

# Exploring the Bible with Tibetans

The companion volume to ཡེ་ཤུའི་ཚོས་ལུགས་ཀྱི་དམ་པའི་གསུང་རབ་  
སྒྲོལ་འོ་སྒྲོད་བཞུགས་སོ།།

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དོ་སློང་བཞུགས་སོ།།

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## How to Use This Book

This book and its companion Tibetan-language volume\* will help you to introduce the basics of the Bible to your Tibetan friends. The content of these bilingual books was determined by asking Tibetan Christians what they wanted to know about the Bible. You can use the books with confidence that they will be of interest to Tibetan believers.

The books may also be used together as language learning tools. The translation of the Tibetan text in this book has been prepared in an easy-to-read English style. The Tibetan and English texts have been numbered identically, so you can use these books to study with a friend. Note that there may be occasional small variations in meaning between the Tibetan and English texts. This comes entirely from the need to keep the English text simple and easily readable.

May God bless you as you explore God's Word with your Tibetan friends!

\* ཡེ་གྲུ་འཛོམས་ལུགས་ཀྱི་དམ་པའི་གསུང་རབ་སྐོར་དོ་སྦྱོང་བཞུགས་སོ།།



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## **Chapter One: An Introduction to the Bible**

### **Section One: What is the Bible?**

#### **(1) Tibetan Christians and the Worldwide Church**

1. The book you have in your hands is written for Tibetan Christians, whose numbers in U-Tsang, Amdo, and Kham are increasing. There are also Tibetan Christians in China, Nepal, and India. Among the Chinese people there are millions of Christians, and in other countries there are even more millions of Christians. Christians all over the world know about the Church in Tibet, and they are praying for Tibetan believers.

2. Wherever they are, those who believe in the Lord Jesus read the Bible, because it is the foundation of our faith. If you go to Lhasa and visit the Potala, you will see the blocks of stone in the Potala's foundation. These stones have supported both the Potrang Karpo and the Potrang Marpo since the seventh century. In the same way, the Bible has served as the foundation for the faith of those who believe in God for thirty centuries. The Bible is God's word for all of humanity. It is for Chinese and Tibetans, men, women and children, rich and poor, farmers and nomads, married and unmarried people.

#### **(2) The Bible is God's Message to Us**

3. The first book of the Bible (called Genesis) records the origin of the world and the beginnings of humanity. According to Genesis, God made the world out of nothing, and He made the first two people as the



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parents of the human race. He gave these two people a commandment to obey, but they deliberately disobeyed it and so became sinners; in the end, they both died. Since we are *all* sinners who do not obey God's commands, this story is not just about our first parents, but about each of us today. Because we do not obey God's commandments, death is in the world. But the Lord Jesus defeated death, and by faith in Him we may be saved. As it says in the book of the Apostle John, "these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, you may have life in His name."<sup>1</sup> Everyone who seeks to overcome death and find eternal life in Christ reads the Bible.

4. The Bible tells us how to live in a way that pleases Almighty God; we gain a right relationship with Him and receive His peace.<sup>2</sup> We can pray to God with confidence.<sup>3</sup> As the Lord Jesus says in the Book of Luke, "Blessed are those who hear the word of God, and keep it."<sup>4</sup> Reading the Bible and praying are like having a conversation with God. When we read the Bible, God is speaking to us. When we pray, we are speaking to Him. As we understand more about Him, we can tell our children, our family, and our friends how extraordinarily good He is.

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<sup>1</sup> John 20:31

<sup>2</sup> John 16:33

<sup>3</sup> John 15:7

<sup>4</sup> Luke 11:28

### (3) The Bible Has Authority

5. The Bible has authority because it comes from God Himself, so we can confidently believe what it says. When people have problems or difficulties, some seek advice from their family or their friends. Some go to monks, lamas, or astrologers, and some do divination. But to understand God's will, Christians prayerfully read the Bible, because only the Bible is a faultless guide to what we should do. As Psalm 119 verse 105 says,

"Your word is a lamp to my feet,  
and a light for my path."

### 6. Four Truths About the Bible

Four Truths About the Bible
1) The Bible is God's Word, so it is true.
2) The Bible is the foundation of our faith.
3) Reading the Bible teaches us how to please God.
4) In the Bible is written the way to eternal life.

## Section Two: Where Did the Bible Come From?

### (1) When Was it Written?

7. The Bible has two main parts, called the Old Testament and the New Testament. They were both written many centuries before the history of Tibet was recorded. The Old Testament was written about 2,500 - 3,000 years ago, and the New Testament was written during the first century A.D., at the same time as the Han Dynasty in China.

## (2) Who Wrote It?

8. Though we do not know the names of all the people who wrote the Bible, we do know for certain that God spoke to men called prophets. The prophets wrote down only what God said. Some of the best-known prophets are Moses, Elijah, Samuel, and Isaiah. The prophet Moses wrote about how the earth was created, the origins of God's specially chosen people, the Jews, and their early history. The prophet Samuel wrote a history of Israel's kings.<sup>5</sup> The prophet Elijah proclaimed that the people should give up idols and worship God alone. In the eighth century B.C., God spoke to the prophet Isaiah about the coming of the Lord Jesus. The prophets Ezra and Nehemiah helped the Jewish people to rebuild their capital city, Jerusalem, after it was destroyed by invaders. The New Testament books were written by men who had been with the Lord Jesus during His lifetime, or by their students. Because God told these prophets and apostles what they should write, and they wrote down just what He told them, we know without doubt that what they have written in the Old and New Testaments is true.

