

Preachers' Handbook

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Why Preach?

1. Preaching saves lives. It gives people the hope of the resurrection from the dead and eternal life in God's kingdom. It is the best thing we can give anyone.
"Remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins" (James 5:20). "The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death" (Proverbs 13:14).
2. God wants us to save lives; *"This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3,4).* God wants everyone to be saved through a knowledge of His truth.

It gives God no pleasure to see people die and gone forever, *"Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked? Declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?" (Ezekiel 18:23).* God wants people to turn from their own ways and turn to His ways. In this way, they will "live".
3. Jesus commanded his disciples to preach. *"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15) and "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).*
4. How can people be saved by the gospel unless they hear it? And how can they hear it unless someone preaches it? As it says, *"How can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Romans 10:14).* Someone needs to take that message to them.
5. It is a beautiful thing to preach the gospel, *"How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (Romans 10:15).*
6. There is a special blessing on those who convert people, *"Those who are wise will shine in the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever" (Daniel 12:3).*
7. All disciples are required to give a witness to the gospel, *"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15).*

This handbook is designed to help others take the gospel to the world.

It is important that many people take the gospel to other people because there are so many people who need to hear.

What should we Preach?

The message that Jesus taught was the good news of the kingdom of God, *"Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom" (Matthew 4:23).* He taught his disciples to do the same, *"he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:2).* It was good news because it was a message of good things for the people. It should be something that people want to hear, and it should be something we want to teach them.

After the death of Jesus, the preaching of the gospel also included the things about Jesus. This was also good news for the people, because it was a message of how sins can be forgiven.

The message of the gospel included these two fundamental things:

1. the kingdom of God and
2. Jesus Christ.

Philip preached this, *"But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women"* (Acts 8:12) and so did Paul, *"Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ"* (Acts 28:31).

When we read the New Testament, the people were taught things in addition to the two main topics. The book of Hebrews speaks of "elementary teachings" which people should know.

"Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment" (Hebrews 6:1,2).

A preacher therefore needs to make sure that all essential topics are taught.

The main items to be taught are listed below, along with reasons for them:

- Kingdom of God – the gospel message of John the Baptist and Jesus.
- The Bible - the message of God (2 Timothy 3:15-17).
- Repentance – the gospel message of John the Baptist and Jesus.
- Baptism – the gospel message of John the Baptist and Jesus and the disciples.
- To understand repentance, we need to understand sin and how to remove it. This leads to the need to understand the nature of evil and how to avoid it in the future.
- Death and how believers get eternal life?
- God (John 17:3).
- How God made us (Acts 14:15; 17:23-28).
- What is the holy spirit and what are the gifts of the holy spirit (Acts 19:1-7; including the laying on of hands in Hebrews 6)?
- Angels. How God works through angels.
- The promises to Abraham and David. Many references in the New Testament (eg the promise to David in Acts 2:30 and the promise to Abraham in Acts 3:25).
- Birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus – the message of the apostles.
- The return of Jesus – the message of Jesus and the apostles (Acts 1:6-11).
- The resurrection and judgment (Hebrews 6).
- The apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer (Acts 2:42).
- How to live as a Christian.
- Christian responsibilities within the ecclesia, family, work, and country.

In preaching these topics to others, we will come across a number of incorrect teachings which people believe. Helping these people understand what the correct teachings are is the most challenging part of a preacher's work. We will cover these incorrect teachings in the relevant sections.

Preaching the Word of God

The word for preaching means 'to proclaim' or 'announce.' When someone preaches, they announce the message of God to the people. It is essential that what is announced is the message of God. As Peter says, *"If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God"* (1 Peter 4:11). We must make sure that we are speaking exactly what God's word is saying. The disciples did this, *"Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went"* (Acts 8:4).

We must prove to the listener that we are speaking the words of God. We can do this by proving everything from the Bible. We should get one of the listeners to read the verses, so that other listeners know that the words are from the Bible and not from us.

We must faithfully proclaim the message of the Bible. As Paul advised Timothy, *"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth"* (2 Timothy 2:15).

Unfortunately, the New Testament tells us of many who do not handle the word of God correctly: *"They are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach"* (Titus 1:11). True preachers are careful to be different. The apostle Paul said, *"we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God"* (2 Corinthians 4:2)

If we do not teach what the Bible says, then we are a false teacher. God will not be happy with this. Every preacher must ask themselves whether they are presenting the word of God faithfully and make sure that they do so.

There are three ways in which a preacher can get things wrong:

1. They can add things to the teaching that are not there. We are warned, *"Do not go beyond what is written"* (1 Corinthians 4:6). People like this add their own teaching, *"their teachings are but rules taught by men"* (Matthew 15:9).
2. They can take away from the teaching things that they should be teaching. *"Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called the least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practises and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 5:19).
3. They can twist the teachings into something that was not intended. They distort the truth.

All preachers must be careful how they teach others, *"each one should be careful how he builds"* (1 Corinthians 3:10). All preachers are accountable to God.

Preachers must avoid teaching in a way that pleases men. The Pharisees did this, *"Everything they do is done for men to see"* (Matthew 23:5). Paul was not like this, *"We are not trying to please men but God, who tests the hearts"* (1 Thessalonians 2:4).

Preachers should not behave as if they are important. The Pharisees did this, *"they love the place of honour at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the market-places and to have men call them 'Rabbi'"* (Matthew 23:6-7). Jesus made it clear to them, *"For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted"* (Matthew 23:12).

Preachers must not preach for money. Paul tells us that there are many like this, *"Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit"* (2 Corinthians 2:17). As Jesus said, *"Freely you have received, freely give"* (Matthew 10:8).

Who can Preach?

The one who preaches must understand what they are preaching. They must know the teaching well and be familiar with the relevant passages.

A preacher does not have to be a good speaker. The apostle Paul was a great preacher, but he was not a good speaker, *"I may not be a trained speaker, but I do have knowledge"* (2 Corinthians 11:6). Nor was he good with words, *"I did not come with eloquence"* (1 Corinthians 2:1).

A preacher does have to be an example of good behaviour. People will not listen if the preacher does not put into practice what he preaches.

Paul set a good example of behaviour when he taught others. He gave this advice, *"In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us"* (Titus 2:7,8).

A preacher teaches by his words **AND** his behaviour.

The Pharisees were trained teachers and good speakers. But they did not set the right example. Jesus said, *"But do not do what they do, for they do not practise what they preach"* (Matthew 23:3).

It is by the works that a preacher is really known. Just as we know trees by its fruit, so teachers are known by their fruit, *"Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognise them"* (Matthew 7:17-20).

We must prepare for preaching as Paul advised, *"Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching... Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers"* (1 Timothy 4:13,16).

Preachers must continue to live in the right way with God or they will not be saved. Paul knew this. He said, *"I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize"* (1 Corinthians 9:27).

How to Preach

The way we preach makes a big difference to how effective we are. If we are harsh, get angry easily or use bad language, it will not create a good impression.

Paul advised Timothy, *"Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth"* (2 Timothy 2:23-25).

People listen to teachers who are kind and pleasant. We should answer people, *"with gentleness and respect"* (1 Peter 3:15). We should *"slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility towards all men"* (Titus 3:2).

We cannot expect everyone we meet to like us. Jesus explained the problem, *"Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed"* (John 3:20). Just as not everyone liked Jesus, so they will not all like us. Jesus again told us, *"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first"* (John 15:18).

Even if we come across angry and rude people, we must not become angry and rude ourselves. *"Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing"* (1 Peter 3:9). Paul says, *"When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly"* (1 Corinthians 4:12,13). This is how we show we are different from them, and how we teach them with our behaviour.

Practical Matters

A preacher must prepare for preaching. They do this by reminding themselves of the verses to be taught. The clearest verses that teach the topic should be chosen. Preparation should be made of answers to possible questions they might be asked.

These notes are designed to help with both presenting and answering questions. The preacher must decide which verses they wish to use to suit the audience. It is hoped that these notes will give preachers confidence, so that they are encouraged to present the gospel to those who need to hear it.

Our style of preaching should change depending on the audience. The preacher must decide the best way to teach topics to the audience and choose the appropriate verses. The apostle Paul changed his style depending on the listeners, *"Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings"* (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

All preaching should commence with a prayer for God's guidance and blessing. We should give a private prayer before preaching and then thanks after preaching. If it is appropriate, it is good to pray publicly before and after the talk.

When Jesus sent out his disciples to preach, he sent them in pairs (Luke 10:1). This is good practice. A second person can confirm the truth of what the first person is saying. A second person can help with preaching, answering questions and organising. It is easier to preach and train new preachers if a second person is there to give confidence and share the load.

The goal of Preaching and the next steps

The goal of our preaching is the establishment of a baptised person in their new faith. Their life does not give God glory if they are baptised and then immediately slip back into the world. Their life does give God glory if they are baptised and then follow it through the rest of their lives. Conversion is a life-long goal, not a single act.

Baptism is part of the goal of a preacher. The preacher needs to make sure that the listener has been taught the essential parts of faith. If the listener does not understand the essential teachings, then their baptism may not be valid. There is the example of twelve men who did not understand the holy spirit or the things of Jesus. They had to be baptised again (Acts 19:1-7). It is good practice for those who want to be baptised to have their understanding checked before baptism.

The preacher has a responsibility to ensure that the person who is baptised is established in their faith. This means ensuring that they can read a Bible, pray and become part of an ecclesia. If the person is in isolation, then special arrangements need to be made to ensure that they are visited or so they can visit others in the faith.

Baptism is the start of a journey and not the end of one. The preacher needs to ensure that the new believer grows in their faith. One way of doing this is by continuing the teaching and doing other courses. One of these is the "Growing in Christ" course which is designed for new believers. Summaries of the first 5 lessons are given at the end of this booklet to help spiritual growth.

One of the problems that new believers face is that they can forget what they have learned. Hebrews refers to an example of this, *"In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again"* (Hebrews 5:12). We therefore encourage preachers to help listeners retain what they have learnt by making notes or having booklets and references. Another reason for this is so that the new believer can pass on his understanding to his family, friends, and contacts. In this way, the gospel is better able to go into all the world.

The Glory goes to God

A preacher is part of a process which God controls. It is God who calls people to the faith (1 Corinthians 1:26). A preacher is someone that God uses. The preacher must remember that it is God who is in control.

The response to the gospel is likened to the growth of a seed, where the seed is the word of God. Paul told us this, *"What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labour. For we are God's fellow-workers; you are God's field, God's building"* (1 Corinthians 3:5-9).

If there is success from your work, it is God's success. The glory goes to Him. We are privileged to be part of God's work. We are blessed because God has allowed us to do His work and see the work blessed.

How to use this handbook

There are many verses given for each topic; probably too many for a talk. The preacher should select which verses to use. Not every translation will give the same sense. The preacher should check that the verses prove the point in the actual Bible they are using.

It is best not to speak directly from this handbook. It would look like you are reading someone else's script. The audience needs to see that you believe what you are saying rather than what someone else is saying. The best way to do this is to organise your thoughts and verses into your own order and speak from your own notes.

Not every teaching is as equally difficult. Experience has shown that the most difficult areas to teach are Devil/Satan and Demons. Because of this, more notes have been included about these topics.

It is best to teach God's message positively. You may wish to teach that the devil does not exist. However, by talking about the devil and saying it does not exist will confuse. It is better to talk about the source of evil and establish that the problem is human nature first. Then one can explain the misunderstanding over the word 'devil'. A brother once described this approach to teaching as 'turn the light on' rather than 'dig out the darkness.'

We recommend that preaching starts with the topic of the kingdom of God for the following reasons,

1. John the Baptist and Jesus chose this topic to teach the people.
2. Jesus told his disciples to teach this.
3. It is good news. People should want to hear it.
4. It gives a vision of a great future, which helps people get through life.
5. It provides the reason why they should listen to the rest of the teaching.
6. It should be our priority: "*seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you as well*" (Matthew 6:33).
7. It provides an urgency for action. The kingdom of God is near.

We must be careful not to just teach facts. Our goal is not just to teach knowledge to pass an examination. Our goal is to develop people who honour God from having a right understanding and practice. This means we need to teach the lessons as well as facts. The Preaching Handbook has been written with this in mind.

Jesus said, "*A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher*" (Luke 6:40). Our aim is to train the student to be like Jesus, who is the ultimate teacher of us all.

1. The Kingdom of God

The kingdom of God was the original gospel message:

- John the Baptist taught it (Matthew 3:1-2)
- Jesus taught it (Matthew 4:23)
- The disciples taught it (Matthew 10:7, Luke 10:9)
- Jesus even taught it in his final time after the resurrection (Acts 1:3)

The kingdom is coming. It requires a response from people. The question is "Are we ready for the kingdom of God?" We need to know what the kingdom of God is first.

The angel Gabriel first taught about the kingdom in the New Testament (Luke 1:30-33). From this we learn:

- Jesus would sit on the throne of his father David.
- Jesus would reign over Jacob's descendants (that is, over the people of Israel).
- Jesus' kingdom would never end.
- Jesus was born to be a king.

Gabriel spoke about a promise that God made to king David (1 Chronicles 17:10-14). In this promise, God said that:

- One of David's offspring would be a great king.
- His kingdom would last for ever.
- He would build a house for God.
- God would be his father.

Jesus would be the king who would reign on David's throne in Jerusalem.

The importance of the promise to David was highlighted in the first speech of the Christian era in Acts 2:29-31 and 36. This message was not just for information. It required the people to respond to the message of the kingdom and get ready. Peter told them, "*Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins*" (Acts 2:38).

Preparation for the kingdom required the repentance from sins as a first step. It would be a problem for the people if the kingdom came and they were still in a state of sin.

To help us understand the kingdom of God, we need to consider the world we live in – the kingdoms of this world. This is a contrast to the kingdom of God.

The kingdoms of the World and the kingdom of God

Our world has many big problems that man is not able to solve. Ask the audience what these problems are. Make a list. They should include:

Oppression, War, Extreme poverty, Crime, Famine and changing weather patterns, Environmental problems, Disease and disability, Injustice, Ignorance, Unemployment, Housing, Wild animals.

God has a solution - the kingdom of God. It is good news.

The Bible gives us pictures of the kingdom of God. From these we can understand what the kingdom will be like.

1. Isaiah 2:2-4. This teaches:

- There will be a temple in Jerusalem.
 - People from all nations will visit this temple.
 - God's word and law will be given from this temple.
 - He will judge between the nations and solve disputes.
 - The result will be peace. There will be no war, armies, or weapons.
2. Isaiah 11:3-9. This teaches:
- There will be true justice, especially for the poor.
 - The wicked will be punished.
 - It will be a time of righteousness and faithfulness.
 - There will be peace even among the animals.
 - The earth will be full of the knowledge of God.
3. Isaiah 35:5-10. This teaches:
- There will be healing for the sick and disabled.
 - The deserts will have water.
 - There is a road for the holy people to travel in that leads to Zion (Jerusalem).
 - The unclean and wicked will not go to Jerusalem.
 - At Jerusalem there will be joy and happiness and singing.
 - There will be no more sorrow for the righteous.
4. Isaiah 65:17-25. This teaches:
- There will be a new heaven and a new earth.
 - The sadness of the old heaven and earth will not be remembered.
 - There will be joy based around Jerusalem.
 - The people will be blessed with long life and own their own houses and land.
 - God will answer their prayers before they are asked.
 - There will be peace among the animals.
 - There will be no destruction on God's holy mountain (Jerusalem).

The fact that there will be a new heaven and new earth does not mean that the current literal heaven and earth will be replaced. What it does mean is that the order of human rulership (the heavens) and the ruled (the earth) will be replaced. The fact that people are called 'heaven and earth' is found in Deuteronomy 32:1 and Isaiah 1:2.

The heaven and earth were replaced previously at the time of Noah when "*the world of that time was deluged and destroyed*" (2 Peter 3:6). The world itself was not destroyed, but people on it were. This is how it will be when Christ comes back.

