

DISCOVER

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

4



God's Plan
for My Life



AFTER A MINISTER HAD SPOKEN on the subject, “Why I Believe in Jesus,” a well-dressed young man paid him a visit in his study and remarked, “Your talk tonight was interesting, but everything you said about Jesus Christ came out of your Bible. Tell me, if Jesus ever lived on this earth, why doesn’t history tell us about Him?”

“That’s a fair question,” the minister answered as he turned and selected several books from his shelves. “But as a matter of fact, history does tell us about Jesus Christ.”

“That I’d like to see for myself,” the young man responded.

“Well, here is Letter 97 in Book 10 of *Letters of Pliny the Younger*, written by a Roman proconsul in Bithynia, a province in old Asia Minor. Pliny wrote to the Roman Emperor Trajan, telling him about events in his province. See, here he is requesting counsel on how he should handle a new sect, the Christians. He tells of their rapid growth and of how they sing hymns composed to their leader, Christ. Pliny sent his letter around AD 110. This letter by Pliny offers historical evidence of Christ, and of the spread of His faith in the days of His apostles.”

Surprised, the young man said, “Tell me more!”

As the minister thumbed through another book, he added, “Another historian, a contemporary of Pliny, was Tacitus. In his *Annals* (Book 15 in chapter 44) he tells of Nero’s hatred for, and persecution of, the Christians at the time of the burning of Rome. Tacitus explains that the term, “Christian,” comes from the name, “Christ.” He mentions that Jesus Christ, the founder of the Christian religion, had been put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea during the reign of Emperor Tiberius. The details that Tacitus provides are an exact match for the events, names, and places given in the Bible.”

“Pastor, I never knew things like that were in secular history!” the visitor exclaimed.

“And while we’re talking,” the minister added, “I want you to notice that around AD 180, Celsus wrote a book attacking Christians, indicating that Christianity by that time had become a force to be reckoned with.

“If you are still in doubt, remember that the four Gospels provide just as much history as these secular books.”

This young man went away convinced that Jesus Christ was a real, historical figure.

Both sacred and secular history agree that Jesus did live as a man on earth. But there’s much more we can know about Him.

Sources for the above historical materials and a more detailed history appear in the following books: *Documents of the Christian Church*, selected and edited by Henry Bettenson (Oxford University Press, 2011); *A Source Book for Ancient Church History*, by Joseph Cullen Ayer (Palala Press, 2015); *Origen: Contra Celsum*, translated by Henry Chadwick (Cambridge University Press, 1980); *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* 6th edition, revised, by F. F. Bruce (InterVarsity Press, 2002); and *The Evidence for Jesus*, by R. T. French (Hodder and Stoughton General Division, 2001). These books should be available through most religious bookstores, local libraries, or online.

1 | Christ Is Eternal

What does the Apostle John say about Jesus' divinity?

"In the beginning was the Word [Jesus Christ], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-3, 14).

According to the Bible, Jesus was not merely a good man, He is also fully God. Jesus, the Word, was with God in the beginning, and spoke all things into existence. What claim did Jesus Himself make concerning His divinity?

"If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also. . . . He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:7, 9).

"I and My Father are one" (John 10:30).

If you want to know what God is like, just look at Jesus. The Father shares the same love and care for each person that Jesus demonstrated during His human life on earth. Jesus, the Word, is fully God, as is the Father. Jesus was with God "in the beginning." God the Father and Jesus the Son have existed together from eternity. There was never a time when Jesus was not with the Father.

"But to the Son He [God] says: 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom'" (Hebrews 1:8).

2 | Christ, the Heart of History and Prophecy

Jesus is unique in that His biography was written before He was born! Old Testament prophecies present a clear outline of Christ's life in advance. The New Testament is His life story told in fulfillment.

We know the Old Testament was completed, at the very latest, 250 years before Christ's birth, because the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, began around that time. No wonder that in writing the Gospels of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), Christ's disciples were amazed at how accurately details in their Master's life fulfilled Old Testament prophecies.