## (3) How the Bible Was Translated Into Tibetan

9. Most of the Old Testament was written in a language called Hebrew, the classical language of the Jewish people. Unlike Tibetan, Hebrew is written from right to left. By the time of the Lord Jesus Christ, the

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<sup>5</sup> The country of Israel is called *Yisele* in Chinese, and the Jews are called *Yuthai*.

Jewish people had lost their own ancient spoken language; although they *spoke* Aramaic, they *wrote* in Greek. So Jewish young men had to learn to read Hebrew in school as a classical language. During the first century, Greek was the international language, so the New Testament was written in Greek. From Greek it has been translated into many other languages, including Tibetan.

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ

Genesis 1:1 in Hebrew

Unlike Tibetan, Hebrew is read from right to left.

Βίβλος γενέσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ Δαυὶδ υἱοῦ Ἀβραάμ.

Matthew 1:1 in Greek

Like Tibetan, Greek is read from left to right.

10. The first translation of the New Testament into Tibetan was done in 1885 in Ladakh. Another version was translated in 1903 and reprinted in Shanghai in 1933. In 1948, the whole Tibetan Bible was published in India. A Tibetan Christian named Eliya Tsetan Phuntshog published the New Testament in 1970. Currently, new and easier to read versions of the Bible are being translated into Tibetan.

## Section Three: A General Overview Of The Bible

### (1) The Two Main Parts Of The Bible

11. The Bible has two main parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament has 39 books, and the New Testament has 27 books, for a total of 66 books in the whole Bible. Each book has chapters, and each chapter is divided into verses. The book called Psalms is the longest in the Bible, with 150 chapters. The longest chapter in Psalms has 176 verses. Finding a verse has three steps: first look for the book, then find the chapter in the book, then find the verse number. For example, to look for John 3:16, turn to the New Testament and find the Gospel of John, then turn to chapter 3, then look for verse 16. You can find any verse in the Bible this way.

### (2) Books of the Bible

<b>Table of the Books of the Bible</b>			
Old Testament	Book Type	Number of Books	Book Name
	Law	5	1. Genesis 2. Exodus 3. Leviticus 4. Numbers 5. Deuteronomy

<b>Table of the Books of the Bible</b>			
<b>Old Testament</b>	<b>Book Type</b>	<b>Number of Books</b>	<b>Book Name</b>
	History	12	6. Joshua 7. Judges 8. Ruth 9. 1 Samuel 10. 2 Samuel 11. 1 Kings 12. 2 Kings 13. 1 Chronicles 14. 2 Chronicles 15. Ezra 16. Nehemiah 17. Esther
	Wisdom	5	18. Job 19. Psalms 20. Proverbs 21. Ecclesiastes 22. Song of Songs
	Prophets	17	23. Isaiah 24. Jeremiah 25. Lamentations 26. Ezekiel 27. Daniel 28. Hosea 29. Joel 30. Amos 31. Obadiah 32. Jonah

<b>Table of the Books of the Bible</b>			
Old Testament	Book Type	# of Books	Book Name
	Prophets (continued)	17	33. Micah 34. Nahum 35. Habakkuk 36. Zephaniah 37. Haggai 38. Zechariah 39. Malachi
New Testament	Gospels and Acts	5	40. Matthew 41. Mark 42. Luke 43. John 44. Acts
	Letters	21	45. Romans 46. 1 Corinthians 47. 2 Corinthians 48. Galatians 49. Ephesians 50. Philippians 51. Colossians 52. 1 Thessalonians 53. 2 Thessalonians 54. 1 Timothy 55. 2 Timothy 56. Titus 57. Philemon
	Prophecy	1	66. Revelation

12. There are different kinds of books in the Bible. For example, the first five books of the Old Testament, from Genesis to Deuteronomy, are called "the Law", because they contain the religious laws that God gave to the Jewish people.

13. **The Law:** The names of the first five books of the Bible are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. (Sometimes they are also called the first through fifth books of Moses.) The first book, Genesis, tells how God created the universe and how sin came into the world. It also tells the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, the ancestors of the Jewish people. The second book, Exodus, explains how the Jewish people became slaves in the land of Egypt, and how God sent the prophet Moses to deliver them. The third book, Leviticus, contains the religious laws that God gave to the Jewish people, and the rituals for worshipping God. The fourth book, Numbers, tells how the people of Israel wandered as nomads in the Sinai desert before settling in the land of Canaan. The fifth book, Deuteronomy, repeats many of the laws and gives the prophet Moses' instructions to the people at the time they settled in the land of Canaan.

14. **History:** The next twelve books of the Bible are Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. The book of Joshua tells how the nomadic Jewish people arrived in Canaan and settled there. The book of Judges tells how the Jewish people forgot God, worshiped the gods of the land, and fell into the power of their enemies. When they repented, God sent leaders to save them. The book of



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Ruth is set in the time of the Judges and tells how an ordinary Gentile woman named Ruth, by God's grace, became one of the ancestors of the Lord Jesus. The two books of the prophet Samuel tell the story of the Jewish kings Saul and David. The books of 1 and 2 Kings tell the story of Israel's later kings, and the prophets Elisha and Elijah. The books of 1 and 2 Chronicles also tell the story of Israel's kings, including its greatest kings, David and Solomon.