These 4 quotations above teach us that the Kingdom of God will be a literal place. Many of the problems of man will have been reduced or even solved completely:

- Disease and Disability cured. Death of the young stopped. Long life.
- The formation of deserts solved so that famine is solved.
- Warfare solved. Unemployment and housing solved. Wild animals solved.
- Enforced justice. Removal of crime and oppression.
- Ignorance of God reduced and eventually solved.

The kingdom of God is the answer to our own problems and to the problems of the world. If we sometimes despair over the world today, then cheer up, because God has a solution. The Kingdom of God is '**good news**' for us and the world.

Then the Kingdom of God gets even better

1 Corinthians 15:24-28. The work of Jesus is to prepare the people of the world by removing sin. When sin has been removed, then man does not need to die because of sin. There is also no barrier to God living with man (currently our sins separate us from God, Isaiah 59:2). When sins are removed, man can live with God. This is the final stage of God's kingdom. Death is no more. The wicked are no more. Sin is no more. This second stage is described in Revelation 21:1-4. This teaches:

- There is no more death. There will be no more crying.
- Everything will be new. This plan is centred on the city of Jerusalem.
- The people will know God. There will be a feast.
- The people of God will have been made beautiful like a bride.
- God will come down and live with man on earth.

The kingdom of God is coming. Nothing can stop God doing this. The question for the listeners is "Are you ready for the Kingdom of God?"

Questions that may be asked

Why is there death in the kingdom (Isaiah 65:17-25)? The kingdom of God has two stages. In the first stage, there will still be mortal people in the kingdom who can repent. For believers who have already repented and got ready for the kingdom, they will be rewarded with eternal life and be immortal in this period. This stage is also called the Millenium. When the second stage comes death is ended.

2. When will the Kingdom come and where will it be?

When will the kingdom come?

Only God knows (Matthew 24:36). If anyone claims to know, do not believe them.

When Jesus was taken up into heaven, two angels said he would return (Acts 1:11). Jesus will set up the kingdom when he returns. See also Matthew 25:31.

Because we do not know when Jesus will return, we must be ready all the time. The parable of the 10 virgins teaches this (Matthew 25:1-13). Jesus will come as unexpectedly as a thief in the night at a time we do not expect him (Matthew 24:42-44).

The parable of the 10 talents (Matthew 25:14-30, or 10 minas in Luke 19:11-26) was given because people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately (Luke 19:11). The parable teaches that the master went away for a long time and that the servants needed to be ready for his return. The return time was unknown. The master returned and found a lazy servant. Lazy servants are of no use to a master. We ourselves must not be lazy.

Questions that may be asked

What does it mean the kingdom of God is 'among you' or 'in your midst'?

The Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come. In his reply, Jesus said that the "*kingdom of God is in your midst*" (Luke 17:21). The original Greek word for '*in your midst*' means '*inside*'. It is used in Matthew 23:26 for '*inside*' of the cup.

Whether we enter the kingdom of God is dependent on our personal response. What is important is in our mind.

What does it mean that the kingdom of God is 'near' (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; Mark 1:15; Luke 10:9)?

This does not mean it is 'near' in time, because it is still not here. Nor does it mean that it is 'near' in distance because the listeners were already in the land promised to Abraham. It means that the invitation of the kingdom has come near the hearers and those who respond correctly will be in the kingdom.

Where will the Kingdom of God be?

The kingdom of God is a fulfillment of God's promise to King David (Luke 1:30-33; 1 Chronicles 17:10-14). David was to have a great son who would sit on his throne in Jerusalem. It will be a restoration of the kingdom of Israel (Acts 1:6) which was on earth. Both these facts mean that the kingdom of God will be on earth.

God made a promise to Abraham, which also teaches that the kingdom will be on earth. God promised Abraham and his descendants would receive the land of Canaan (Genesis 13:14-17).

The fact that the kingdom of God will be on earth is taught by the Lord's prayer; "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your **kingdom** come, your will be done on **earth** as it is in heaven...*" (Matthew 6:9,10). The kingdom is going to 'come' and it will be a time when God's will is done on 'earth'.

The teaching of the return of Jesus to the earth means that Jesus is not going to remain in heaven. The angels told the disciples this (Acts 1:11). Jesus is coming back to the earth to set up the kingdom on earth.

Here is a list of other verses which teach that the kingdom of God will be on earth (Revelation 5:10; 11:15; Matthew 5:5; Psalm 37:22; Psalm 115:16; Daniel 2:44; 7:27). Some of these teach that the kingdom of God will replace the kingdoms of man on earth.

The earth has always been part of God's plan for the people of God. It was "*formed ~~it~~-to be inhabited*" (Isaiah 45:18). His ultimate plan with the earth is spoken of by the prophets; "*For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea*" (Habakkuk 2:14, see also Isaiah 11:9 and Numbers 14:21). The earth has not yet been filled with the knowledge of God, but it will be.

Passages which seem to teach a kingdom in heaven but do not

The kingdom of God is called the 'kingdom of heaven' in the gospel of Matthew. It is never called the 'kingdom **in** heaven'. It is the kingdom '**of** heaven' - that is, the kingdom 'from' heaven. It is called the kingdom 'of heaven' because it is 'of God'. This is how the language is used in Matthew's gospel when speaking about the baptism of John; "*John's baptism - where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?*" (Matthew 21:25). It was from God and not from man. The same is true of Hebrews 11:16 where faithful people; "*were longing for a better country - a heavenly one*" (Hebrews 11:16).

The kingdom of God will be a different type of kingdom from man's kingdoms. Jesus told Pilate; "*My **kingdom** is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by Jewish leaders. But now my **kingdom** is from another place*"

(John 18:36). Jesus meant his kingdom is a kingdom of peace rather than of fighting. The phrase *"from another place"* is better translated as *"not from here"* and means not being like other worldly kingdoms. In the same way, the disciples are not of this world (John 17:14).

John 14:2 is alleged to teach us that Jesus is preparing a place for us in heaven. However, the next verse explains; *"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am"* (John 14:3). Jesus is preparing a place for us but is coming back to be with us. The reward is being prepared in heaven (Matthew 5:12; 1 Peter 1:4) but will be given when Christ comes to set up the kingdom on earth (Matthew 16:27; 1 Peter 5:4; Revelation 22:12).

The prophet Enoch is supposed to have gone to heaven without dying. We read of Enoch in Hebrews 11:5. However, we are told that all the people died; *"All these people were still living by faith when they **died**. They did not receive the things promised"* (Hebrews 11:13,39). See also Romans 5:14.

Hebrews 11:5 says Enoch was 'taken' from this life. The word used for 'taken' means 'transferred' or 'changed places'. Enoch was transferred from one place to another to save him from a deadly situation.

The prophet Elijah is alleged to have gone to heaven without dying. The description of Elijah going to heaven is given in 2 Kings 2:11. People automatically assume Elijah went to the heaven of God, but there are other heavens. There is the heaven of the birds (Genesis 1:20), the heaven of the stars (Genesis 1:15,16) and the heaven where God lives (Psalm 115:16). We can work out that Elijah went to the first heaven, the heaven of the birds. God often took Elijah from one place to another through the air (1 Kings 18:12). In fact, when Elijah went to heaven, the prophets wanted to look for Elijah in other valleys (2 Kings 2:16). After the events Elijah was found alive and wrote a letter to Jehoram (2 Chronicles 21:12). God had picked Elijah up from one place and taken him to another place. Elijah is one of the "prophets" who died and did not receive the promises (Hebrews 11:32,39).

Elijah, like Enoch, was taken from one place to another by the spirit of God. This is a rare event, but it does happen. Philip was taken through the air to Azotus (Acts 8:39,40).

It is said by some that the thief on the cross went to heaven on the day he died. Jesus said that the thief would be with him in paradise (Luke 23:43). But that day Jesus died and went to the tomb. The thief died on the cross and awaits the resurrection and a place in the kingdom paradise. The thief did not go to paradise that day.

It is a Bible principle that all men die: no exceptions – Psalm 89:48; Romans 5:12; Ecclesiastes 3:20; 9:3.

It is said that Jesus went straight to heaven because he said, *"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit"* (Luke 23:46). Stephen said a similar thing when he was dying (Acts 7:59-60). The simplest explanation of these verses is that God was receiving His spirit back when they died (Job 34:14-15; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Psalm 146:4).

We are told that no one has gone to heaven except Jesus; *"No one has ever gone to heaven except the one who came heaven – the Son of Man"* (John 3:13). David did not go to heaven; *"For David did not ascend to heaven"* (Acts 2:34).

3. Repentance and Baptism

Repentance

There is no automatic entrance into the kingdom of God. Everyone is invited to prepare for it. John the Baptist and Jesus both taught that people must repent (Matthew 3:1-2, 4:17).

Repentance means to change - to 'change one's mind' **and** to 'change one's ways'. If one is doing evil, then repentance means to stop doing evil. True repentance is always demonstrated by a change in behaviour. When the Pharisees came to John, John told them; *"Produce fruit in keeping with repentance"* (Matthew 3:7,8). The 'fruit' means the deeds. John was concerned that they would not change and so not truly repent.

All people must repent (Acts 17:30) because we are all sinners (Romans 3:23). We all need to prove our repentance by showing that our behaviour has changed. Paul said, *"I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance **by their deeds**"* (Acts 26:20).

True repentance comes with a blessing (Psalm 32:1-6). If one really turns from the old ways and follows Christ, then God is willing to forgive us of **all our past sins** - no matter how bad. This is demonstrated by the forgiveness of prostitutes and tax collectors, some of whom became Jesus' closest disciples. This is such a wonderful and merciful offer that we would be foolish not to accept!

For those who do repent and turn from evil, there is joy in heaven (Luke 15:7,10). God wants all people to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

We cannot enter the kingdom of God as a sinner. The Kingdom of God is not a place where sin is welcome. Jesus said, *"The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil"* (Matthew 13:41).

Additional Verses: Repentance was God's message throughout the Bible. It was the message of the prophets (Jeremiah 15:19; Ezekiel 18:30; Revelation 16:9).

Baptism

To show our repentance, we must be baptized. Baptism is a response to the teaching about the kingdom. It is a demonstration of our commitment to change from our old ways to the ways of God.

Both John the *Baptist* and Jesus taught their disciples to be baptized. Peter and the other apostles taught baptism. Peter said, *"Repent and be baptised, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins"* (Acts 2:38).

Baptism is essential. We cannot enter the kingdom of God unless we are baptized (John 3:3,5). When it speaks of being 'born of water', it refers to baptism. Baptism is a symbolic rebirth in water. We no longer remain a child of the world, but we must be born as a child of God. Being 'born of the spirit' refers to the change in mind, or repentance, we have. Being covered in water is not enough, our minds must be committed to change into the way of Christ.

Baptism occurs after someone is taught God's message and understands what to do (Acts 2:38; 8:12). It is important that we believe the right things before baptism. In Acts 19:1-7 we read of 12 men who had to be re-baptised because they had insufficient knowledge about Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

A good example of baptism is that of the Ethiopian in Acts 8:26-39. Look at the stages leading to baptism – teaching first, understanding what is required, request for baptism, baptism, then rejoicing.

Baptism takes place where there is a lot of water because baptism requires complete covering and full immersion in water (Acts 8:36-39; John 3:23; Mark 1:9-10).

Full immersion in water is required because baptism is a washing away of sins (Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21). When we wash our bodies, we do not wash only part of our body. The whole body must be washed to make it clean (like Naaman in 2 Kings 5:14). Washing was like the cleaning in the Law of Moses for certain types of uncleanness. The whole body was washed (Leviticus 15:16).

Baptism symbolizes the death and resurrection of Jesus (Romans 6:3,4; Colossians 2:12). When one goes into the water, one acts out the death of Jesus. When one comes up out of the water, one acts out the resurrection of Jesus. Full immersion in water is required to symbolize the death and resurrection of Jesus. You do not partly bury a body – it needs to be fully covered.

By being baptised, the work of Jesus becomes effective in our lives. It means that if we die in Christ then we will be raised like Christ.

To be ready for the kingdom of God, we need:

1. the correct understanding of the gospel,
2. to repent of sin and change,
3. to be baptised,
4. to live in new life living the way Jesus did.

Baptism makes us children of Abraham and heirs of the promises (Galatians 3:26-29).

Questions that may be asked:

I have been baptised previously, so why do I need to be baptised again? In Acts 19:1-7 people had to be rebaptised because they did not understand about Jesus and the Holy Spirit. We need to understand the right teaching before baptism. Almost all other Christian groups baptise with the understanding of the Trinity. This teaches that Jesus is God not man and so could not really die. Baptism is into the death and resurrection of Jesus. This does not happen with the understanding of the Trinity. A Trinity baptism is more like a baptism of repentance (Mark 1:4); assuming there is a correct understanding of sin and repentance and the new life in Christ.

Do you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit at baptism? The apostles and New Testament disciples sometimes did. This does not happen today. See topic of the Holy Spirit Gifts.

Is christening baptism? Christening cannot be found in the Bible. It is not the Bible baptism. It does not involve full immersion. It does not involve repentance of sins. It does not involve knowledge of the kingdom and Jesus.

It was introduced because of concern about babies dying before they were baptised. They considered that these babies would die without hope otherwise. A second reason

for its popularity is in areas where lakes and rivers freeze in the winter. This makes baptism difficult.

What is baptism of the holy spirit? John the Baptist speaks of Jesus baptizing with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16). In Acts 1:5 Jesus told the apostles that they would be baptised with the Holy Spirit in a few days. This was the reference to Pentecost when the apostles were covered with the Holy Spirit and with tongues of fire (Acts 2:1-4). The room was full of the Holy Spirit so that they were immersed or baptised in the spirit and fire. The first conversion of the Gentiles is also described as a baptism of the holy spirit (Acts 11:15-17). This too must have been a covering in the spirit. Apart from the first outpouring of the Jews and the Gentiles, there are no other occasions recorded.

What is baptism for the dead (1 Corinthians 15:29)? It seems that people were being baptised so that they could see their dead believing relatives in the resurrection. It does not mean that anyone can give dead relatives their baptism after their death. As it says in Psalm 49:7, *"No man can redeem the life of another."*

4. Sin and Temptation

Sin is a problem for everyone. The greatest problem is that it leads to death (Romans 6:23). Death may occur through disease or disaster, but the ultimate cause is sin.

All people sin (Romans 5:12; 1 John 1:10) with the single exception being Jesus. It is because we sin that we will die. We need to know what sin is and what to do about it.

The first man and woman were Adam and Eve, who lived in the Garden of Eden with God (Genesis 2:15). God gave them a command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, with the punishment of death if they did (Genesis 2:16,17). They did eat. This led to the sentence of Adam and Eve to death (Genesis 3) and later Adam died (Genesis 5:5) and everyone like him (Romans 5:12-14).

Their crime led to their removal from the Garden of Eden and from the presence of God. They were cursed in different ways. The woman had to suffer from childbirth and from being ruled by her husband (Genesis 3:16). The man would suffer from hard work and death (Genesis 3:17-19). They lived outside the Garden and suffered pain from the curses. The breaking of God's command by Adam is called 'sin' (Romans 5:12). Sin is the breaking of the commands of God (1 John 3:4).

Sin is a problem. It causes hardship and pain and death. It denies us of blessings. It separates us from God (Psalm 5:4,5; Habakkuk 1:13).

It is important we know the commands of God, so we can avoid breaking them. Even if we are unaware of the commands and break them, it is still sin. This means that learning the commands from the Bible is essential. As we read in Psalms 119:11, *"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."* Jesus had the word of God in his heart when he was tempted to commit sin in the wilderness. He was able to remember the commands and avoid sin.

The Bible word for 'sin' means to 'miss the mark'. It carries the idea of missing the standard that God has set. A related word in the Bible (iniquity) carries the idea of twisting or bending the rules. Man is unfortunately good at not meeting God's standard, either by breaking the rules or by bending it. It comes naturally to man.

There is also another word which is much worse. This is the word 'rebellion'. This is where the person deliberately chooses not to keep the commands of God. Just like rebels who rebel against the leadership of a country, these rebel against the leadership of God. They will have no place in the kingdom of God.