Anyone who carefully reads the Old Testament discovers that it continually mentions the coming Messiah. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, God immediately promised them that He would send someone to our world to defeat the devil (Genesis 3:15). That person, Scripture further reveals, would be the Messiah. The Hebrew word "Messiah" in the Old Testament, literally means "Anointed One," and it corresponds to the Greek word "Christ" in the New Testament (John 1:41; 4:25). Jesus Christ is the Messiah. That's a central promise of the New Testament.



Living from 500 to 1,500 years before Christ's birth, the Old Testament prophets made scores of very specific predictions about the life of the Messiah. Their prophecies identify the city of Christ's birth, His name, and His lifework. They disclose details of

His trial and the events connected with His death. The prophecies show that when brought into court, He would offer no personal defense, and they actually predict some of the very words He would speak in His dying hours. Even the year, the day, and the hour of His death are foretold. Messianic prophecies also reveal that He would come to life again on the third day.

At the very beginning of Christ's earthly ministry, as people compared His life with Old Testament prophecies, what did they conclude?

“We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:45).

At His first public appearance, our Saviour appealed to prophecy to establish His identity. After quoting from an Old Testament passage, He declared:

“Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21).

Shortly after His resurrection, which words did Jesus use to remind two of His followers about the fulfillment of the prophecies that pointed forward to Him?

“He said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the [Old Testament] Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:25-27).

Fulfilled prophecies give convincing evidence that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

3 | Christ's Life Is a Fulfillment of Prophecy

Let's look at a few of these prophetic passages from the Old Testament—and their fulfillment in the New Testament record of Christ's life.

OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

NEW TESTAMENT FULFILLMENT

His Place of Birth

"But you, *Bethlehem Ephrathah* . . . out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2).

"Jesus was born in *Bethlehem of Judea*" (Matthew 2:1).



His Virgin Birth

"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the *virgin* shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14).

"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for *that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit*. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:20, 21).

OLD TESTAMENT
PROPHECY

NEW TESTAMENT
FULFILLMENT

His Lineage From the Tribe of Judah

"The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes" (Genesis 49:10).

"For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah" (Hebrews 7:14).

His Rejection

"He is despised and rejected by men" (Isaiah 53:3).

"He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11).

His Betrayal

"Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me" (Psalm 41:9).

"Jesus answered, 'It is he [the betrayer of Jesus; see also John 13:21] to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it.' And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot" (John 13:26).



His Betrayal Price

"I said to them, 'If it is agreeable to you, give me my wages; and if not, refrain.' So they weighed out for my wages *thirty pieces of silver*" (Zechariah 11:12).

"Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?' And they counted out to him *thirty pieces of silver*" (Matthew 26:14, 15).

His Death on a Cross

"*They pierced My hands and My feet*" (Psalm 22:16).

"When they had come to the place called Calvary, there *they crucified Him*" (Luke 23:33).

Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 contain a graphic depiction of the Messiah's persecution and death at the hands of those whom He came to save.

His Resurrection From the Tomb

"*For you will not leave my soul in Sheol [the grave], nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption*" (Psalm 16:10).

"He [David] . . . spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that *His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses*" (Acts 2:31, 32).

Christ's life story is a continuous fulfillment of Bible prophecy. Peter Stoner, in the book *Science Speaks*, examined these predictions in the light of probability theory. Of the 60 major Messianic prophecies, he selected just eight and calculated this: "The chance that any man might have lived down to the present time and fulfilled all eight prophecies is 1 in 10^{17} ." (That's 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000.) The evidence is strong that Jesus didn't just happen to fit a few predictions. His biography was indeed written beforehand by supernatural means. Truly, Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