15. Both the kings and people of Israel kept on disobeying God, so in 587 B.C. a people called the Babylonians invaded from the East, conquered Israel, and exiled many Jews from their own country to Babylon. (Ancient Babylonia is now the modern country of Iraq.) Fifty years later, the armies of the Persian Empire conquered Babylonia and the Persian king allowed the Jews to return to their homeland. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are the story of the rebuilding of Jerusalem, the Jewish capital city which had been destroyed. Esther was a Jewish queen of Persia. The book of Esther is a story of how she saved her people from their enemies.

16. **Wisdom:** The next five books of the Old Testament are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. Job was an honest and blameless man who experienced great suffering and asked God about the reason for it. The theme of the story is the reason why people experience suffering. From reading the Book of Job, we can not only gain comfort, but we also know that God does not allow meaningless suffering. The Book of Psalms is the hymns and prayers

of David, king of Israel, and others. The Proverbs are wise sayings collected by King Solomon. They are similar in style to the proverbs of Khache Phalu. The book of Ecclesiastes looks at the meaninglessness of life without God. The Song of Solomon is a collection of poems about love.

**17. Prophecy:** The next seventeen books of the Bible are the books of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The prophets were men who, as God's representatives to the Jewish people, spoke about righteousness and God's judgement, and explained His commands to them. By means of the prophetic foreknowledge God had given to them, they proclaimed to the Jewish people, many centuries before the coming of the Lord Jesus, a coming Savior who would deliver all peoples from sin and death. The books of the prophets are the last books in the Old Testament.

**18. Gospels and Acts:** The next five books of the Bible, and the first books of the New Testament, are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, plus a book called the Acts of the Apostles. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John each tell the story of the Lord Jesus' life and work on earth. After the Lord Jesus was raised from death, His disciples proclaimed the Gospel in Asia, Europe, and Africa, and established the Church. This is the story that is told in the book of Acts.

**19. Letters:** The next twenty-one books of the Bible are Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians,

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Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Jude. In the first century, the early Christians lived in many different countries in the Middle East, Europe, and northern Africa. Sometimes the leaders of the Church, men such as the Apostles Paul, Peter, and James, would send a special letter to the Christians in one particular city. For example, they sent letters to the Christians living in such cities as Rome (the capital city of the Roman Empire), Corinth (in Greece), or Ephesus (in West Asia). At other times they would send general letters to all Christians to encourage them in their faith. First and Second Timothy, Titus, and Philemon were sent to individual Christians.

20. **Revelation:** The last book in the Bible is called Revelation. Its main themes are the return of the Lord Jesus to the world at the last day, how God will completely destroy death and evil, and how all those who believe in the Lord Jesus will be taken to Heaven and live with Him there forever.

## **Chapter Two: The Story of the Bible**

### **Section One: The Story of the Old Testament**

21. The first story in the Bible tells how God made from nothing the universe and all that is in it. He made the sun and the moon, outer space with its stars, the land and the sea, and plants and animals. He made the first two people, named Adam and Eve, to live in fellowship with Him; and in a land called Eden He made a garden and put Adam and Eve in it. He gave them a commandment to obey. If Adam and Eve had obeyed God, they would always have lived happily in fellowship with Him. But because they deliberately broke God's command, their relationship with God was spoiled, and God put them out of the Garden and out of His presence.<sup>6</sup>

22. The children of Adam and Eve continued to violate the commands of the God who loved them. Finally, God saw that all people thought of nothing but evil; He deeply regretted having made them, and so He decided to cause a great flood in order to put an end to mankind. But God was pleased with a righteous man named Noah, and He saved him and his family from the flood. Even so, after the flood, Noah's children continued to sin, so God made a plan to restore man's relationship with Him. He specially chose a man named Abraham to bring blessing to all the world's peoples. Abraham was probably born around the 19th century B.C., and he lived in a city called Ur in Mesopotamia in what is now Iraq. God told him to go to Palestine (also called Canaan), so he took his family and moved there.

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<sup>6</sup> Genesis 1-3.

After he arrived, God promised to give that land to him and to his sons. Abraham's son Isaac and grandson Jacob (also called 'Israel') lived as nomads there, and they had many descendants.<sup>7</sup> But when a famine arose, the whole family had to move to Egypt to get enough to eat.<sup>8</sup> One of them, a man named Joseph, became a very powerful minister in the court of the king of Egypt, and he later saved his whole family from dying in the famine.

23. The descendants of Israel became slaves in Egypt for four hundred years and they suffered greatly. God was concerned about their suffering, and He called a man named Moses to set the Jewish people free. Moses led the entire Jewish people out of Egyptian slavery with many signs and miracles. On the way to Canaan, they met God at the foot of Mount Sinai. Moses went to the top of the mountain, and God gave him a covenant written in stone. According to the covenant, God was to be the God of the Jewish people, and they were to be the people He had specially chosen. He gave them ten commandments written in stone, as well as many religious laws and rituals for worship. But the Israelites continued to break God's laws, and so for forty years they had to wander in the Sinai Desert. Finally, Moses' successor Joshua led the Jewish people to the land God had promised to their ancestor Abraham.