Man, left to himself, sins and then dies. Man cannot solve this problem. But God can. God proposed a way for man's sins to be forgiven. It is through the sacrifice of Jesus that our sins can be forgiven (Matthew 26:28).

We cannot undo our sins. They have already been committed. Our past sins must be removed from God's record by God wiping them out. Peter tells us that forgiveness of sins can be found with Jesus Christ through repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38).

The unfortunate thing is that baptism does not prevent us sinning in the future. Despite our best endeavours, we still sin. We are not rebels against God's commands, but sin still happens. In this case, we must call on God in prayer in the name of Jesus. This is what Jesus taught us to do when he taught us how to pray to God (Matthew 6:12).

We note that in the Lord's prayer there is a condition on our forgiveness. We must forgive those who have sinned against us. If we forgive them, then we will be forgiven. If we do not forgive, then we will not be forgiven. This is fair.

If we sin, it is important that we do not cover up our sin. Sin is not hidden from God. Sin leads to problems in our lives. Sin can only be forgiven if we admit it and we ask for forgiveness (Psalm 32:5-6).

If we sin after baptism, we must:

1. Admit our sin to God.
2. Turn from these ways of sin.
3. Forgive others who sin against us.
4. Pray for forgiveness in Jesus' name

We started this topic pointing out the problem of sin. It brings a curse on the life of the sinner, separates man from God and causes death. The opposite is true if sin is removed. It causes life. It binds man back to God. It results in a blessing on the life of the repentant sinner.

Temptation

Temptation is a huge problem. If man gives in to temptation, it results in sin and we know that sin leads to death. Temptation can lead to our death.

We are told about this process of temptation in James 1:13-15. It starts with man's evil desires. These only become a problem when there is a state of temptation. If a person gives in to these temptations, then he commits sin. And sin leads to death.

Temptation on its own is not sin. It is a state where sin can easily occur. We will all face temptations in our life (1 Corinthians 10:13)

In James 1:2-4, the word for 'trials' is the word for 'temptations.' If we endure temptations, then it shows we have perseverance. This enables us to become complete Christians. We need temptation to help us develop to spiritual maturity and give us life (James 1:12). We will be tested by temptations, but if we stand the test there is a great reward (1 Peter 1:6,7).

Adam and Eve were tested but they gave into their temptation and sinned. They both tried to blame someone else for their failure. But God was not fooled. They sinned and so they were punished. God tells how Eve was tempted in Genesis 3:6:

"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it."

Eve was tempted by her own evil desires. There were three parts to this temptation:

1. She wanted good food.
2. She liked the look of it.
3. And she wanted wisdom.

She deliberately ate. These three parts are described in 1 John 2:15-17.

It is true that the snake gave Eve the idea. But an idea is only an idea. The temptation was Eve's when she thought about eating the fruit. The sin was Eve's. We can demonstrate the process by asking someone to take someone else's mobile phone. The idea is only an idea. Though it is still best not to put temptation in other people's way.

We cannot blame our temptation on other people or things. Our temptations are ours alone. We must have self-control to avoid temptation. Proverbs 1:10 says: *"My son, if sinful men entice you, do not give in to them."*

One of the 10 commandments tells us not to desire what does not belong to us (Deuteronomy 5:21). Adam and Eve should not have taken what did not belong to them (the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil). Neither must we.

There is only one person who managed to resist all temptations and never sin. Jesus faced the same temptations we do (Hebrews 4:15). He was *"tempted in every way, just as we are"*, because he was a man. He really knew what temptation was like.

The purpose of testing is to learn about the character of someone or something by submitting it to testing. Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tested. God wanted to know about the character of His son. Only under a state of testing does one find out the quality of a man. We do not learn about someone when life is easy.

We are told that Jesus was tempted in the wilderness. Matthew 4:3 says, *"The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.'"*

The translation gives the impression that Jesus was tempted by another person. But we need to remember, that even if the idea comes from someone else, the actual temptation comes from inside the person. Jesus was hungry after fasting for 40 days, so he was tempted to turn the stones into bread. The temptation was inside Jesus. Jesus recognized this himself (Matthew 15:18,19).

The source of evil is the human heart inside a man. It does not come from outside. Our desires deceive us and corrupt us (Ephesians 4:22). We all face a battle inside ourselves. Our evil desires are fighting with our mind over what to do (James 4:1). It is a battle. Peter calls it a war (1 Peter 2:11). Like all battles, it is hard.

We need to know the enemy within us. We need to avoid situations where our enemy can gain the upper hand. We must avoid situations where we are tempted. We must be always on our guard because our enemy can surprise us. Jesus told his disciples (Matthew 26:41), *"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."*

Jesus taught us how to use prayer to help us in Matthew 6:13: *"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."* Jesus resisted his temptations by constantly being alert and through the power of prayer. Let us follow his example.

5. Who is responsible for evil?

God identifies the source of evil. He witnessed His creation turn evil so that He ended up destroying it. We are told what went wrong at the time of the Flood,

*"The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the **thoughts of the human heart** was only evil all the time"* (Genesis 6:5).

The human heart was the source of the problem. His heart was evil from an early age; *"every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood"* (Genesis 8:21).

The real source of evil in this world comes from the human heart, which is another name for the human mind. Even God's chosen people Israel had the same problem; *"But these people have stubborn and rebellious hearts; they have turned aside and gone away"* (Jeremiah 5:23).

God summarised His understanding of the human heart: *"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure"* (Jeremiah 17:9). Jesus agrees, *"But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean'. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean'"* (Matthew 15:18-20).

The evil human heart is an enemy of God, *"The mind governed by the flesh is **hostile** to God; it does not submit to God's laws, nor can it do so"* (Romans 8:7). The evil mind of the flesh is against the mind of the spirit (Romans 7). The mind of the spirit is the mind that submits to God's ways. See also Ecclesiastes 9:3; Psalm 14:3; Psalm 95:10.

The human mind can choose whether to follow the way of the flesh or the spirit, *"Once you were alienated from God and were **enemies in your minds** because of your evil behaviour. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation"* (Colossians 1:21,22).

People do not automatically have to follow evil – everyone is tempted to follow the evil desires of their heart but they can choose what to do. As Jesus said, *"The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him"* (Matthew 12:35).

Bible Names given to Human Nature - Satan

The Bible gives other names to the evil side of human nature. One is the word 'satan,' which means 'adversary'. It is often used to refer to a person who behaves as an enemy of God.

An example of this is Peter. He tried to stop Jesus going to the cross, so *"Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the **things of men**"* (Matthew 16:23). The problem with Peter was that he was thinking like a man. He was not thinking like God.

Another example is Judas, *"Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve"* (Luke 22:3). The mind of Judas entered a state of being an enemy of Jesus, which led to the betrayal of Jesus. A state of mind 'entering' someone occurs elsewhere, *"And there entered a reasoning among them, this, Who may be greatest of them?"* (Luke

9:46, Youngs Literal Version). This is a Bible way of saying someone changed their mind.

Believers can become adversaries of God if they take on attitudes that are against God and the ways of the world; *"don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred towards God. Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God"* (James 4:4).

The fact that the word *satan* means 'adversary' is shown by comparing 1 Chronicles 21:1 and 2 Samuel 24:1. Here the adversary to David and Israel, it is God Himself! Clearly, God is not an evil monster called '*satan*'. God also cause adversaries to occur (Hebrew: *satans*) such as those against Solomon (1 Kings 11:14; 11:23,25). God has all power and authority. He is the one who can be your adversary or friend.

Bible Names given to Human Nature - Devil

Another name to the evil side of human nature is '*devil*'. Many languages do not distinguish between '*devil*' and '*satan*', but they are different in the original Greek. '*devil*' means '*false accuser*' or '*slanderer*'. It means someone who makes false accusations against someone else. Examples of this where the '*devil*' word is in the Greek are:

- There will be a time when *"People will be... slanderers"* (2 Timothy 3:2,3).
- That *"the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers* (Greek word for '*slanderers*)" (1 Timothy 3:11).
- And *"teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine"* (Titus 2:3).

Believers can be slanderers ('devils') if they are not careful. Judas was one (John 6:70). Paul writes, *"In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold"* (Ephesians 4:26,27). He is saying 'do not give into a state of falsely accusing the one you are angry with'. If you resist this state of mind, then you will avoid the problem, *"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you"* (James 4:7). The word for 'he' is better translated as 'it', where 'it' is the state of mind to be avoided.

The word '*slanderer*' is often used of those who falsely accuse God's people. 1 Timothy 3:6-7 refers to outsiders who criticise believers. See also 1 Peter 5:8.

Bible Names given to Human Nature - Sin

Sin is the breaking of God's commands. The tendency of human nature to sin is described as like a boss (Romans 6:6,17) who pays wages (Romans 6:23) or is like a king who reigns (Romans 5:21; Psalm 119:133). It is described as like an animal about to jump (Genesis 4:7). This is descriptive Bible language to help us understand the problem of sin. If we give in to temptation and sin, then it rules over us (Psalm 19:13).

False Teaching about satan and the devil

There is a common view that evil in the world comes from a supernatural monster called '*satan*' or the '*devil*,' who tempts man into sin. Man likes this view because he can blame the problem of his sin onto someone else. It is helpful to point out a number of problems with this false teaching.

1. If the devil/satan causes wickedness, then why are wicked people punished?
People are not to blame if the devil/satan is the cause. Since God does what is

just and right and true (Deuteronomy 32:4), to punish people instead of devil/satan would not be just.

2. If the devil/satan is an immortal being in opposition to God, then this makes it an evil god. The Bible says there is only one God who causes good and evil (Isaiah 45:5,6). God is unopposed (Deuteronomy 32:39; Isaiah 43:13), there is no other.
3. Why would anyone "*hand someone over to satan*" (1 Timothy 1:20) if satan is a supernatural monster? Instead, the phrase means to leave the person to their state of mind which is opposed to God.
4. If the devil/satan is a fallen angel, it cannot be killed because angels are immortal (Luke 20:36). But devil/satan will be/is destroyed (Hebrews 2:14).

Passages which seem to teach a Supernatural Evil Being but do not

We will look at only the main confusing passages here.

The Temptations of Jesus

Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days. This is like Israel in the wilderness for 40 years. God led Jesus into the wilderness to test him to see whether he was different from Israel. God was in control of this. When Jesus fought the temptations, he did so using the words of the Bible. All his quotations from the Bible come from Israel in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 6-8).

Matthew 4:10 says; "*Jesus said to him, "Away from me, **satan** (adversary)!"*". Jesus was not necessarily talking to anyone else. The Greek words for "him" can also mean "himself". A literal translation of the passage is, "*Jesus said to himself, "Go, adversary"*".

Jesus rebuked his own thoughts. This is like other places where the phrase "*said to himself*" occurs. It is often used of people who are thinking evil (Genesis 27:41; 1 Samuel 18:17; 1 Samuel 27:12; 2 Kings 5:20; Luke 7:39; 16:3; 18:4). Jesus used this 'self-talk' to fight the evil thoughts from his own heart.

According to Matthew and Luke's gospels, a slanderer or 'devil' tempted Jesus. Who was the slanderer? The text in these gospels reads as if it is someone other than Jesus. To answer this question, we will look at the options:

1. God. It is impossible for God to lie (Hebrews 6:18) so He could not slander. He does not tempt anyone (James 1:13).
2. An angel. Angels do not slander (2 Peter 2:11). They help believers to get to the kingdom rather than hinder them (Hebrews 1:14). They do God's will (Psalms 103:20,21).
3. Another man. A temptation would not have been a temptation unless it was possible. No man had the ability to give Jesus the kingdoms of the world. No man could take Jesus to the top of the temple.
4. A supernatural evil being. It does not own the kingdoms of men, so it cannot offer them to Jesus. God owns the world (Job 41:11; Psalm 105:7; Daniel 4:17).

There remains only one other option that fits. The slanderer was a way of representing the temptation of Jesus's own mind.

1. The first temptation to turn stones to bread is only natural. Jesus had just received the power of the Holy Spirit and would be tempted to misuse this power

for personal needs. He had been fasting 40 days and was hungry. We can understand the human mind, saying; "you're the son of God, why don't you use the power God gave you".

2. The second temptation (in Matthew) was to put on a public display and show he really was God's son. He could jump off the top of the temple and the angels would be forced to catch him. At least, that was the reasoning that came from Psalm 91. But forcing God to act is putting God to the test and that was wrong (Deuteronomy 6:16). Jesus had a good knowledge of Scripture, and so it makes sense if this temptation came from his own knowledge of Scripture.
3. The third temptation (in Matthew) was about taking all the world as his own. This temptation **only** makes sense if it took place in Jesus' mind. No-one else had the promise of the kingdom. Jesus knew God had promised him the kingdom (Psalm 2:7-8) and that God was able to give them to him. This temptation cannot be literal as there is no place where all the kingdoms of the world can be seen at once.

The temptations of Jesus only make sense if they came from Jesus' own thoughts.

By fighting the temptations, Jesus caused the evil thoughts to flee. Temptations are described as like a separate person in Thessalonians; *"I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labours had been in vain"* (1 Thessalonians 3:5). The tempter here is the minds of the believers and not a separate person.

Jesus knew the danger and the potential damage caused by giving into temptation. He told his disciples to pray for help in this (Matthew 6:9-13).

The Victory of Jesus

If there was a supernatural devil, then it is a strange that Jesus won the victory when he died. Surely this was more of a time for jubilation by the supernatural evil monster. In fact, at the death of Jesus, this supernatural monster is nowhere mentioned.

The death of Jesus makes sense if the real enemy of man was human nature. Jesus fought the temptations typical of man in his own body and won (Hebrews 4:14,15). We know that when we are tempted, we are not tempted by a supernatural being but by our own heart.

For Jesus to fight human temptation he had to be human. This is where the human heart can be found which is the source of the evil in the world (Hebrews 2:14,15). Jesus destroyed the problem (1 John 3:8).

Sin causes death. Yet Jesus died without having sinned. This was not just. So, the God of justice raised Jesus from the dead. Through Jesus, this victory over the evil in our own hearts can be ours, *"But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Corinthians 15:57).

The Devil and Satan in Revelation 12 and 20

The first occurrence of devil and satan is in chapter 12. A pregnant woman is clothed with the sun, stands on the moon, and has a crown of 12 stars. She is not a literal woman but a symbolic one. We can work out what she represents. The sun, moon and stars represent the house of Israel (Genesis 37:9,10). The woman gives birth to a son

who is taken up to heaven (Revelation 12:5). This child would rule the nations with an iron sceptre. This is Jesus (Psalm 2:9). We have a picture of the woman (Israel) giving birth to a son (Jesus) who is taken up into heaven.

Revelation 12 then introduces us to a 'dragon' who tries to eat the child. Michael and his angels appear and fight against the dragon and his angels. In Daniel, we read of one other occasion of Michael and angels fighting (Daniel 10:13). Here they are fighting the nation of Persia. It makes sense that the dragon of Revelation 12 also represents a nation that is fighting against the purpose of God. We know that this is the nation of Rome, who tried to kill the young Jesus soon after birth and later did put Jesus to death. Jesus was raised from the dead and later caught up to heaven. This fits in with the description in Revelation 12. The Bible uses beasts to represent nations (Daniel 7).

The dragon of Revelation 12 is called three things:

1. 'The Adversary' (or 'satan'). It became God's adversary or enemy by fighting the purpose of God.
2. "Slanderer" (or 'devil'). It slanders God's people; *"For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down"* (v10).
3. "Ancient Serpent". Like the serpent in the Garden of Eden it opposed the truth and lied.

The dragon of Revelation 12 was thrown down from its position of heavenly rulership to an earthly position. The fact that a beast is in heaven is not unique in Scripture. The empire of Babylon is described as being heavenly and was thrown down to the earth (Isaiah 14:12-15). The town of Capernaum was thrown from heaven to earth (Matthew 11:23). Heaven is symbolic of a high place of spiritual rulership. The description of Revelation 12 fits in with the understanding of the beast being a symbol of the Roman Empire which was a place of spiritual rulership.