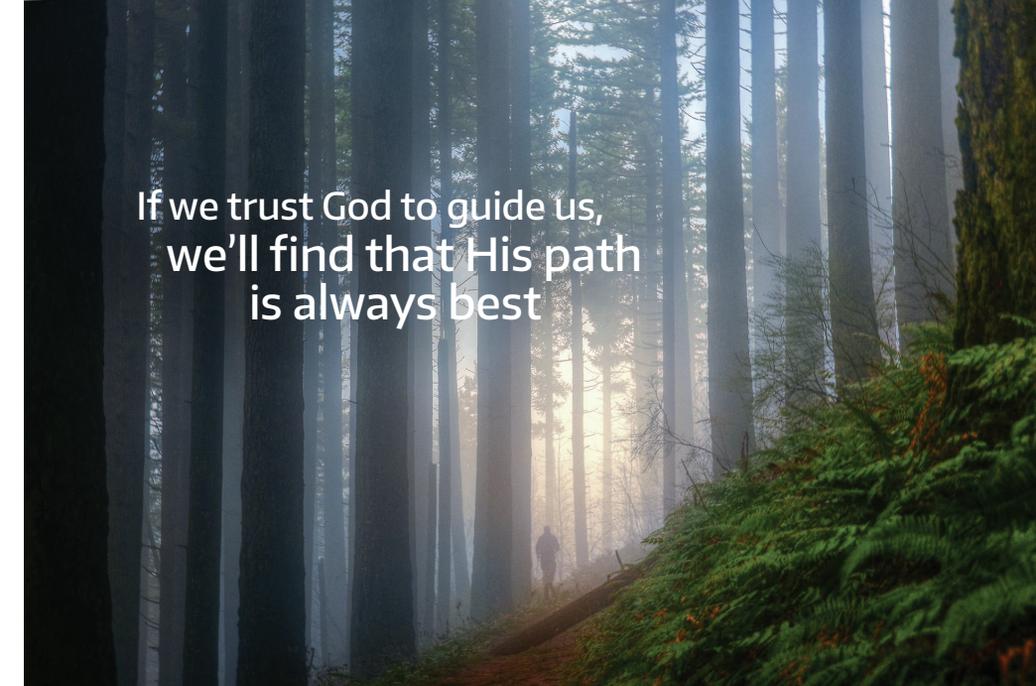
One of the main reasons the followers of Jesus, many of whom were at first skeptical of His claims, came to believe so passionately was because they saw Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in every detail of His life. A disciple named Apollos, for example, "vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 18:28).

The eyewitness testimonies of Peter, John, and Luke compel us to take Christ's claim seriously when He says that He is God's Son (2 Peter 1:16; John 20:30, 31; Luke 1:1-4). After looking at the evidence, we need to make a prayerful decision about who is going to be Lord in our lives. If you have not already done so, will you place your life in Jesus' hands?

4 | A God-Planned Life

Jesus lived a God-planned life—one outlined hundreds of years before His birth. That's why He said:

"I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. . . . I always do those things that please Him" (John 8:28, 29).



If we trust God to guide us,
we'll find that His path
is always best

Just as God planned the human life of Jesus before His birth, even so He has a plan for every one of us. He has a plan for you. He knows how you can fulfill your deepest desires and find an abundant life.

Sometimes we are reluctant to submit to God's plan, because we are afraid He will lead us in ways we don't want to follow. But if we will trust Him—letting Him guide in each decision we make—we'll find that God's plan is always the best plan. Looking back, we'll be amazed at how God has always tried to guide us down the correct path, even if we didn't see it at the time.

But how can you know God's plan for your life? Here are four steps that will help you as you learn to follow God's leading:

- ▶ **Ask.** According to James 1:5, if you ask God for wisdom, He will give it to you. In every situation, instead of trying to figure out things on your own, ask God for guidance.
- ▶ **Live up to what you know is right.** God can't lead you further if you aren't following the light you already have.

- ▶ **Listen.** Study God’s Word, pray, and watch for the leading of the Holy Spirit. God will never lead you to go against the principles of His character or His Word.
- ▶ **Wait.** Sometimes God gives you more than one good choice. Waiting on God before you act allows Him to lead you more fully and give you more of the wisdom He has promised.