24. About 1200 BC, the Jewish people drove out the original inhabitants of Canaan. After they settled the land, they forgot about God and His commandments and

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<sup>7</sup> Jacob was also called Israel. Israel was also the name of the land of Israel, which was also known as Canaan or Palestine.

<sup>8</sup> See the map section.

they worshiped the gods of the land. So God allowed foreign armies to invade their land again and again. As the people cried out to Him for mercy, God sent them a series of leaders called judges to rescue them from their enemies. Eventually, the prophet Samuel founded a monarchy in Israel and appointed a man named Saul to be the first king. Saul's successors David and Solomon ruled wisely and well. King David established Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. His son Solomon built a great Temple at Jerusalem for the worship of God.<sup>9</sup>

25. The nation became prosperous, but the officials oppressed the poor, and the government became corrupt. God's prophets repeatedly warned the government to be honest and the people to keep His commandments, but the officials and the people would not listen to what God said; so the country split into two parts, a northern kingdom called Israel, and a southern kingdom called Judah. God sent prophets such as Elijah and Isaiah to the Jews. Elijah rebuked them for their worship of natural objects, local gods, and idols. Isaiah preached to them about their sin and prophesied that God would send them a Savior. But the Jewish people continued to commit adultery and to deceive, oppress, and do violence to each other. In God's sight, Israel's society had become completely corrupt, so in 722 B.C., He sent the Assyrian army from the East to destroy the Northern Kingdom of Israel. After that, the Southern Kingdom was also destroyed, together with its capital Jerusalem and its Temple. The Babylonian army exiled the Jewish people

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<sup>9</sup> At the time each king was appointed, the prophets had the custom of anointing the new king with oil. 'Anointed one' is *messiah* in Hebrew and *Christos* in Greek.

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to Mesopotamia and the Jews had to remain in Mesopotamia for 70 years. Some Jews, for example the prophet Daniel, became ministers of the Babylonian government.

26. In 539 BC, the army of the Persian Empire invaded Mesopotamia, and the Persian king, Cyrus, allowed the Jews to return to their homeland, Israel. Under the leadership of the prophets Ezra, Zechariah, and Haggai, the Jews rebuilt the Temple in order to worship God. In the fourth century BC, the Greek king Alexander conquered the Persians. (Alexander was a great king who later conquered India almost up to the border of Tibet.) The Greek officials that he appointed ruled Israel, and they allowed the Jews to continue to worship God at the temple in Jerusalem. But many Greek-speaking Jews, including even the priests, followed foreign customs, and Israel became disunited.

27. In the first century BC, people from a country called Italy conquered many of the lands around the Mediterranean Sea, including Israel. The people from Italy were called Romans, after the name of their capital city, Rome. The Jews did not want to accept Roman culture, so there were many revolts. During that time various Jewish political parties, such as the Pharisees and Sadducees, became stronger. Many Jews went to live outside Israel in lands such as Egypt and Greece. Since they were far away from the Temple at Jerusalem, they built meeting places or synagogues in which they could worship God wherever they were. Many Jews were waiting for the Savior that God would one day send.

## Section Two: The Story of the New Testament

28. During the first century, the promised Savior was born. By the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit, while the Lord Jesus' mother was still a virgin, she became pregnant and gave birth.<sup>10</sup> The Lord Jesus Christ grew up with His father Joseph and His mother Mary in the region of Galilee in the north of Israel. When He was thirty years old, He was baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist, and for three years, with His disciples, He proclaimed the Kingdom of God to the Jewish people.

29. The Lord Jesus said that merit-making, religious rituals, and human traditions were of no value in God's sight for salvation. Instead, the one who wants to worship God must love God with all his mind, heart, and ability; and love others more than himself. Jesus preached that if a man confessed that he were a sinner, and repented of the bad things he had done, then God would certainly forgive him. If one did so with faith, he would enter the Kingdom of God. But all who ignore and oppose God will be separated from Him and have to remain in hell eternally. To show that He had authority to say such things, the Lord Jesus did many miracles, such as healing sick people, casting out demons, and raising dead people to life. The Jewish officials became jealous and feared Jesus, so they arrested Him.

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<sup>10</sup> At the time, the Lord Jesus' mother, Mary, may have been about 15 years old. Also note that in Tibetan, the Lord Jesus may be referred to as *Yeshu Mashika* (from the Hebrew words *Yeshua*, *Messiah*) or as *Yeshu Chrisito* (the Greek form of His name).



30. The authorities handed Jesus over to the Roman governor, Pilate, who ordered that He be executed by crucifixion. After Jesus died, the Romans sent soldiers to guard His tomb, but on the third day after His death some of His disciples went to the tomb and saw that it was empty. Two angels told them that Jesus had risen alive from the dead, but the disciples did not believe this. Only after the Lord Jesus appeared to them several times did they finally believe. The disciples realized that though sin had originally spoiled the relationship between God and man, the resurrection of Jesus restored that relationship for those who have faith. Whoever believes in Him will receive a boundless life with God. So wherever they went, they preached the Good News of Jesus, and the Lord proved that the Good News was true by means of many miraculous signs.