We do not hear of the dragon again until Revelation 20:2. Here the dragon is locked away in an abyss or prison for 1000 years (20:3). Afterwards he is released (20:7) and then finally destroyed (20:10). The language continues to be symbolic. The Adversary in Revelation 20 is any leading nation that leads the opposition against God. The fact that the dragon is multi-headed tells us there are many rulers as part of this group.

Only at the end of God's purpose will all opposition to God's people be removed (Isaiah 41:10,11). No longer will there be an evil heart of man (Jeremiah 3:17). All enemies of Jesus will be destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:25,26). Slanderers will be removed (Psalms 140:9-11).

Satan at the Time of Job

Job was tested to see what was in his heart. The trouble came from someone called an 'adversary' or 'satan', who questioned whether Job was really very good. There are no capitals in the Hebrew language, so 'Satan' should really be 'satan'. The adversary was an adversary because he was against Job.

Job's adversary was someone who went into the presence of God and was able to speak directly to God. He had no power of his own and was not able to do anything unless he was given the ability by God (Job 1:12). This suggests that it is an angel. We note that the adversary did not do wrong - only what God told him to do.

The fire, invaders, wind and ultimately disease that came on Job all came from God. Everyone recognised this. Job did (2:10). Job's wife did (2:9). God did (Job 2:3). Eliphaz did (Job 5:17). All his brothers and sisters did (Job 42:11).

God is the one who is all powerful in the book of Job. No one can stop God doing what He does (Job 9:12). Job describes this supreme authority of God (Job 12:13-16) where he says, *"both deceived and deceiver are his"*. There is no power that opposes God in the earth (Job 23:13; Daniel 4:35).

In Job, the challenge of the adversary is answered. In the end God blessed Job with many good things (Job 42:10). God had worked out His plan through troubles, despite the words of the adversary and the words of his 'friends' who slandered Job.

The Serpent

It is said that the serpent was the cause of man's fall. The serpent was *"more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made"* (Genesis 3:1). The serpent was an animal blessed with the gift of speech and reason.

The serpent questioned God's command (Genesis 3:1). He invented the first lie; *"You will not surely die"* (Genesis 3:4). He also invented some reasons why God did not want them to eat of the tree. Like all dangerous lies, it had some truth in it, but it was not the full truth. Eve believed the false teacher and was deceived by the serpent.

God was not happy with Adam, Eve, or the serpent. Each received its own punishment. Only man was told that he would die; *"dust you are and to dust you will return"* (Genesis 3:19). The woman was not told that she would die, yet she did. The animals were not told that they would die, yet they did, including the serpent. The serpent also received a special punishment – it would move on its belly and lost its ability to speak and reason. This is a fair punishment for a creature that misused its speech and reason.

The Wicked man, who is called 'adversary' (satan) or 'slanderer' (devil)

The problem in the world is the tendency of the human heart to become evil. It lies and speaks evil of others (Isaiah 59:4). It schemes to bring about his evil plan (Psalm 10:2). It aims to shed innocent blood (Proverbs 6:16-19). It is described as dangerous as a lion (Psalm 10:9), as dogs (Psalm 59:6) and as snakes (Psalm 140:3). These descriptions teach us how God sees the wicked – more like beasts than humans.

God describes the wicked as 'adversaries' (satans) and 'slanderers' (devils) to emphasise the evilness of their ways. These wicked people plot to harm the innocent and profit from the fall of others. It is these particularly people who are called 'adversary' or 'slanderer'. All these terms are used interchangeably of the wicked. The world contains many of these types of people. The believer should not fear these people since God is in control; *"Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe"* (Proverbs 29:25).

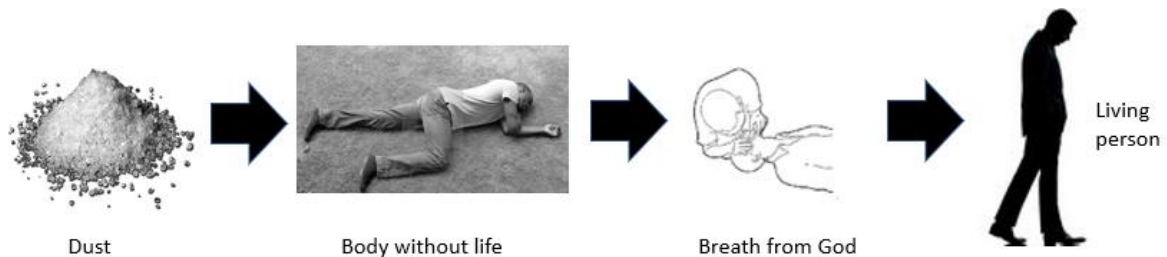
The king of Babylon is an example of a wicked man (Isaiah chapters 13-14). He is called the 'morning star' (Isaiah 14:12). He was sometimes called 'Lucifer' but this is just a term for the king of Babylon. He was only a man (Isaiah 14:16,17). Another wicked man was the king of Tyre (Ezekiel 28:2,14-16).

6. Death and Life

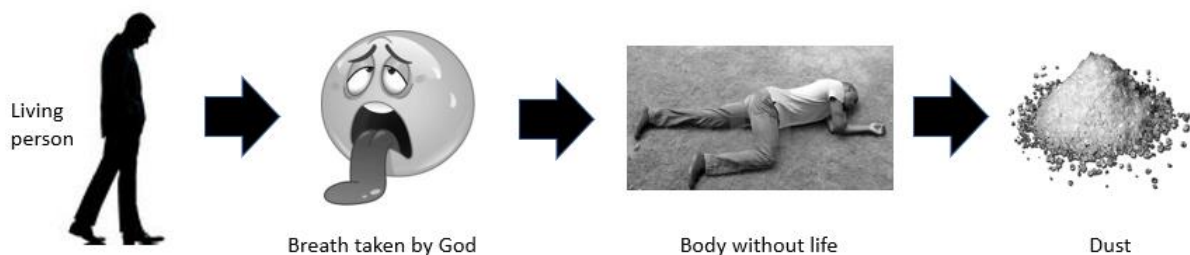
Life comes from God. Nothing can live unless God gives it life and maintains it.

God made the first man, Adam, and then gave him life. This was a two-step process, (Genesis 2:7): *"Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."*

Man lay in the dust but did not live until God breathed into him. The 'breath of God' is also called the 'spirit of God' (Job 33:4). The process of living is this:



Man is dust (Genesis 3:19). That is all. The process of dying is the reverse of the process of living.



Ecclesiastes 12:7 speaks about death: *"the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it."* The spirit was God's spirit. At the end of man's life, God takes His spirit back and man returns to dust. See also Psalm 104:29, 146:4 and Job 34:14-15. It is the breath or the spirit that keeps man alive. If God takes this away, then man dies.

In this respect, man is like the animals. Land animals were made from the ground (Genesis 1:12,24,25) and had the breath from God giving them life (v30). They die in the same way (Ecclesiastes 3:19,20). Man lives and dies like the animals (Psalm 104:29).

No part of man survives death. Death is the end of man's existence. The 'soul' dies, which means the being or person dies (Ezekiel 18:4,20; Proverbs 23:14; Matthew 10:28; Mark 8:36,37).

The life of man only lasts a short time. He is like a mist that comes and goes (James 4:14). Like the grass which grows up and then withers (Psalm 37:2; Isaiah 40:6). Like a shadow that goes down and disappears (Ecclesiastes 6:12), a cloud that is there one moment and gone the next (Job 7:9), a breeze that comes and goes (Psalm 78:39). Man does not have a continuing existence.

When man is dead that is the end of his life (Ecclesiastes 9:4-6). The dead "know nothing"! They are not loving or enjoying. Ecclesiastes 9:10 has advice for the living - make the most of your life now.

The dead cannot even praise God (Isaiah 38:18). They are silent (Psalm 31:17; 115:17; 88:10-12). They do not give thanks (Psalm 6:5; Isaiah 38:18-19). They have no thoughts (Psalm 146:2-4).

The destiny of all the living is death. It does not matter if one is good or bad! We all go to the same place. Ecclesiastes 9:2,3: *"All share a common destiny – the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. As it is with the good, so with the sinful; as it is with those who take oaths, so with those who are afraid to take them. This is an evil in everything that happens under the sun. The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of people, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead."*

David knew this (1 Kings 2:2). So did Joshua (Joshua 23:14) and Job (Job 30:23).

But death need not be the end. There is a way we can find eternal life. Romans 6:23 says, *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."* God has given Jesus the authority to give eternal life to others (John 17:2; 2 Timothy 1:10). Further verses which teach the gift of eternal life are John 3:16, 10:28, Romans 2:7-8; 1 Timothy 6:12; Titus 1:2 and 1 John 2:25. This occurs through the resurrection and judgment.

The grave

The grave is literally the 'unseen place' or 'covered place,' which is a good description of the grave. It comes from the Hebrew word 'sheol' in the Old Testament and the Greek word 'hades' in the New Testament. When man dies, he is buried in this unseen place. Jesus went to the grave (Acts 2:27; 31, Isaiah 53:9).

Questions you may be asked

Where does the teaching of the immortal soul come from? It came from Jews who took these ideas from Greek philosophers such as Plato (428-348 BC).

What does the Bible mean by 'soul'? The Hebrew word is 'nephesh' and the Greek word is 'psuche'. Both mean the 'life' or 'person'. There is nothing in the word that means it is immortal. It has emotions like a person. It grieves (Job 30:25). It suffers (Isaiah 53:11). It rejoices (Psalm 35:9). It sins (Micah 6:7). It dies (Ezekiel 18:4,20). These are all features of a person or a life.

Does the parable of the rich man and Lazarus teach the immortality of the soul? This is a parable, which is a non-literal story designed to teach a lesson (Luke 16:19-31). Several features show that this is not literal. The parable speaks of bodies not souls. Lazarus goes to Abraham's bosom, while the rich man goes to the grave. They can see each other from where they were. These are not literal things. The lesson of the parable is to live life carefully today because there will be consequences later when we are judged. The parable uses elements of false Jewish teaching to teach them this lesson. The Jewish historian Josephus tells us about these beliefs, which are not found in the Bible.

Where does the teaching of hell fire come from? These come from the Greek word 'gehenna'. It developed as a false teaching from Greek Philosophy where they thought that the wicked would be burnt forever. It was described by the historian Josephus. The word literally means the 'valley of Hinnom'. It was a literal place outside Jerusalem first mentioned at the time of Joshua (Joshua 15:8; 18:16). It was linked to idol

worship and child sacrifice (Jeremiah 7:31). By the time of Jesus, it was the city rubbish tip. Like all rubbish tips, there was always a flame somewhere and always worms (Mark 9:43-48). It does not mean there was an eternal flame where the wicked are burnt forever. It does mean that worthless criminals would be thrown on the rubbish pile. The fire would not be put out and they would burn until their bodies are gone (Mark 9:43).

The wicked will not suffer pain forever in torment because of a short life of sin. This is not compatible with a God of justice and mercy. God does not remain angry forever (Psalm 103:8-10). The dead are silent (see above) and so are the wicked (Psalm 31:17). They remain where they were buried (Psalm 49:11; Deuteronomy 11:4).

The false teaching of the eternal fire of hell has led to misunderstanding other passages:

Jude 7 says Sodom is burnt with everlasting fire. But it is not burning today! What it meant was that the fire will continue burning until Sodom was fully destroyed.

Isaiah 14:9-23 is a parable of Babylon. The king exalted himself to heaven as a god (verse 13,14). So, he would be punished by being brought down to below the ground (verse 15). This is the punishment for all who exalt themselves (Matthew 23:12). As a parable, it was not literal. He did not live forever (verses 19,20).

2 Peter 2:4 tells us that messengers (not divine angels) are cast into hell. The word for hell is different. It is the Greek word 'tartarus' which means the lowest pit. It refers to Korah, Dathan and Abiram who exalted themselves and an earthquake opened the ground up and swallowed them (Numbers 16:30-32).

7. Demons and witchcraft

The Bible uses the term 'demon-possession' for certain types of sicknesses. This can be seen in Matthew 4:23-24, where they are one on a list of sicknesses. In Matthew 8:16-17, the sickness of demon-possession was healed. It is described as a disease using a quote from Isaiah 53:4. Casting out demons is spoken of as healing in Luke 13:32.

Only certain types of sicknesses were called 'demon-possession' - those where the cause was unknown. Someone who was deaf had ears, but it was not known why he could not hear. Deaf people talk in a funny way, as if something has taken control of their speech. The same was true of mentally ill people. They have all their body parts, but it is not working correctly. They looked like something was in control of their bodies.

Examples: Matthew 9:32, was a man who could not speak. It was not clear why he could not speak, so it was called 'demon-possession.' Matthew 12:22 - a blind and dumb man. Mental sickness in a man called Legion (Luke 8:36; Mark 5:15) who was healed so that he had a 'right mind.'

It is not unusual for people to call things that are not understood by strange names. We may call a mentally ill person 'lunatic' (Matthew 17:15-18), which means influenced by the moon, although we do not really believe this. We may say our computer has a 'bug'. This does not mean we believe it has one, but just something is wrong with it.

Demons are Idols

The basic meaning of demons in the Bible is that they are idols. This is what is taught in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 32:16-17; Psalm 106:37) and the New Testament (1 Corinthians 10:19-22; Revelation 9:20; Acts 17:18).

Idolatry is wrong (Exodus 20:2-4). There is only one God (Isaiah 45:4,21; 46:9). An idol is described as 'nothing,' that is, the gods they are supposed to represent do not exist (1 Corinthians 8:4-6; 10:19,20; Isaiah 44:9). They are just bits of wood or metal (Psalm 115:4-7; Isaiah 40:19,20). They are not to be feared because they cannot do harm or good (Jeremiah 10:2-5).

Idol worshippers believed that idols (also known as demons) could cause sickness. King Ahaziah consulted an idol as to whether he would live or die (2 Kings 1:1-4). Idol worshippers used the term 'demon-possession' for certain types of sicknesses. Unfortunately, many Jews adopted this false teaching. Examples of this are where they claimed Jesus had a demon (John 7:20; 8:48; 8:52).

Questions that may be asked

Demons spoke, so doesn't this mean they exist? We are never told that demons existed separately from a person. They were always present in a person. This means that whenever it is described as demons speaking, it was the person who was speaking. The person speaking was called the "demon" in a couple of passages (Luke 4:41; 8:31). People are referred to as 'demons' in James 2:19. This is how the Bible refers to people with a sickness. We might say call the blind man 'the blind' (Matthew 15:14,31), or lame people 'the lame' (Matthew 21:14). It is the normal way of referring to the sick. When Jesus rebuked a fever (Luke 4:39), it did not mean that it had independent life.

In 1 Timothy 4:1, it says demons teach. Does this mean that demons exist? The verse says, "some will abandon the faith and following deceiving spirits and things taught by demons." The translation is incorrect. The Greek says, "things taught of demons". People believing in the false teaching of demons was predicted. See also Revelation 18:2

What are evil spirits? The term 'spirit' is used in many places to refer to the mind or attitude of the person (Psalm 78:8; Isaiah 29:24). An evil spirit is someone who has an evil or disturbed mind. We are told that God is in control of evil spirits and gave it to people (Judges 9:23; 1 Samuel 16:4-5). This means that God gave them a disturbed mind as a punishment.

What are unclean spirits? They mean people with spiritual problems. Often Bible translations mix up the terms 'unclean spirits' and 'evil spirits', but they are different. There are 5 examples of unclean spirits where we have a lot of information about them,

1. the synagogue man (Mark 1, Luke 4). Problem – lack of holiness
2. Legion (Matthew 8, Mark 5, Luke 8). Problem - lack of holiness and mentally sick.
3. the demonic son with the father (Matthew 17, Mark 9, Luke 9). Problem – unfaithfulness and mental sickness.
4. The daughter of a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15, Mark 7). Problem – unfaithfulness.
5. Beelzeboul and the parable of the 7 spirits (Matthew 12, Mark 3, Luke 11). Problem – Unfaithfulness and false speaking.