In addition to these four steps, there are three main avenues by which God speaks to us. If we pay close attention, He will show us His will:

STEP 1: The Bible

How does the psalmist describe the Bible, life’s Guidebook?

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”
(Psalm 119:105).

What does Paul tell us we should learn from the life experiences of Bible characters?

“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Corinthians 10:11).

God’s Word renews our minds and gives us insight (Romans 12:2; Psalm 119:99). Instead of just putting your finger on a random text, hoping for some guidance, try to absorb the mind of God by studying and meditating on many texts—the whole of God’s Word. A regular time for prayerful Bible study is best.

STEP 2: Providential Circumstances

God also guides us by divinely-directed circumstances. Psalm 23 depicts Him as the Good Shepherd. A shepherd leads his sheep



through lush valleys as well as through rocky ravines. With Him by our side, we can benefit and learn from every experience.

STEP 3: Direct Communication From God to Our Hearts

God also guides us by speaking to our conscience through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10). Paul declares that the Spirit can enlighten “the eyes of your understanding” (Ephesians 1:18). Prayer enables us to talk directly with God. The more consistently we practice communicating with God, the more He is able to guide us. He molds both our inner impressions and our reasoning and judgment so we can see clearly the next step we need to take.

5 | Understanding God’s Will

How can you be sure that you are living a God-directed life and not just following your own inclinations and impulses? The Bible cautions us about just such a trap:

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 16:25).

It's easy to rationalise the problem areas of our lives. We make excuses for our behavior even when we know it is not in harmony with God's will. Some people tell themselves things like, "God understands my situation," "God wants me to be happy," or "What I'm doing isn't really hurting anyone."

Our actions and feelings must harmonise with Bible teaching. God has a plan for each of us, but that plan will never involve disobedience to His Word. It's never safe to conclude that God is leading us if our actions are out of harmony with any of the three points discussed above—the Bible, providential circumstances, and God speaking to us through the Holy Spirit.

What is the final test for determining a right course of action?

"To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20).

6 | Submitting to God's Plan



When the devil came to tempt Jesus in the wilderness, he attacked Jesus on the issue of submission. The devil suggested, "If you will only forgo the painful sacrifices your Father has planned for you, I'll give you the world in the palm of your hand—with fame, fortune, and a comfortable lifestyle." Satan even quoted Scripture in an attempt to lead Jesus astray. But each time, Jesus fought him off with the words, "It is written" (Matthew 4:1-11).

Continued on page 16

WordSearch

If you want to go deeper into this study topic, complete this section.

1. What claim did Jesus make regarding His eternal nature? (John 4:23-26; 8:57, 58; 17:21)

2. How does God describe His plan for your life? What does He have in store for you? (Jeremiah 29:11)

3. How carefully does God promise to guide you so that you can follow His plan for your life?

(a) Isaiah 30:21 _____

(b) Through whom does this guidance come? (John 16:13, 14)

4. What good advice does the psalmist give about how to use God's Word to know and follow His will? (Psalm 119:11-16)

5. How faithfully does God promise to protect and guide you through all the dangers and difficulties of life? (Isaiah 43:1-3)

One powerful lesson we can learn from the life of Jesus is submission to the Father's will. Even amid the terrible agony of



Gethsemane, He cried out, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:39). After three years of His ministry, living each day in harmony with the Father's plan, Christ's dying words were: “It is finished” (John 19:30). Jesus was really saying, “My God-planned life is now complete and fulfilled.”

As you begin to hear God's voice speaking clearly through His Word, providential circumstances, and through His direct leading in your life, you can learn to accept His guidance wholeheartedly. You too can discover the joy of a well-planned existence—a God-guided life.

My Decision

- I want to follow God's plan for my life. I choose to let Jesus lead me and show me His will.

My Prayer

Dear Father: Thank You for sending Jesus to this world to live and die for me. I want You to guide my life just as You guided Jesus' life while He was here on earth. I invite You to be the Lord of my heart and mind. In Jesus' name, Amen.



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