31. By God's grace, Jesus' small band of followers grew rapidly; within a short time after His death there were about 5,000 believers. The Jewish authorities were alarmed and began to persecute the Christians, putting some in jail and killing others. One of the Jewish officials who persecuted the Christians was a young man named Saul. On his way from Jerusalem to the Syrian capital Damascus, the Lord Jesus appeared to Saul, and he believed. The young man Saul (later known as Paul) traveled to the countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea fearlessly proclaiming the Good News of Jesus. In many places he gathered the believers into local churches. When he returned to Jerusalem, the authorities arrested him and tried to kill him, but he appealed his case to the

Roman emperor. Soldiers took him to Rome, and before his trial, he spoke about his faith.

32. As a result of the preaching of the Apostles and other Christians, churches spread all across the Roman Empire. People from every nation and language turned away from their sins, confessed their evil deeds, and believed in the Lord Yeshu. These new Christians wanted to understand the will of God for their lives, so the leaders of the Church, men such as the Apostles Paul, Peter, James, John and others, wrote letters to the churches telling them how to live in accordance with their faith. For example, the letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians living in the city of Rome is one of the twenty one such letters in the New Testament.

33. Paul told the Romans that when sinful people trust in Jesus, God forgives their sin and gives them a new relationship with Him. He wrote of the Jewish people who had not yet believed in Jesus, and then told the Christians how to live in a way that pleases the Lord. In other letters, Paul wrote about giving, worship, relationships in the church, and many other such topics. The Apostle John also wrote letters to churches, including one letter that is the last book of the New Testament. This letter tells us that one day the Lord Jesus will return to earth and he will completely destroy all evil. Those who believe in Jesus from every race and language will live in heaven with God.

34. After the New Testament had been completed, Christians went out through the Middle East proclaiming the Gospel. By the second century they had established

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the Church in Iran and India. In the seventh century, Christians arrived in China, and then later came to Mongolia. In modern Mongolia there are about 20,000 Christians, and in China and India there are millions.

## **Chapter Three: The Setting of the Bible**

### **Section One: The Setting of the Old Testament**

35. In Old Testament times, many different peoples lived in the Middle East. Some, such as the Philistines, Greeks, and Egyptians, lived in the lands around the Mediterranean Sea. Others, such as the Babylonians and Assyrians, lived in a place called Mesopotamia. Each of these peoples made their own idols, some with the shape of the sun or moon, others like cattle, or snakes, or various kinds of animals. The people built temples for the gods to live in, and offered them things to eat and drink. Even though these gods were greedy, jealous, and corrupt, people hoped that if they worshipped them, happiness and good luck would follow, or at least that the gods would not cause them any trouble. But such gods could in fact not move, or speak, or control events, and they were of course lifeless and powerless.

36. God's prophets, such as Moses, Elijah, and Isaiah, understood that there is only one true God. The God who has all power has absolutely no need of food and drink, or clothes, or a temple to live in, or money, or religious rituals. Because God is completely righteous and holy, He always does what is right. He is in control of time, and of history, and of all events. He knows the thoughts of everyone and cannot be deceived or bribed. He commands people of every nation to be good, and their governments to rule justly. The prophets always reminded the kings, the government, and the Jewish people of God's commands and also told them not to worship false gods and idols.

37. Israel and its neighbors were located on a major trade route between East and West, and the surrounding peoples invaded Israel repeatedly. The other peoples would try to force the Jewish people to worship idols. But because Israel was the nation God specially chose to be an example to the other nations, it was very important that Israel worship God alone, for He had commanded them to put away false gods.

38. God never abandoned the Jewish people even when they disobeyed Him. He promised to send them a Savior, who would establish the rule of God in their hearts, where foreign invaders could never take it away. After the Babylonians had exiled the Jews to Mesopotamia, God brought them back from their exile (see Chapter 2) to their own land of Israel. From that time onwards they stopped serving local gods and worshiped God alone. They rebuilt the Temple, and tried to live as God had told them. Many Jews were waiting for the day when God would send the promised Savior.

## Section Two: The Setting of the New Testament

39. By the time of the Han Dynasty, Israel was ruled by the Roman Empire. Roman armies had conquered many peoples in Europe, north Africa, and the Middle East. The Romans even traded with China across the ancient trade route called the Silk Road. They invaded Israel in 63 BC and appointed the Herod family to rule Palestine. Since the Herods were corrupt and cruel rulers, in their place the Romans later appointed a governor named Pontius Pilate, who ruled the Jews from 26 to 36 AD. The common people had to pay heavy

taxes to the Roman government, so both the Romans and their corrupt tax-collectors were widely hated.

40. Under the Roman government, the Jewish people had a ruling council called the Sanhedrin. Here there were several political parties, including the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Zealots. Some of these parties backed the Romans, some opposed them, and still others incited the people to revolt against the Roman government. After Jesus' resurrection, men from all parties became His followers.

41. The wealthy officials among the Jewish people lived in the bigger cities such as Jerusalem. Many spoke Greek and lived according to Greek customs. Most people who lived in the countryside were very poor farmers or shepherds. Some were slaves, and life was very hard for them. On holidays and on the weekly Sabbath they did not have to work. The most important holiday was called Passover. During Passover, the people ate a feast of unleavened bread, lamb, and bitter herbs at home together to remember their coming out of Egypt under the leadership of the prophet Moses.