Jesus and the disciples healed these spiritual and physical sicknesses (Matthew 10:1, Mark 1:17; Acts 5:16; 8:7,8). The sick person became whole in mind and spirituality.

Here is a summary of this topic:

Topic	What are they?	Additional comment
Demons	Idols. 'Demon-possession' is a type of sickness.	The people often thought certain diseases were caused by idols. Idols are 'nothing'.
Evil spirits	The evil mind of people	God gave evil spirits to punish evil people
Unclean spirits	Unspiritual people who often also have mental sickness	The spiritual uncleanness that may cause sicknesses.

In the example of Legion, the demons speak and then go into pigs. Isn't this evidence that demons exist? When demons speak it is really the person who is speaking (see above). What is different with Legion is that the sicknesses go from man into pigs. The example of Legion is unusual because the man was in such a bad state - living in tombs away from people and with many demons (sicknesses). Legion represents the worst-case sick person. He represents Israel at its very worst state.

In the incident, the ability of Jesus to heal is demonstrated by sending Legion's sicknesses into a herd of pigs. This was a visual lesson to everyone that Jesus was able to heal Legion. He can therefore heal any person no matter how bad their state.

There was a similar example in the Law of Moses. On the day of Atonement, the High Priest put his hands on a goat, confessed the sins of the people and sent the goat into the wilderness (Leviticus 16:21). All Israel watched as the goat went into the wilderness and saw their own sins being taken away.

Israel's sins going into the goat is like Legion's sins going into the pigs. They are completely removed and sent away. God's forgiveness is described as like casting the sins into the sea, which is what happened with Legion's sins (Micah 7:18-19). God will heal His people and cleanse them of all their uncleanness (Jeremiah 33:6-8).

Where do sicknesses come from if not from demons? Sicknesses come from God. There is abundant evidence of this. In Genesis the two examples are from God (Genesis 12:17; 20:17,18). In Exodus, the examples are from God (Exodus 4:11; 9:8-12; Chapter 11; 32:35). In Numbers, it is the same - (11:33,34; 12:10; 14:37; 16:49; 25:8,9; 32:13). The pattern continues throughout the Bible. God brings sickness and health (Deuteronomy 32:39; 1 Samuel 2:6; Lamentations 3:37-39; Exodus 4:11; Luke 1:20,64; Acts 9:9,18; Romans 11:22; Amos 3:6; Isaiah 45:5-7; Jeremiah 33:6-9). God has all power. There is no other power in the world. Therefore, we must fear God and pray to Him when we are sick.

What does the Bible say about witchcraft?

'Witchcraft' refers to claims of magical or supernatural powers by people. They claim to be able to perform supernatural acts and have access to supernatural knowledge. God hates witchcraft (Deuteronomy 18:9-12). This passage speaks of many things:

No.	Activity described in Deuteronomy 18:9-12	What it describes
1	Sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire	Do not burn your children (eg as a sacrifice to idols)
2	Practice divination	Seeking knowledge by divination (eg predicting the future)
3	Sorcery	Interpreting the times and future events from clouds (or other means)
4	Interprets omens	Use of omens to answer questions
5	Witchcraft	Practicing sorcery or magic
6	Casts spells	Casting spells
7	Medium	Consulting someone who claims to be able to contact the dead
8	Spiritist	Someone who claims to know about the unseen world (ie the dead)
9	Consults the dead	Trying to contact the dead

Divination is wrong (Deuteronomy 18:14; 2 Kings 1:3,4; Micah 5:12; Zechariah 10:2; 2 Peter 2:14). Only God knows the future (Isaiah 42:8,9; 41:22-24; Daniel 2:21,22,28,47). God acts against diviners (Isaiah 44:24,25; Micah 3:4-7).

Sorcery is wrong (Psalm 101:7). The Egyptian magicians pretended to do miracles of the first 3 plagues (Exodus 7:22), but they later recognised God's true power (Exodus 8:19). Nebuchadnezzar understood the power of the true God (Daniel 6:27; 4:35). His sorcerers would be punished (Isaiah 47:9). See also Acts 8:7-13; 13:8-11; 19:19.

We will come across people who will be able to do signs and wonders. If they do not teach the truth, they should not be listened to (Deuteronomy 13:1-4). God is testing us to see if we will follow truth. See also Mark 13:22.

Consulting the dead is wrong (Isaiah 8:19,20). Those who consult the dead put on an act to pretend they have seen the dead. The dead know nothing (Ecclesiastes 9:5,6,10). They are silent (Psalm 94:17; 115:17).

What about the witch of Endor? When king Saul consulted the witch, he was wrong to do so (1 Chronicles 10:13). He was also wrong to allow the witch to live (Leviticus 20:27). Saul wanted to see the dead Samuel. Since the dead know nothing, the witch did her usual pretending to see the dead. But she did not expect to see him. When she saw something, she screamed in surprise (1 Samuel 28:12).

Saul could not see Samuel, because he asked the witch what she saw (v13). Samuel was present in a vision inside the head of the witch. For Saul to talk to Samuel, he had to talk to the woman. We have a conversation between Saul and the witch (representing Samuel). The vision of Samuel said that God had left Saul because of Saul's sin over Amalek (1 Samuel 15). Only God, Samuel and Saul had known this. Also only God would have known that Saul and his sons would die the next day. Therefore, God must have brought the vision to the witch to speak to Saul.

It is unusual that God gave a vision to a witch. It told Saul that God knew Saul had consulted a witch! God has used evil people to pass on His message before. God used the evil diviner Balaam to speak to the king of Moab (Numbers 22), which resulted in a donkey speaking (2 Peter 2:18). God used a false prophet to speak to another prophet (1 Kings 13:18-22). God uses different ways of getting His message across depending on what was right in each situation. Since God does what is right, He is right to do so in these situations.

8. God

We need to know God if we want eternal life (John 17:3; Jeremiah 9:23,24; Hosea 6:3).

There is only one God (Isaiah 45:5-7,18; 44:6-7; Mark 12:32; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 4:6; Jude 25). The centre of Jewish belief is that there is only one God (Deuteronomy 6:4; 4:35,39).

We must *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength"* (Deuteronomy 6:5; Luke 10:27). God is jealous – He is not willing to share us with other gods (Exodus 20:5; Joshua 24:19,20).

God made all things (Isaiah 45:18; 40:22,26,28; Job 38-39; Genesis 1; Psalm 33:6-9; Psalm 148:1-5; Mark 10:12; Acts 14:15; 17:23-25; Revelation 4:11). When we look at the heavens, we see God's greatness. It should make us humble (Psalm 8:3,4; Isaiah 66:2; James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6).

God can do all things (Job 8:4-10; Matthew 19:26; Luke 1:37). God does what man calls 'good things' and 'bad things' (Deuteronomy 32:35,39-42; 1 Samuel 2:6-8; Job 2:20; Isaiah 47:7; Lamentations 3:38; Amos 3:6; 4:6-13; Romans 11:22; Hebrews 10:30,31; 12:28,29). God does not just do 'good things', He also punishes. Consider who destroyed the world at the time of Noah, and who destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

We should be in fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge and leads to life (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7; 19:23; Job 28:28).

God lives in heaven (Deuteronomy 26:15; 1 Kings 8:30). He also fills heaven and earth (Jeremiah 23:23,24; Psalm 139; 1 Kings 8:38).

God's character

God tells us His character – compassionate, gracious, merciful, loving, faithful, forgiving, but He will punish (Exodus 34:6,7; Psalm 86:15; 103:7-11). God is love (1 John 4:16). We learn this when we read the Bible and think about how God treats man.

We are required to be godly, which means to be like God's character.

"He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he" (Deuteronomy 32:4). He never does any wrong. If we do not understand what He is doing in our lives, it is because we do not understand it – not that God has done anything wrong (Isaiah 45:9; Jeremiah 18:6; Romans 9:20,21).

God is not like man. He is different (Psalm 50:21; Isaiah 55:8,9; Micah 7:18). We should not try and understand God from the way we think or do. God is spirit, not flesh (John 4:24).

God is holy. Holy means 'separate'. God is different from man. We must also be holy like God (Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15-16) and separate from the world.

The Spirit of God

The Spirit of God is the same as the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God in Matthew 3:16 is called the Holy Spirit in Luke 3:22. The Spirit of the Lord in Acts 5:9 is called the Holy Spirit in Acts 5:3. Other examples are Isaiah 63:10,11 and 14; Psalm 106:33; Ezekiel 11:1,5,24 and Matthew 22:43 and Mark 12:36.

The Spirit of God is of God. It is not separate from God, it is part of Him (John 4:24; 2 Corinthians 3:17).

The Spirit of God is a term used to describe the thoughts, words, and actions of God. We could simply say that the Spirit is the mind of God because the mind determines the words and actions.

Verses where 'Spirit' is used of the thoughts of God: Genesis 6:5; Isaiah 40:13 (usually translated as 'mind' in this verse); Isaiah 63:10; Psalm 106:33; Ephesians 4:30.

Verses where 'Spirit' is used of the words of God: Isaiah 61:1; Numbers 24:2,3; Matthew 10:20; John 6:63; Acts 4:25.

Verses where 'Spirit' is used for the action and power of God: Exodus 31:1-3; Luke 1:35; Matthew 1:18; Judges 14:6; Psalm 104:29,30.

The Bible

God has placed a record of His thoughts, words, and actions in the Bible. By reading and living it, it can save our life: 2 Timothy 3:15-17.

The Bible was written by God by giving His Holy Spirit to the writers, who wrote down the words of God (1 Peter 1:20,21; Jeremiah 36:1-4, Hebrews 1:1). This enabled the message to be preserved for other generations to read (Exodus 17:14). The Bible is the word of God and not the word of man (2 Thessalonians 2:13, Titus 1:2,3, Jonah 3:4,5, Acts 4:25; 28:25; Ezekiel 1:3; Joel 1:1). There is no other book in the world like this.

The benefits of reading the Bible are found in Psalm 19:7,8, Psalm 119:9-17, 97-104; Proverbs 1:2-6. We should read the Bible daily as if it were our food. The basic Bible teaching is like milk that a baby feeds on regularly (1 Peter 2:2; Hebrews 5:12,13; 1 Corinthians 3:2). The deeper things are like solid food which we should grow on (Hebrews 5:12). People must be encouraged to read and to listen to the Bible daily.

People should check that what we are saying is found in the Bible (Acts 17:11). It is the message of the Bible that is important (Galatians 1:6-9; 1 John 4:1).

The Old Testament was originally written in old Hebrew and Aramaic (parts of Ezra and Daniel). The New Testament was written in old Greek. Since these languages are not used today, we rely on translations. No translation is perfect and some of the meaning is lost in translation. This is partly because all languages express ideas differently and part because the translator may not translate accurately. If there is a choice of Bible translation, then we should choose one that is the most accurate. Even the translation used by the preacher may give an unusual translation of some of the verses quoted in this Handbook. It is best if the preacher checks the verses before using them.

God's message in the Bible is consistent. We can use the whole Bible to check this. The Old Testament should have the same teaching as the New Testament. We can use this to check that we have the right teaching. We should not rely on single passages for Bible teaching.

Questions that may be asked

Is God a Trinity? No. The Trinity is not taught in the Bible. It was developed by the church in the first four centuries when they mixed Greek and Roman philosophy alongside Bible teaching. It was not believed by Jesus and the apostles. A document of Bible teaching from the 1st/2nd century, called the Didache ('Teaching'), did not have the Trinity in it.

The first big step was the Council of Nicea in AD325 when the bishops voted to make Jesus 'God'. Then at the Council of Constantinople in AD381, the bishops voted to make the Holy Spirit 'God' and the current form of the Trinity was adopted by churches.

The following additional points are useful in discussing the Trinity:

- The Trinity does not make sense (3 in 1 and 1 in 3).
- The Jews believe in one God based on the Old Testament. God does not change (Malachi 3:6; James 1:17).
- For comments on the nature of Jesus, see Jesus section.
- The 3 parts of the Trinity are not equal (they are supposed to be). The Father sends the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13) and the son (1 John 4:9). The Father is greater than the son (John 14:28). Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is worse than blasphemy against the son (Matthew 12:32).
- If there was the Trinity, then we are told that the Holy Spirit caused the birth of Jesus. Jesus should then have been the son of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35).

What is the Comforter? This is the Holy Spirit. It was the gifts of the spirit that was given to the disciples, so they knew what to do after Jesus left them (John 14:16-31; 16:5-15). The translators use the word 'he' when describing the holy spirit in many parts of Scripture. This is poor translation. It should be translated with the word 'it.'

Is the Trinity taught in Genesis 1:26? Genesis 1:26 says, "Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule..." The Hebrew word for 'said' is singular, which means that God is a single person. He is speaking to the angels who are the ones who were present at creation (Job 38:7 where they are called 'sons of God'). Man was made in the image of both angels and God. Angels are human in form and are often described as men in the Bible (Hebrews 13:2; Genesis 18:2; 19:5). God presents Himself as a human form in several visions (Ezekiel 1:26; Daniel 7:9).

Is the Apocrypha part of the Bible? No. The Apocrypha is a collection of 14 books written between 400BC – 50AD which is included in Catholic Bibles. It is generally not included in Protestant Bibles. It has always been rejected by the Jews. These books were not considered as written by God in the early centuries and were only adopted by the Catholics in 1546. The Apocrypha is not quoted by the Bible. It has teachings not found in the rest of the Bible, such as praying for the dead (2 Maccabees 12:45,46), purgatory (2 Maccabees 12:41-45) and salvation by works (Tobit 12:9). Some stories are fanciful and unethical (Judith asks God to help with falsehood in Judith 9:10-13).

Does the Bible contain lots of copying errors? No. The Jews were very, very, careful in copying the Old Testament Scriptures. The Dead Sea Scrolls were written between 150 BC and AD 70. When the text of the Dead Sea Scrolls was compared with scrolls dated 1000 years later, there were minimal differences found.

For the New Testament, there are over 5,800 manuscripts found allowing comparison between them. There are some textual variations. However, these are minimal, and the United Bible Societies publish the Greek text which is the generally accepted standard.

9. Angels

The word 'angel' means 'messenger'. Angels carry God's messages (Genesis 16:9). They also carry out God's orders: "*Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will*" (Psalm 103:20,21). God used them to give the law to Israel (Acts 7:38,53; Galatians 3:19). God used them at the birth and resurrection of Jesus.

Angels only do what God asks. They go into the presence of God (Matthew 18:10), which means they can only be good (Psalm 5:4,5; Habukkuk 1:13).

God uses angels to look after faithful believers (Psalm 34:7; Psalm 91:11; Hebrews 1:14). There are many examples in the lives of Jacob, David, and Daniel. In contrast, God also uses angels to punish the wicked (Isaiah 37:36; Psalm 78:49; 2 Samuel 24:16; 2 Kings 19:35; Acts 12:23).

Angels represent God and are therefore called 'God' in a number of passages (compare Exodus 3:2 with 3:4, see also Genesis 19). This does not mean they were God. It means that they were acting on His behalf. This is like an ambassador carrying out duties in the name of the king of the country when they represent him. When they do this, they do not take the glory for the message, but they give it to God (Revelation 19:10; 22:8,9). We should not worship angels (Colossians 2:18).

Angels look like men (Genesis 18:2; Hebrews 13:2). They are spirit, not flesh (Hebrews 1:14), and are immortal (Luke 20:36).

Human Messengers

The word for a human messenger is the same as the word in the Bible as used for a divine messenger (angel). This means that the Bible translator decides when to use the word 'angel' or 'messenger.' In 2 Kings 1:3 the word occurs twice in the same verse and is once translated as 'angel' and once as 'messenger.' Genesis 32:1-3 and Numbers 20:14-16 are other examples. Human messengers are described in Malachi 2:7; Haggai 1:13; Mark 1:2; Luke 9:52.