42. In the middle of ancient Israel was the district of Samaria. A few centuries earlier, the district of Samaria had been part of the kingdom of Israel. After separating from Israel, its king and people stopped worshiping God and worshiped idols instead, so the Jewish people hated them. Most Jews would not even travel through Samaria. Many were shocked that the

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Lord Jesus would not only go through Samaria but even talk with a Samaritan woman.<sup>11</sup>

43. Most first-century Jews lived outside Palestine, and no longer knew their own language. So they translated the Old Testament into Greek, the international language of the time. Later, the New Testament was written in Greek, and from Greek it was translated into Chinese and Tibetan.

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<sup>11</sup> See John 4.

## **Chapter Four: The Bible and Christian Life**

### **Section One: Becoming a Follower of Jesus**

44. God calls people from every nation to follow the Lord Jesus,<sup>12</sup> so a person can be a Tibetan and a Christian. The first Christian church in Tibet was founded in the seventeenth century in the Kingdom of Guge (now Ngari) in the west of Tibet. The second Christian church in Tibet was established in the eighteenth century in Lhasa, and it had twenty seven baptized believers. Though the church was later destroyed, its bell can still be seen today in an upper storage room of the Jokhang. In Ladakh and in India, Tibetan Christians made important contributions to Tibetan culture. Tibetan Christians published the first Tibetan language newspaper and the first modern Tibetan language schoolbooks. Yoseb Gergan and Eliya Tseten Phuntshog made a translation of the Bible into Tibetan. In the present day there are groups of Tibetan Christians in Qinghai, Sichuan, and Tibet.

45. The first step in following the Lord Jesus is to recognize that by our sinful human nature we each do wrong things. From that sinful nature we tell lies, steal, and disobey our parents. In the seventh chapter of the Gospel of Mark, the Lord Jesus teaches that from the heart of man come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lust, envy, slander, pride, and folly, and these things make us

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<sup>12</sup> Acts 10:34-5, Rev. 5:9



unclean.<sup>13</sup> These sins destroy people's relationship with God. From the time of Adam and Eve, all human beings have had this corrupted nature from birth. God commands us to stop doing these things and turn away from them.

46. In the Gospel of Luke there is a story about a tax collector. He was very wealthy because he had stolen a lot of money from the people. But when he met the Lord Jesus he repented, saying, 'I give half my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone of anything, I will pay back four times the amount'. And the Lord Jesus answered, 'Today salvation has come to this house'.<sup>14</sup> In the city of Ephesus in Turkey there were magicians who believed the Gospel. When they repented, they burned their expensive magic books.<sup>15</sup> These people repented from their hearts.

47. The second step is to believe in the Lord Jesus. Because we all have a sinful nature, no one can stop doing evil just by deciding to do so. Only Jesus gives us the power to overcome sin; by depending on that power we can get rid of our evil ways and obtain a new life. Since God who is completely holy cannot be pleased by means of the virtue that men accumulate, or by religious rituals, or even by good works; we must come before God sincerely depending on His mercy. If we do this, He will certainly give us new life.<sup>16</sup> In place of hate, He gives us love; in place of sadness He gives us joy; in

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<sup>13</sup> Mk. 7.21-3.

<sup>14</sup> Luke 19

<sup>15</sup> Acts 19

<sup>16</sup> John 6:37

place of evil thoughts, He gives us peace and love; not only this, He forgives our sins completely and gives us boundless life.

48. Once there was a monk named Nyima. One day he was with some other monks who were drinking. He drank as well, and being drunk, he broke his monastic vows with a woman. He left the monkhood and wandered away to India, where he heard about Jesus and believed in Him. He said, "I received a new heart. I turned away from my adultery, drinking, and other sins; and confessing them, left them all behind. All my sins were forgiven by the Lord Jesus." No matter what we have done, the Lord Jesus will certainly forgive it and give us a new relationship with God.

49. The third step is to be baptized. Christian baptism is not a way to remove impurities and defilements, but a sign that God has forgiven our sins. It means that our old, sinful nature has been put to death and that the Lord Jesus has given us a new nature. People who have this new nature live their lives by depending on God's power, so they do not worry about karma or their next life. The Lord Jesus said this wonderful new life that God gives is like being born all over again.<sup>17</sup>

50. Christians show God's love to others and tell them the good news about the Lord Jesus. Each week they join with other Christians to worship God and pray.

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<sup>17</sup> John 3

## **51. Four Steps in Following the Lord Yeshu**

1. Repent of sin
2. Believe in the Lord Yeshu
3. Be Baptized
4. Meet with other Christians in church

## **Section Two: The Bible And God's Will**

52. When we must make decisions we should ask, "What is God's will for this situation?" We will get the answer by reading the Bible. For example, Tashi wants to go to Shigatse to visit his parents. The highway is a bit dangerous. Before Tashi was a Christian, he would go to the monastery and ask a lama to do *mo* for him to find out on what day it would be best to go. But now Tashi knows that God is in control of his life and no longer does this. From reading the Bible, he knows that God will take care of Him whenever he goes, so he can go in peace without any worry.

53. Sometimes Tashi has bad dreams. Before he was a Christian, he would worry that they were a sign that something bad was going to happen to him. But now, Tashi does not worry because he reads in the Gospel of Matthew the words of the Lord Jesus, "I will never leave you or forsake you".<sup>18</sup> Tashi no longer pays attention to bad dreams because he knows that God always protects him.

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<sup>18</sup> Mt. 28.20

54. One of Tashi's relatives is possessed by an evil spirit. Before Tashi was a Christian, he would call the lama to cast it out. But now Tashi knows that the Lord Yeshu has all power. Together with other Christians, he goes to his relative's house to pray in the name of Jesus, and the evil spirit is driven out.

55. Tashi's wife Drolma works in a restaurant. Before Drolma was a Christian, she wanted to know if it was alright to eat meat. But now that she reads the Bible, she knows that God created all living things and gave them to man for food. She knows that it makes no difference to God whether she eats meat or not. What is most important to God is whether one loves Him with all one's heart, mind, and strength; and whether one loves others as oneself.

56. Tashi and Drolma still respect Tibetan culture but no longer take part in Buddhist religious festivals. This is because they love God and want to serve only Him. They have also learned that they are to worship no other gods but the one true God. So, on Saga Dawa, instead of walking around the Lhingkor, they meet with other Tibetan believers and pray to God and pray for the Tibetan people.

57. When Tashi and Drolma's daughter got very sick, instead of taking her to a lama, they prayed to God to look after and protect her.

58. When Tashi and Drolma became Christians, their parents were not pleased. But Tashi and Drolma read in the letter of the Apostle Paul to the Romans "so

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far as it is possible, live at peace with all men". Even though it was sometimes difficult, with good hearts they repaid the kindness of their parents. Now their parents ask them about their faith in Jesus.

59. Tashi and Drolma read the Bible and pray in every situation in order to understand God's will, because Yaweh God's Bible was given for everyone to read and understand.

### Section Three: How to Study the Bible

60. When Drolma was growing up, her parents would keep the Buddhist scriptures on a shelf. Sometimes a monk would come and recite the scriptures, but Drolma could not understand what he said. She could not read the scriptures for herself, because she had never studied Tibetan religious language. But later, after Tashi and Drolma became Christians, some other believers taught her how to study the Bible.

61. Each day before Tashi and Drolma read the Bible together, they pray that God will speak to them, and then they read a portion of the Bible (for example, a chapter or several verses). Then they think carefully about what they have read, and they talk about it. After they think about how to put it into practice, Tashi and Dolma thank God, confess their sins, and pray for themselves and others.

62. Tashi and Drolma both memorize God's word so that it will always be with them. Each week they meet with other people in church who are following the Lord Jesus and study the Bible together with them and pray for

each other. This helps the church grow in faith and is pleasing to God.

### 63. Summary of the Steps in Bible Study

#### **A Five-Step Approach to Bible Study**

1. **Pray** that God will speak to you
2. **Read** carefully.
3. **Think carefully** about what God is saying to you
4. **Decide what God wants you to do**
5. **Pray**