Most of the time the translators have correctly identified which passages speak of divine messengers and have correctly translated them as 'angels'. There is one important example where they are mistaken. 2 Peter 2:4 should be translated as 'messenger' not 'angel'. This is because the chapter is about false prophets that are 'among the people' (2:1) and who are men (2:10,12,17). The verse is about human messengers who sinned and were cast down. The word 'hell' means 'lowest pit' and it is the only time the word is used (Greek: tartarus). It is a reference to the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram in Numbers 16 who fell into a deep pit. This is referred to in the parallel passage (Jude 11).

10. Gifts of the Spirit

In the same way that God gives power to angels to carry out His will, so also God can give gifts of His spirit to people. This then allows them to speak the words of God and/or do the actions of God. God does this when there are important activities that men must do rather than angels.

The first example is at the time of Moses. Moses had to convince the people about God's message and instruct the new nation of Israel on how to be God's people (Exodus 4:17; Deuteronomy 34:10-12) and how to build the Tabernacle. Bezalel was given the gifts of the spirit so he could make the items of the Tabernacle (Exodus 31:1-5; 35:30-33). Oholiab and other craftsman were also given the spirit gifts (Exodus 31:6; 35:34-36:1). 70 elders were given the spirit to help them make right decisions of judgment (Numbers 11:24,25). Joshua was given the spirit to help him lead Israel into the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 34:9). Once Israel was established as God's people in God's land there was not the same need for the gifts of the spirit.

On special occasions God helped Israel by giving gifts of His spirit to judges such as Othniel (Judges 3:10) and Samson (Judges 14:6). These were to prevent the corruption of Israel and to save them from their enemies. They maintained God's people so that they were not corrupted and lost. The prophets are other examples. Mainly they were just given the ability to speak the message of God. Only very rarely did they have power to work miracles. Elijah and Elisha were exceptions. This was important then because the religion of God's people was being changed to Baal worship.

God helped the establishment of the kingship at the time of Saul, David, and Solomon by giving the gifts of the spirit. Saul was given the spirit (1 Samuel 10:9-11) which was later taken away when he became corrupt (1 Samuel 16:14). David was given the spirit (1 Samuel 16:13). Solomon was given the gift of wisdom (1 Kings 3:11-13). We are not told of any other king being given the spirit.

In these examples, the spirit was primarily given to establish the nation and the kingdom. When the work was done, the gifts were no longer needed. The gifts of the spirit were always rare and occurred only for certain time periods. They were specific gifts given to specific people for a specific purpose. They were not unlimited.

Gifts of the spirit in the New Testament

The coming of Jesus brought about a change in the Law. The people needed to be convinced of his message with signs and miracles. A spiritual people had to be established. This is just like at the time of Moses. God assisted this with the sending of gifts of the spirit.

God sent Jesus with the spirit of God without limit (John 3:34), which he received at his baptism. This power proved a great temptation to misuse them, which Jesus faced and resisted in the wilderness. No one else has received the spirit without limit. No one else could resist the temptation to misuse it.

The 12 disciples were given the ability to teach God's message and perform miracles (Matthew 10). This ability must have ended because they received the ability again on Pentecost (Acts 2). God gives His gifts for a purpose and a defined period and when the purpose is completed the gift ends.

God gave several gifts to the new believers (1 Corinthians 12:7-11,28; Ephesians 4:11). They needed them to convince the people that the gospel message was from God and to

establish God's people in the new spiritual order (Ephesians 4:12-16). Once God's people were established, they no longer needed the gifts of the spirit. This is also like the establishment of God's people at the time of Moses.

The spirit gifts were only promised for 2 generations – "*for you and your children*" and to the Gentiles – "*for all who are afar off*" (Acts 2:39). It was promised to them and their children (Acts 2:17) and to the Gentiles afar off (Acts 22:21; Ephesians 2:13,17).

A time was predicted when the spirit gifts would end (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). This would be when what is 'perfect' came (verse 10). The word 'perfect' means 'complete' or 'mature.' This happened when the New Testament was fully written, which can make us complete (2 Timothy 3:16,17; Ephesians 4:8-14). All the information that God gave the people through the gifts of the spirit was now available in written form. Again, this is like the time of Moses. God's new spiritual order had been established and there was no longer a need for the spirit gifts.

The Bible speaks of a future time when the gifts of the spirit will be needed (Hebrews 6:5). This is when the full kingdom age will be established. This is another reason why the gifts are not around today.

Speaking in Tongues

At Pentecost, the disciples were able to speak in tongues. This allowed visitors to Jerusalem were to hear the gospel message in their home languages (Acts 2:11). This was a new gift that had not occurred before in the Bible. The reason for this new gift was to enable the message of God to go to other nations. The gospel needed to be preached in different languages. The gift of tongues is described as other languages (1 Corinthians 14:21,10; Revelation 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9).

When the 12 disciples were first sent, they did not have the gift of languages. This is because they were speaking in their own language and were sent to only the "*lost sheep of the house of Israel*" (Matthew 10:6). The gift of speaking in languages is mentioned at the same time as taking the gospel to the nations (Mark 16:15-17). Cornelius, the first Gentile, was given this ability (Acts 10:46). It was a sign to convince Gentiles of the gospel message (1 Corinthians 14:22).

The gift of speaking in tongues was abused by the ecclesia at Corinth (1 Corinthians 14). They were speaking in tongues at the same time as others, so that there was confusion (verse 33). They were told to speak one at a time and only two or three should speak (verse 27) so that there is order (verse 40). They were also speaking without an interpreter, so that no one could understand what they were saying (verse 2-25). This should not happen. God wants people to be instructed and built up, and that can only happen if people understand what is being said. Sisters were speaking when they should not (verse 34).

The modern church practice of everyone talking at once in a way that cannot be understood is not right. They claim to be compelled by the spirit to speak, but we are told that the spirit can be controlled by the person (1 Corinthians 14:32). The gift of tongues is the ability to speak in other languages and this is not what the churches do. What they are in is a state of spiritual excitement. This is a self-induced state that is also experienced by other non-Christian groups.

Many churches claim to be able to heal the sick. Where this does happen, it may be because some heal spontaneously, and some by having faith in the healer. However, this does not mean that they are healed by the true gifts of the spirit. Church people

still go to doctors and hospitals. There were people like this with false claims in the first century (Acts 19:13-16; Luke 11:19). Faith-healing can be performed by other groups who have different beliefs. Of course, we cannot exclude the possibility of God answering someone's prayer, which God alone has the authority to respond to or not.

When we see what looks like a miracle, then we need to be careful. Are they speaking the words of God? This is the real test (Deuteronomy 13:1-5). We will not be able to explain everything in this life. But we can check whether people are speaking the truth against the Bible (1 John 4:1).

Laying on of Hands

The laying on of hands was the way that the gifts of the spirit could be passed on to others. The authority to do this was given to the apostles (Acts 8:17-19; Acts 19:6). Timothy received the spirit by this means (1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6). Not everyone could pass on the gifts of the spirit this way (Acts 8:14-17; 17:17-20). This indicates that only the apostles were able to pass on the gifts. Therefore the gifts would die out after the time of the apostles, when there was no one left to pass them on.

Jesus healed by laying his hands on the sick (Mark 6:5; Luke 4:40; 13:13; Acts 9:12,17). Peter healed through his hands (Acts 3:7). Timothy is warned not to do this too hastily, otherwise he would share in the sins of others (1 Timothy 5:22).

Jesus lay his hands on children to bless them (Matthew 19:13-15). This is what the disciples did in order to associate and bless works of spiritual service (Acts 6:6; 13:3).

Questions that may be asked

What is meant by tongues of angels? This is only mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13:1; "*If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels*". Angels always speak in ways that men can understand, that is, in the language of man. That is the only way they can give God's message to people. The Bible does not mention any other ways of speaking.

11. God's Promises to Abraham and David

God's Promise to Abraham

God called Abraham to leave his country and go to a new one. Abraham obeyed and showed his faith. He was rewarded with a promise. This promise was repeated several times, but the main elements can be seen in Genesis 17 and 22:

1. Abraham would have many children (17:2)
2. Abraham would be a father of many nations, including kings (17:3)
3. God would be his God (17:3)
4. Abraham and his children would be given the land of Canaan *for ever* (17:8)
5. All nations will be blessed through him (22:18)

The fact that all nations will be blessed means that everyone can benefit. These blessings were passed to Isaac and Jacob and all of Jacob's descendants (the Israelites). The fathers died not receiving the promise (Hebrews 11:13).

The Israelites did inherit the land of Canaan, which we know as the land of Israel. But it was not for ever. Israel became unfaithful and were removed.

God remembers His promise (Psalm 105:8,42). The promise will be fulfilled through Jesus (Luke 1:73; Acts 3:25,26; Galatians 3:16). By faith and baptism, we can also receive this promise (Romans 4:16; Galatians 3:7,9,26-29).

God's Promise to David

The promise of God to David is given in 1 Chronicles 17:11-14 and 2 Samuel 7:8-16. It teaches:

1. One of David's sons would be king.
2. He would build a house for God.
3. His kingdom and throne would last forever.
4. God would be his father.

The angel Gabriel identifies this son as Jesus (Luke 1:30-33). It says that Jesus would sit on the throne of David, which was in Jerusalem. Peter identifies the promise as being fulfilled in Jesus (Acts 2:29-31) and so does Paul (Acts 13:32-33).

Putting the two promises together, they teach:

1. There will be a special son of Abraham and David.
2. This special son will also be the son of God.
3. The children of Abraham will live in the Land of Canaan forever.
4. All nations will be blessed, not just Israelites.
5. A king will reign from Jerusalem forever.
6. The people of the kingdom will be people of faith.

Matthew 1:1 draws attention to this by saying that Jesus was the son of Abraham and David.

The Jews

The Jews remain the people of the promises to Abraham and David, and God's special people (Romans 3:1,2; 9:3-4; 11:1; Jeremiah 31:35-37; 33:24-26). Jews and Gentiles are to be fellow-heirs (Ephesians 2:11-21). Salvation is through the Jews (John 4:22).

The Jews have been scattered because of wickedness (Deuteronomy 28:49-52,64; Jeremiah 30:11; 31:10). They have been gathered because of God's grace (Ezekiel 36:24; 37:21). This has happened even in relatively recent times (in 1948 when Israel became a nation again) and shows that God is still in control. These events are needed before the return of Jesus.

12. The birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus

Jesus Christ is the most important part of God's creation. He is the centre of God's Plan. God planned Jesus from the beginning, just like an architect plans a city (Hebrews 11:10).

An architect plans in stages, starting with the foundations, then the chief corner stone and then the building. In the same way, God laid the foundations with the fathers, then the chief corner stone (Jesus). He has been building the house of believers ever since.

All this was planned from the beginning. Even the believers have been chosen from the beginning as part of God's plan (Ephesians 1:4,5). His plan is to adopt us as sons through the work of Jesus Christ.

God's plan means that God was able to tell different people at different times what He was going to do. An example of this is Abraham (John 8:56) and David (Acts 2:25,26). Both Abraham and David understood God's plan with a special son long before Jesus existed. They knew this because of the promises. They did not know that his name but they knew there would be a special son from their lineage. Jesus was son of Abraham and son of David (Matthew 1:1).

Much of Jesus' life had been foretold in the Old Testament. He was to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:6). He was to be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23). There are many examples of this (Luke 24:27,44; John 1:45). The four gospels describe his life, death, and resurrection.

From Birth to Resurrection

Jesus had a beginning. He did not exist before he was born. His birth and development are in the early chapters of Luke. His conception was miraculous. There was no human father because God was his father (Luke 1:26-35). The pregnancy and birth of Jesus were normal. The baby grew in a normal way (Luke 2:40).

When Jesus was 12 years old, he went to the temple at Jerusalem and amazed the teachers by his understanding. He continued to grow (Luke 2:41-52). We are then not told anything until Jesus was 30 when he was baptised (Luke 3:21-23). He then received the Holy Spirit and the approval voice of God. He was tempted to misuse the power and his role as God's son. He resisted (Hebrews 4:15). He preached repentance and the good news of the kingdom and healed (Matthew 4:17,23,24).

Jesus made disciples and asked them to follow him. There were many teachings to be followed, including the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and the parables.

Jesus did what was good and right. He was sinless (Hebrews 4:15; 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 John 3:5, 1 Peter 2:22) but was killed. This was part of God's plan (Acts 2:22,23). He was killed by professional killers who made sure he was dead. He died like any man. He did not exist for 3 days. His body was put in a tomb. He was raised to eternal life by God (Acts 1:3; 2:24). He taught his disciples for 40 days (Acts 1:8). He then went to heaven where he awaits to return to the earth (Acts 1:9-11). He is now at the right hand of God in heaven (1 Peter 3:22; Acts 7:55,56).

Questions you may be asked

Was Jesus God? No. Jesus was a man (1 Timothy 2:5; 1 Corinthians 15:21; Hebrews 2:14-18; 5:1-3; Deuteronomy 18:15; Acts 2:22-23). To be the son of Abraham and David, he had to be a normal descendent of them.

There are several important differences between Jesus and God. God is immortal (1 Timothy 6:16) Jesus was not. And when Jesus died, it was God who had to save him from death (Hebrews 5:7,8). Only God is 'good' (Mark 10:18). God cannot be tempted (James 1:13) but Jesus was. God cannot be seen (1 Timothy 6:16; Colossians 1:15) but Jesus was.

Unlike God, Jesus had limited understanding (Mark 13:13; Hebrews 5:8) and limited authority (1 Corinthians 15:27,28). He did the will of God (Matthew 26:39; John 8:29). God was greater than Jesus (John 14:28; 1 Corinthians 11:3; John 10:29; Philippians 2:6).

God was the God of Jesus (1 Peter 1:3; John 20:17; Mark 15:34; Ephesians 1:3,17). Jesus says there is only one God (Mark 12:29-32; John 5:43,44). Jesus was separate from God (1 Corinthians 8:6; Acts 2:22,23).

Jesus had abilities that were given to other men – the forgiveness of sins (John 20:23; Matthew 18:18), to receive worship (1 Chronicles 29:20; Daniel 2:46) and to be called Lord (any king or ruler is called Lord).

The Jews misunderstood Jesus and thought he was claiming to be God on several occasions. One was when he called God his 'Father.' Jesus argued against being God (John 5:17-19). Another was saying Jesus was 'one' with his Father (John 10:30-36). Believers are to be 'one' with the Father as well as Jesus (John 17:20-23).

Does John 1:1 speak of Jesus existing from the beginning and being God? A literal translation of John 1:1 is "In beginning was the word and the word was towards God and the word was God". This does not mention Jesus.

The order of teaching in John chapter 1 is:

1. about the word of God (verses 1-5), 2)
2. then about John the Baptist coming preaching the word (verses 6-9), 3)
3. then about Jesus coming as the word of God in flesh (verses 10-14).

The "beginning" that John speaks of is the beginning mentioned in the other places (Mark 1:1 and Luke 1:3 and 1 John 1:1-2). This is the beginning of the times of John the Baptist and Jesus. The word of God came in the beginning of these days through angels who told John's father (Luke 1:11-17) and Jesus's mother (Luke 1:26-38) about the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus. God's plan always starts with God's word because God has to give the order to start the next phase of His plan.

John 1:1 uses the word with a capital, 'Word'. The capital is not in the original Greek. John 1:2,3 uses the word 'him' to describe the 'word'. A noun like 'word' should be translated by the word 'it'.

Does 1 Peter 3:19-20 teach that Christ continued living after his death? This teaches that when Jesus was raised from the dead he went and preached to "spirits in prison." Prison is a term used for those who are bound under sin (Galatians 3:22,23; Isaiah 42:7; 61:1; Psalm 102:19,20). The 'spirits' is another way of saying the people (Numbers 16:22; 27:16). Jesus went to people who were still under sin and spoke about the kingdom of God to them (Acts 1:3,4; John 20:19).

Does Philippians 2:6-8 teach that Jesus is God? Translations sometimes confuse these verses. A literal translation of the Greek is: "Who being in the form of God, did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a slave, being in the likeness of a man, and being found in outward appearance as a man, he humbled himself, being obedient to death, even death on a cross."