## **Chapter Five: Geography And Climate Of Bible Lands**

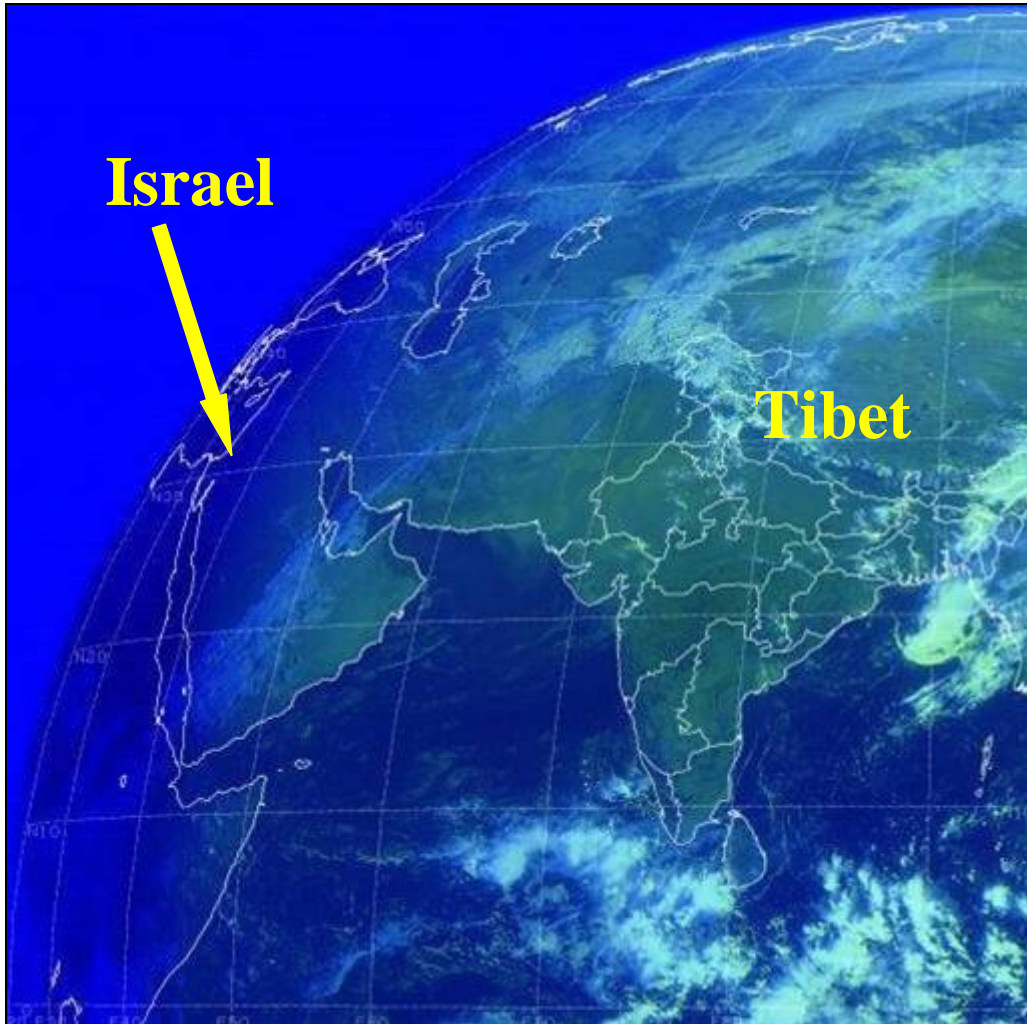
### **Section One: Maps**

64. Most of the stories of the Bible took place in the Middle East, Europe, or North African countries such as Egypt. All these countries are west of Tibet.

(Maps begin on the following page)



65. Map 1: Tibet and Israel



66. Map 1: This map is a photograph taken from outer space. On the right side you can see Tibet. On the left side you can see Israel and the Mediterranean Sea. At the bottom of the picture, you can see India and the Indian Ocean. The distance from Tibet to Israel is just over 5,000 kilometers.

67. Map 2: Mesopotamia



68. This map is also a photograph taken from outer space. On the right of the picture is the modern country of Iraq. On the left is Israel and the Mediterranean Sea. People have lived in Mesopotamia for over 5,000 years . Its people were the first to do farming, the first to invent an alphabet, and the first to build cities. Forty centuries ago, Abraham, the ancestor of the Jewish people, came from Mesopotamia to Canaan - a journey of about 1,500 kilometers.



69. Map 3: The Eastern Mediterranean



70. Map 3. In the center is Israel, with Egypt to the left and Mesopotamia to the right. Most of the events of the Bible took place in these countries, and in the lands around the Mediterranean.

71. Map 4. Egypt and the Sinai Desert



72. Map 4: Once the Jewish people worked as slaves of the king of Egypt along the banks of the Nile River and along the Mediterranean coast. The Prophet Moses led them out of Egypt, through the Sinai Desert, to Canaan, the land God had promised to their ancestor Abraham.



73. Map 5: Israel 1



74. Map 5. The Lord Jesus lived along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, which is about half the size of Nam Tsho. The Jordan River, where the Lord Jesus was baptized, flows from the Sea of Galilee in the north to the Dead Sea in the south. The Dead Sea is the lowest place in the world - 400 meters below sea level, or 4,050 meters lower than Lhasa. Since it is a salt lake and fish

can't live in it, it's called the Dead Sea. It's about the size of Yamdrok Lake.

75. Map 6. Israel 2



76. Map 6. Israel is much smaller than Tibet. It is only 125 kilometers wide from the desert to the Mediterranean Sea. It has four main landform areas: 1) The Coastal Plain: This area has good farmland. During

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the Roman Empire it was a part of a major trade route between Egypt and Syria, and even China. 2) The Central Mountains: These mountains are only 800 meters above sea level, but here are the major cities such as Jerusalem, Hebron, Shechem, and Samaria. 3) The Jordan Valley: This connects the northern Sea of Galilee with the Dead Sea. The Jordan is a much smaller river than Tibet's Kyi Chu: only 30 meters wide and 2 or 3 meters deep. 4) The Transjordan: This country is mainly mountain ranges and desert.

## Section Two: Climate and Animals of Israel

77. In general, Israel is a hot country with a lot of desert. Average temperatures in the desert in July can be up to 45 °C and rainfall is very rare. Winter is cold and it can snow in the capital Jerusalem.

78. At the time the Bible was written, Israel had animals similar to those in Tibet, such as antelope, kyangs, bears, foxes, donkeys, horses, mules, sheep, goats, and wolves. Israel also had cranes, doves, hoopoes, and ravens. Like India, Israel had lions, leopards, camels, and snakes.



### Section Three: Photographs of Israel



79. Photo 1: Capernaum

80. Photo 1: Capernaum: The Lord Jesus often stayed here by the Sea of Galilee.





81. Photo 2: The Jericho Road



82. Photo 3: The Jordan River

83. Photo 3: The Jordan River: This is the river where John the Baptist baptized the Lord Jesus.



84. Photo 4: Jerusalem



85. Photo 5: The Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee





86. Photo 6: Desert Country in Israel



87. Photo 7: The Sea of Galilee



88. Photo 8: A Tomb

89. Photo 8 This photo shows a tomb dug from the rock. The large stone could be rolled in front of the entrance to close it. The body of the Lord Jesus was put into a tomb like this. Three days later, He was raised (see Mark 15:46, 16:3).



90. Photo 9: Dawn Over the Dead Sea

91. Photo 9: Jesus said, "I am the light of the world."

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*How to Read Tibetan*

*Central Tibetan Edition*

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