This teaches that Jesus did not consider himself equal with God. He was physically like God because he was of human form. He was like God in character because of his perfect character. Even with a godly character, he did not consider himself equal with God. We are also in human form, but we need to be trans-formed (similar word to 'form') into God's character too (Romans 12:2).

Why is Jesus called 'God' in several places? This is because Jesus represents God. This is like a ambassador who takes on the name of a king and acts in the king's name. It is the same with angels who represent God (see section on angels). Jesus said he came in his father's name (John 5:43,44) as a ambassador of God. Humans can also carry the name of God (John 10:34-36). We will look at several other examples where Jesus is called God:

John 20:28. Thomas said to Jesus, "My Lord and my God." Thomas had not believed in the resurrection up until this point. He had previously asked Jesus a question about 'the way' (John 14:5). In reply, Jesus said, "If you really knew me, you would know the father **as well**" (verse 7) and "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father... Don't you believe that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me" (verse 9,10). After seeing the resurrected Jesus, Thomas could now say he believed in Jesus and the Father. In seeing Jesus, he was seeing the Father as well. This did not mean that Jesus was God, because Jesus still identifies God as his God in the same way Mary did (verse 17).

The name 'Emmanuel' in Matthew 1:23. The name means 'God with us'. This is like many names which include the name of God. Gabriel means 'mighty one of God' and Michael means 'who like God.' These angels were named after God, but they were independent from God. It is the same with Emmanuel.

Hebrews 1:8-9,10-12. Hebrews 1 explains why Jesus has a name that is greater than the angels (verse 4). Several passages in the Old Testament that refer to God are also in Hebrews 1 and applied to Jesus. Hebrews 1:8,9 are from Psalm 45:6,7. God's throne will be given to Jesus because Jesus will sit on the throne in the kingdom. The Psalm also makes clear that God is still the God of Jesus in Psalm 45:9. Hebrews 1:10-12 are from Psalm 102:25-27. Hebrews 1:10 applies to God whereas verse 12 applies to Jesus. God and Jesus are working together to bring about the new heavens and earth.

Did Jesus exist before his birth? Jesus was a man, so he did not. Much of this misunderstanding is because of misunderstanding about the plan of God.

Before God made the world, He had a plan of what He was going to do. This is like an architect who plans out a city. He plans the different stages, who will do the work, and what it will look like in the end. God knows from beginning to the end (Isaiah 46:9,10, 37:26). He invites us to join this plan which He had from the beginning (Matthew 25:34).

Because it is all planned out, He can tell us what is going to happen, even the specific people at specific times (Isaiah 44:8; Amos 3:7). Jesus's life was planned (1 Peter 1:20). Abraham was able to understand some of the plan with Jesus and rejoiced at it (John 8:56-58). David could 'foresee' Jesus (Acts 2:30-31). Both Abraham and David knew of the coming of Jesus from the promises of God they received. Jesus was to be a descendent of both Abraham and David. Jesus had to be born after them otherwise these promises do not make sense.

The birth of Jesus was like any other person. It took 9 months of pregnancy for the baby Jesus to be formed. If Jesus was a God, then why did it take this time?

When we compare the birth of Jesus with the birth of John the Baptist, we find that the same words were used to describe them both. The words for 'conceive', 'with child', 'bore', 'bare' and 'birth' are used both of John's birth and the birth of Jesus. There is no difference. The birth of Jesus was like any other baby.

Jesus grew like any child. He was not full-grown as if he had come from heaven and taken on a man's body. The words "*the child grew*" for Jesus (Luke 2:40) are the same words used of the growth of John the Baptist. Jesus learned obedience and obeyed his earthly parents just like any other child should do (Hebrews 5:8). The birth and growth of Jesus only makes sense if Jesus had a normal human beginning.

Jesus's death and resurrection was planned (Acts 2:22,23; Revelation 13:8). In the same way believers were planned from the beginning (2 Timothy 1:9,10; Ephesians 1:4,5). Of course, the believers did not exist then. The same is true of Jesus. He only existed after his birth. God planned for Jesus to have glory and He planned it from the beginning (John 17:5,24).

Was Jesus the creator? Jesus did not exist before his birth, so he cannot have been. People who say this are confused by the 'new creation'.

The new creation is the spiritual creation that comes about because of the work of Jesus. Jesus is the first of those who has been raised to eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:20) and is the firstborn of this new creation (Colossians 1:15; Revelation 1:5). After Jesus, there will be those who have been made like Jesus in the future. This is the new creation.

The new creation is a creation of those created in Jesus Christ. Those baptised and following Christ are new creatures and are part of the new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15; Ephesians 2:10; 4:22,23; 1 Peter 1:23).

It is because of this that all things of the new creation come 'through' and 'by' Jesus (1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:16).

Jesus gives life to this new creation (John 5:21; 17:2; 1 John 5:13). This is like the original creation which God gave life to.

Jesus is making the new creation for God's glory. This is like the original creation that God made for His glory (Revelation 4:11; Numbers 14:21; Habakkuk 2:14). The believers of the new creation will share in this glory (Romans 8:18).

13. The Return of Jesus

Jesus is now in heaven but will return to the earth (Acts 1:10,11; 3:20-21; John 14:2,3). When he comes, he will reward believers based on the life they lived (Matthew 16:27, Revelation 22:12). The first thing he will do is raise the dead and judge them (1 Thessalonians 4:16; 2 Timothy 4:1).

The Resurrection

The believers who have already died will be raised from the dead. There can be no life after death unless they are raised. The resurrection is taught in many places (John 5:24-29; John 11:25-26; 1 Corinthians 15; Acts 24:15; Romans 6:5; Philippians 3:10,11).

The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection and were corrected by Jesus (Matthew 22:23-32). Some Corinthians did not believe in the resurrection and were corrected by Paul (1 Corinthians 15:12-23). Some of the Thessalonians and others thought the

resurrection had finished and were corrected by Paul (1 Thessalonians 4:13-16; 2 Timothy 2:16-18). People are still confused today.

Not everyone who ever lived will be raised (Romans 2:12; Daniel 12:2; Isaiah 26:13,14, Jeremiah 51:57). Those without faith cannot please God (Hebrews 11:5) so those who never had faith will not be raised.

The resurrected believers will be gathered to the place of judgment (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17; Luke 17:30,36). This describes aerial transport in the way that Philip, Elijah, and the disciples were transported (Acts 8:39-40; 1 Kings 18:12; John 6:21).

The Judgment

Believers will be judged based on their life (Psalm 62:12; Ecclesiastes 12:14; Jeremiah 17:10; Matthew 16:27; Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:1; Revelation 22:12). Many parables teach this – wheat and weeds (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43), fishes in a net (Matthew 13:47-50), sheep and goats (Matthew 25:31-46).

Flesh and blood cannot enter the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15:50; Philippians 3:21). Those who are righteous will receive honour and eternal life (Romans 2:7; Matthew 25:21,34). Those who are wicked will receive shame and death (Daniel 12:2; Matthew 8:11,12; Romans 2:5-11).

The Kingdom

Once the believers have been judged, the righteous will enter the kingdom of God. Jesus will rule from Jerusalem (Luke 1:32; Jeremiah 3:17). The righteous will be given positions of rulership over the kingdom of God (Daniel 7:27; Revelation 5:10).

There are still the remaining mortal people on the earth at this point (Isaiah 65:17-20). This period lasts 1000 years and is called the 'Millenium' (Revelation 20:1-6). It is only at the end of this period that death will be destroyed, and Jesus will hand the rulership of the kingdom to God (1 Corinthians 15:22-28; Revelation 20:14; 21:4).

14. The disciple of Jesus

Those who wish to benefit from the saving work of Jesus are required to follow Jesus and live as his disciple. This includes what is described in Acts 2:42, where we read that the disciples continued in the *"apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."*

Apostles' teaching

The apostles' teaching is the teaching of the New Testament, which is based on the Old Testament. We need to remember what we have learnt and add to this (2 Peter 3:18; Proverbs 9:9; Isaiah 66:2). We do this by reading and learning from the Bible daily.

Fellowship

When one is baptised, one becomes part of a family of believers (1 John 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:9; Galatians 3:26). We are united in Christ with our new brothers and sisters. The Bible is full of this teaching - we are to be one body, one family, one loaf, one temple, one vine, one flock.

Just as there is light, there is also darkness. Believers in the light are not to fellowship darkness (2 Corinthians 6:14,15). The letters of John teach us who we should fellowship and who we should not fellowship. In 2 John 7,10,11 we should not share fellowship

with those who teach the nature of Christ falsely. Those who teach the Trinity are like this. This means we should not fellowship in churches where they teach the Trinity. On the other hand, we must fellowship true believers (3 John 9,10). We must fellowship those who walk in the light (1 John 1:3,4).

Fellowship means sharing what we have (Acts 2:44,45; Hebrews 13:16). We have a duty to give food and clothing to those without them (James 2:15-17).

Breaking of bread

The disciple is required to remember the death and resurrection of Jesus in the breaking of bread and the drinking of wine (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19,20; Acts 2:42-46; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23-28). They broke bread once a week, usually on the first day of the week which is Sunday (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Acts 2:42), and sometimes more often (Acts 2:46; Hebrews 10:24,25). This is our usual practice, but the service can take place more frequently and on other days of the week.

Prayer

We should always pray (1 Timothy 2:8) and not give up (Luke 11:5-8; 18:1). We pray because it works (James 5:16; Psalm 50:15). If we want God to listen to us, then we must first listen to Him in His word the Bible (Zechariah 7:13; Proverbs 28:9). We should pray in the name of Jesus (John 16:23,24). The Lord's prayer is a model prayer (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4). This starts with the things of God and then the things of man. We should pray that God's will is done in our lives (Matthew 26:39,42).

What it means to be a disciple of Jesus

A disciple of Jesus must be different from people in the world. Wicked people will not enter the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:3-11). The disciple of Jesus must change from being a worldly person to being a godly person (James 1:27; 4:4; Ephesians 4:22-24). We cannot serve God and money (Matthew 6:24).

Disciples must be holy (1 Peter 1:15,16; 1 Corinthians 1:2), which means we must be separate from wickedness. We must be godly (Titus 2:12; 2 Peter 3:11), which means we must be like God. To do this, we must live in the ways of the spirit and not the ways of the world. This affects our thoughts, our words, and our actions:

- Our thoughts – Romans 12:2,3; Ephesians 4:22,23
- Our words – James 1:26; 1 Peter 3:10; Ephesians 4:29-32
- Our actions – 1 John 3:18; Hebrews 10:24

Faith is not enough. Words are not enough (1 John 3:17,18). If it is not followed by deeds, then our faith is dead (James 2:26).

We must love God and our neighbour (Matthew 22:37-40). We must produce the fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5:22,23) - not the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). We must love like 1 Corinthians 13. We must love all people, including our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-36; Romans 12:17-21).

We must not be proud but be humble (1 Peter 5:5,6; Ephesians 4:2; Philippians 2:3).

We must look after widows and orphans (James 1:27; 1 Timothy 5:3-10,16). We must feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and in prison and provide shelter to the traveler (Matthew 25:31-46; Isaiah 58:6-10).

Responsibilities of a Christian

Marriage (if not yet married): Marry only in the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:39; 2 Corinthians 6:14) - an unbelieving partner can take us away from God (1 Kings 11:1-13). If we are already married when baptised, we should remain married (1 Corinthians 7:12-15) even if there are two wives. Apart from this circumstance, we should not have more than one wife. Divorce is wrong (Matthew 5:31,32; 19:1-12; Malachi 2:14-16). Sex outside marriage is wrong (1 Corinthians 6:9-18; 7:9; Hebrews 13:4). It is better to remain unmarried and serve the Lord than to marry (1 Corinthians 7:32-35).

Husbands: Love, respect, and care for your wife as Christ does for the believers (Ephesians 5:25-33; Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7).

Men: Men should consider following the example of Job (Job 29:11-17; 31:1-34).

Wives: Love and submit to your husbands (Ephesians 5:22-24; Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:4-5; 1 Peter 3:1-6).

Woman: Women should consider following the example of the virtuous woman (Proverbs 31:10-31).

Fathers: Do not anger your children but bring them up in the Lord (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21).

Mothers: Care for children (1 Thessalonians 2:7; Titus 2:4). Support the father.

Children: Obey and respect your parents (Ephesians 6:1-3; 1 Timothy 3:4).

Bosses/Employers: Do not threaten but consider God as your master (Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 4:1).

Servants/Employees: Submit to your masters, respect them, and work hard (Ephesians 6:5-8; Colossians 3:22-25; 1 Timothy 6:1,2; Titus 2:9,10; 1 Peter 2:18-20). There are occupations to avoid, such as warfare (Matthew 5:38-44; 26:52; Genesis 9:6) and politics (John 17:14-16; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17; Philippians 3:20).

Citizens of a country: Submit to the authorities and pay taxes (Matthew 22:21; Mark 12:17; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1,2; Titus 3:1,2; 1 Peter 2:13-17). Where there is conflict between the wishes of a country and God, God takes priority (Acts 4:18-20; 5:29).

The Cost of Discipleship

The decision to follow Christ is the right decision, but the consequences need to be understood. It is not good to vow to follow Christ and then later turn away (Hebrews 4:1-3; 10:26-31). It is a lifelong journey. It requires effort (Matthew 16:24-26; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:62) and there will be some suffering for our faith (2 Timothy 3:12; Matthew 13:18-23). There may be opposition from our family and friends. It is better to walk with God by your side throughout your life than to live a life without God. The blessings of eternal life in God's kingdom are far greater than any inconvenience we suffer in this life (2 Corinthians 4:17). The Christian is blessed in this life and the one to come. We need to persevere to the end to receive the gift of eternal life (James 1:12).

The Preachers' Responsibilities

The one who teaches another to become a disciple of Christ has a responsibility to them. They must ensure that the person understands the teaching about the good news of the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus. It is good practice for an independent suitable person to check that this is so.

The preacher should assist with the baptism arrangements and ensure that the appropriate elders and Linkman are informed about the baptism. Then they must assist in establishing them in their life in Christ. They should assist the person in being part of an ecclesia. If there is no ecclesia, they can be part of, then the preacher must ensure that they are able to maintain the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers.

The preacher must ensure the newly baptised can read a Bible in their own language (if it is available). They must make sure the newly baptised reads every day.

The preacher should consider ensuring the new brother or sister begins to grow in Christ. This can be by using the "Growing in Christ" course (available as videos on-line at the country website or www.cbmmmedia.org), or the "New life in Christ" (available as a written course) or any other suitable courses. The first 5 lessons of the 'Growing in Christ' course are added to the Preachers' Handbook to assist this.

Topic for Information: The Law of Moses and the Christian today

When Israel became the people of God, God made a covenant with them. God would look after them if they obeyed His commands (Exodus 19:4-8). He also gave instructions on how to make the Tabernacle, how to set up the duties of the priests and how to carry out the various sacrifices. Together these laws are known as the "Law of Moses". It is the covenant agreement between God and the Israelites.

The Law of Moses was given until Jesus came (Galatians 3:19). It pointed forward to the blessings of Christ (Hebrews 10:1). The Law of Moses was like a shadow. It gave the outline of God's purpose with Jesus, but it was not Jesus. Now Jesus has come, we do not need to keep the Law of Moses. The reality of Jesus is better than the shadow.

The early Christians were all Jews who kept the Law of Moses. The gospel was then preached to the 'Gentiles' - that is, to non-Jews. The early church leaders met to discuss whether Gentiles needed to keep the Law of Moses. We are given the details of their discussion in Acts 15. We read about their conclusion in Acts 15:19,20. The Gentile Christians did not need to keep the Law of Moses. The church leaders wrote to the Gentiles instructing them with 4 specific things, because of the sensitivities of the Jewish Christians. Gentiles were asked to:

1. not eat food that had been sacrificed to idols,
2. not commit sexual immorality (Christians were not to do this either),
3. not eat meat of strangled animals. This is meat with blood in it. Eating this type of food would prevent Jewish Christians eating with Gentile Christians. This does not apply to us today. And
4. not murder. Christ also asks us to avoid this.

We do not need to follow the Law of Moses today. We do not need a temple or priests or sacrifices. These have all been replaced by the coming of Jesus.

Not all Jewish Christians were happy about the end of the Law of Moses. Many of them taught that Gentiles should keep the Law. Paul's letter to the Galatians particularly addresses this issue.

Today there are various Christian groups who take things from the Law of Moses and argue that we should keep them now. We will give four examples:

1. Tithing. Tithing is where one gives 10% of one's income to the church. This is found in Leviticus 27:32. Under Christ, we should give to the work of the Lord, but there is no fixed amount. We are the ones who decides what to give and we should give cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7).
2. Priests. God ordained priests to present the sacrifices required by the Law of Moses. Under Christ there is no need for priests because Jesus gave his life in sacrifice once and for all. We are all brothers and there is no brother higher than another (Matthew 23:8).
3. Sabbath. Under Christ, the Sabbath laws do not need to be kept (Colossians 2:16-17, Galatians 4:9-11). There are no special days in Christ. In Christ, we break bread usually do this on the first day of the week, which is Sunday, but there is no command to do it on a specific day.
4. Food. In Christ, all foods are clean (Mark 7:19).

If anyone wants to keep the Law of Moses, they must keep the whole of the law not just part of it. But why would anyone want to go back to the Law, which is a shadow, when we have the real thing in Christ?

Growing in Christ: Lessons 1-5

This course is designed to help the newly baptised grow in the faith, so they grow more like Jesus. This is what a disciple of Jesus must do. Baptism is the start of a journey, so it is appropriate to keep learning.

Only summaries of lessons 1-5 are provided here because of space. There are 25 other lessons available with many important topics (see the country website or www.cbmmmedia.org). For example, the titles of the next 5 lessons are: 6. Marriage, 7. The Family, 8. Caring for the Needy, 9. Controlling the Tongue, and 10. Wisdom.

Lesson 1: Growing into Christ

When you were baptized, you became a new person in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). The person in Christ is like a different creature from other people. They have different ways of thinking, different ways of speaking and different ways of living. Baptism was such a big change in life, that it is as a new birth (1 Peter 1:23).

You became a baby in Christ. Babies are designed to grow. In the same way, the new spiritual baby needs to grow (1 Peter 2:2). You need to crave spiritual milk like a baby. The spiritual milk is the word of God. You have been developing into a baby using the word of God. Now you need to continue to grow by taking the milk of the word (Hebrews 5:12-14). The most important thing that a newly baptized person can do is to feed on the word of God. Read the Bible daily like it is your spiritual food.

The Bible Companion can be used to help read the Bible daily. This is a list of Bible passages to be read on each day. If you have not read much of the Bible before, you may find parts of it difficult. This would be like a baby trying to eat solid food straight away. We recommend that you do not try and eat the difficult bits at the start.

One danger of not reading the Bible is that you may forget what you have learnt. Then you will not be able to tell others about what you believe (1 Peter 3:15).

There is a danger worse than forgetting. When someone else says something different, you could be misled (Ephesians 4:14). There are many verses that can be misunderstood.

The first part of our being a new person in Jesus is to stand firm in what we believe. We need to know Bible teaching and be able to teach others (Hebrews 5:12-14; 6:1-3). Whatever we learnt for our baptism, we should retain. If we made notes, we should keep them. If we read explanations, we should keep these references.

Hebrews tells us to move on from the elementary teachings and go on "to maturity." This means 'completeness'. We need to grow so that we become 'complete' and 'mature'. It takes a lifetime of growing. Hebrews 5:13 says solid food is for the mature, "*who by **constant use** have **trained themselves** to distinguish good from evil.*" We must train ourselves and continually develop ourselves.

We need to become like Christ (2 Peter 3:18; Ephesians 4:13-16). If you want to see a complete and mature Christian, then look at Christ (Ephesians 4:32; 5:2; Philippians 2:5; 1 Corinthians 11:1). We must follow in his footsteps.

We do not grow to maturity by ourselves. We need to grow in the company of our fellow believers, who God has given us. We can help each other grow.

Not everyone in the day of Christ liked Christ. Not everyone liked his godly behaviour because it made them feel bad. We can expect others not to like us being like Christ (2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 2:21). There is a benefit from suffering for Christ. It produces perseverance and helps make us mature (James 1:2-4). It makes us ready for the return of Jesus (1 John 2:28).

Lesson 2: The Ecclesia

Christian life was designed to be lived in a community. Jesus taught his disciples to love one other (John 15:17; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 4:10,11). This requires community living.

Now you are baptised you are part of a new family of brothers and sisters in Christ. You must love all these new brothers and sisters. You may have not known them beforehand but now you must adopt them as your spiritual brothers and sisters. We are commanded to love these people deeply and they must love us. We can help each other with our obstacles and difficulties.

God's family meet together for four things: the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of Bread and prayer (Acts 2:42).

1. The believers share the apostles' teaching and practice. If we walk in the light, we are automatically in fellowship with other believers who are walking in the light (1 John 1:7). We have no choice in this matter. We cannot say we do not need our fellow believers (1 Corinthians 12:12,13). We are all baptised into one body, with Christ is the head of this body (Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18). Just as there is light, there is also darkness. Believers in the light are not to fellowship darkness (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).
2. Fellowship means sharing (Acts 2:44). They did not consider their own possessions as belonging only to themselves (Acts 4:32). Fellowship particularly means sharing with fellow believers who are in need (Romans 12:13; Acts 6:1-6).
3. The early believers "*broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God*" (Acts 2:46). The life of the Christian starts when they are baptised into the death and resurrection of Jesus. Once associated with

the life of Jesus, they continue to associate with his death and resurrection regularly in the breaking of bread. In this way the life of the believer is always associated with the work of Jesus. A breaking of bread service must include,

- i. meditation on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus,
- ii. a prayer for the bread and the breaking and eating of the bread,
- iii. a prayer for the wine and the drinking of the wine. There are other activities which are mentioned in the Bible. While not critical, these are usually added to the service. They are:
 - a. an exhortation (Acts 20:7),
 - b. hymns (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26),
 - c. a collection (1 Corinthians 16:1) and
 - d. additional prayers (Acts 2:42)

They broke bread once a week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Acts 2: 42,46; Hebrews 10:24-25), usually on the first day of the week, that is, Sunday. It could take place more frequently if desired and it could take place on other days.

4. The pattern of praying together began immediately (Acts 1:14).

The place where believers meet to teach, fellowship, break bread and pray is the ecclesia. The word translated 'church' is the Greek word 'ecclesia'. 'Ecclesia' means an 'assembly of called out ones.' It refers to the believers who have been called out from the world and who meet. The ecclesia is not the church building but the people. God is concerned about people not buildings. The most common form of meeting place in the New Testament was not a church building but the home of individuals.

Many believers live in areas where there is an ecclesia. The believer automatically becomes a member of an ecclesia, usually the one closest to them. They have a meeting place.

Sometimes a believer may live too far from an ecclesia to meet with them regularly. This is known as 'being in isolation'. In this case, they should travel to the nearest ecclesia as often as they can. Occasional personal contact with an ecclesia is better than none. The ecclesia should try and keep in contact.

Those in isolation must stand in faith on their own. They need to read the Bible daily so they can grow spiritually. Ideally Bible readings will be shared in the home so all the family can learn together. They should ensure that children are taught about God. They should ensure that prayer is a regular feature of their personal and home life. If they can access materials such as lessons, books, talks or videos these will be a great help.

If the believer has a non-believing wife, the husband should teach her and set a good example. Maybe she will become interested. If the believer has a non-believing husband, the wife should try and win him over by her good behaviour (1 Peter 3:1-2).

The believer must break bread and drink wine in memory of the death and resurrection of Jesus each week. The believer may not be able to care for fellow believers, because of distance but they can still pray for them. They also have a responsibility to help the needy in their own family and community. They should preach the gospel so that other people's lives can be saved. If God allows, others will come to the faith and the believer will no longer be in isolation.

If there is an ecclesia nearby, then the newly baptised must become part of it. An ecclesia is a group of believers who meet regularly and devote themselves to the

apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer. Hebrews 10:21-25 lists some activities we should be doing as part of an ecclesia.

Lesson 3: Prayer

Prayer is an important part of a Christian's life. God wants believers to pray (Proverbs 15:8). When we pray, we talk to God. It is a one-way conversation with the God of the Universe. God is interested in us because He cares about people.

There are many reasons why we should want to pray to God. Just think about the model prayer Jesus gave us, which we call 'the Lord's prayer'. This prayer includes:

1. honour to God – we need to show that we value God,
2. a request for His kingdom to come – this is the full answer to all our problems,
3. a request for forgiveness – without which we cannot be right with God,
4. a request for daily food – God is the provider, and
5. a request for protection from temptation and evil – which we all need.

God knows all our needs even before we ask Him. But He wants **us** to know that we need these things. He also wants us to **recognise** that every blessing we receive comes from Him and to pray for them. He wants us to pray when we are in trouble (James 5:13; Psalm 50:15). We could all do with God at our side helping us in our troubles.

If God is on our side, we do not need to worry (Hebrews 13:6; Philippians 4:6-7; Psalm 55:22). Imagine living a life with no fears! We can pass our problems over to God.

When we pray, we may expect an immediate answer from God. But God does not work like that. He has His own timetable. There is a danger in this for us. We may get disappointed and stop praying. This is not what God wants to see (Luke 18:1; 11:5-13; 1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Faithful people develop good prayer habits. David prayed 7 times a day. Daniel prayed 3 times a day. Nehemiah prayed spontaneous prayers. It is good to pray at set times as well as praying spontaneously. For example, many will pray first thing in the morning and last thing at night. Many pray and offer thanks before every meal or before a journey. There may be other set times that work for you.

Then there are the spontaneous prayers. For example, when you hear of someone who is sick or in trouble. You may want to say a short prayer immediately before you get distracted and forget about it. If a worry comes into your mind, offer a prayer immediately. In this way you cast your worry on God.

When we pray, we think of God. This means we are suddenly in His presence. If we think of Him regularly through our day, then we are regularly in His presence. This encourages us to have spiritual thoughts throughout the day (Psalm 145:18). It helps us be careful about what we do or say.

If we do not pray, it is like having God as a distant Father who has nothing to do with us. This is like children having a father they never see. They must make their own way through life, without the care and protection of a loving father. We do not want that!

There are some things we should not take to God in prayer. We should not pray to be very rich. Riches and possessions will take us away from God (James 4:3). We should not pray against the purpose of God (1 John 5:14,15).

It may not be clear to us how God works in our lives. We need to leave that to God. God knows what He is doing (Deuteronomy 32:4)

God has the choice as to whether He acts on our prayers. We cannot force God to do what we want. We are not the master and God is not our servant. Neither should we give God no choice. For example, if we say God must do what I want, or I am going to leave the faith. This is testing God and is wrong. God decides if, when and how He responds to our prayers. That decision remains with Him alone. Our attitude should be like the attitude of Jesus (Matthew 26:39) - we should say 'God willing' (James 4:15).

Our prayers should be offered in humility (Isaiah 66:2; Luke 18:14; Ecclesiastes 5:2). We do not have to pray using clever words or educated speech. Sincere words from the heart are what God wants to hear.

God will not listen to us if we do not listen to Him (Zechariah 7:13; Proverbs 28:9; Psalm 66:18). We do this by reading the Bible daily and listening to His words.

Prayer can be a great help to us in our lives. It can give us peace of mind in a troubled world. We pray because prayer works (James 5:16).

Lesson 4: Sharing your Faith

Baptism is a special opportunity to share our faith with our friends and family. They will want to know why you took that decision and what it means in practice. Will you still be friends? Will you still see your family? How have you changed?

They may never ask these questions again, so we encourage you to take this special opportunity to share the good news with them (1 Peter 3:15,16). Those who question you deserve an answer. Notice the advice here on how to answer them. We must answer with gentleness and treat them with respect. They are more likely to listen to us if we respond in this way. We must be kind and teach in a gentle manner (2 Timothy 2:23-25). Our behaviour is an important part of our message. It can be as much a witness as the words we speak.

Even if your friends do not ask questions, an opportunity still exists. You can ask to have a chat with them to explain why you were baptised. If you would like support in this, ask another baptised believer to help you.

There is much more to this opportunity than just explaining why you were baptised. The gospel can save lives by giving others the hope of the resurrection (1 Timothy 2:3-4; Daniel 12:3). What better act of love can we give our family and friends than to try and save their lives?

If we have a husband or wife who is not a believer, then we particularly need to share our faith with them. We do this because we love them and want them to be saved too. We also do this because until that happens, we have a divided family. One partner is part of the ecclesia and the other may refuse to get involved. This brings tensions over the use of time and resources. A divided family makes decision-making difficult. It is a particular problem for the children. Parents should teach their children about God, but it is harder for the children to believe if one parent does not.

If the husband has a non-believing wife, he has a responsibility to teach her (1 Peter 3:7). If the wife has a non-believing husband, she has a responsibility to him (1 Peter 3:1,2).

Sharing our faith is part of a wider command to teach the gospel to the world (Mark 16:15,16). How will the gospel go into all the world unless someone teaches them (Romans 10:14,15)? The book of Revelation has a picture of saved believers from every tongue, tribe, nation, and language (Revelation 7:9). Every believer is called to

be part of this effort of saving others. The message we should give people is the message Jesus and his disciples taught. This is the good news of the kingdom of God.

Jesus sent out his disciples with the message in pairs. This is good practice. Each one can support the other. The two together can provide two reliable witnesses to the truth of the message. They can help each other with questions and arrangements. It is important not to give the appearance of evil, so it is best to go on preaching trips with someone of the same sex (not with another person's wife or husband).

A teacher's behaviour and character are important. When we teach the gospel, we need to be careful that our behaviour matches our message (1 Timothy 4:16).

Preaching is like planting the seed of the gospel in people's hearts. We cannot tell whether the seed will grow and whether our preaching will be successful. Any result is to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 3:7-9).

Lesson 5: The New Life in Christ

When we were baptised, we left our old life behind and began a new life in Christ (Romans 6:4; Ephesians 2:1-5). Through baptism, we went from a position where death was our certain end to the hope of everlasting life. In Christ, even if we die, we will be raised and live again. As far as God is concerned, only living in Christ is truly living.

This change from the old life to the new requires a different way of thinking (Ephesians 4:22-24; Romans 13:14; Colossians 3:12). The difference between the old and new ways of thinking is so great that it is described as a 'transformation' or complete change (Romans 12:2). The word for 'transformed' is the word we use to describe the change from a caterpillar to a butterfly. We are like a totally different creature. Those in Christ are described as a 'new creation' (2 Corinthians 5:17).

If we are part of the new creation, we must discard the activities and attitudes of the old. We cannot claim to be in the new if we continue in the old ways (Ephesians 5:3-5; Colossians 3:8-10; Galatians 5:19-21). Any change we make we should not see as losing our own character. The things we must change are those which were ungodly and selfish (Titus 3:3).

As we become a new person in Christ, we will be transformed into someone who does what is right and good. We will be an easier person to live with and we will enjoy life more (Titus 2:11,12). The new person in Christ must be encouraged to develop and flourish. There are certain behaviours we need to cultivate. See Galatians 5:22-24. Jesus had all these qualities. Now that we are in Christ, we need to develop these qualities too.

If we truly embrace our new life in Christ, then we will live like Christ and this should be obvious to others (James 3:13; Philippians 2:14,15). This creates a problem (Ephesians 5:7-12). We cannot join with people in doing the deeds of the old way (2 Corinthians 6:14,15).

We need to be careful about how close we are to people who live in the ways of darkness. 1 Peter 4:3-5 explains what will happen. When we stop joining in with activities of the old life, we will attract some adverse comments. But do not let that deter us from following the new life. We would be fools to return to the bad old ways which lead to death. Returning to the old ways of the flesh is worse than having never left (2 Peter 2:20-22). Let us not be fools (Hebrews 10:39). We need to choose carefully what we think about - as our thoughts determine our words and actions (Philippians 4:8).