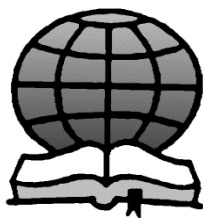


**THE GOOD NEWS
OF
THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

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OF
THE KINGDOM OF GOD**



Christadelphian Bible Mission
404 Shaftmoor Lane
Birmingham B28 8SZ
UK

The Good News of the Kingdom of God

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1

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

Reading: Psalm 19

The Bible – God’s Word

This book is designed to help you understand the Bible, sometimes called the Scriptures. The Bible is the Word of God and it is the only book that reliably tells us about Him. In it we read of God’s plans for the earth and the people on it. It promises a blessing for everyone who reads it and responds to its message.

To help you read this book you will need a copy of the whole Bible, not just the New Testament.

About this Book

There are 40 chapters in this book and each consists of one lesson with questions at the end so that you can test your understanding.

[If you have a tutor you can write out the answers on a piece of paper and return them to him/her. Your tutor will then mark your answers and return them to you. You may also ask your tutor questions about the Bible and this book. Please only write to your tutor, even though you may see other addresses in our literature. If you do not have a tutor and would like to be put in touch with one, please send your answers using the address at the front of this book. Your answers will be passed on to a tutor who will write to you.]

The Bible passages in this book are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV). Other versions may be available in your country. Two good modern versions are the New King James Version (NKJV) and New International Version (NIV). The King James Version (KJV), also known as the Authorised Version (AV), is another good version to use, although it is sometimes difficult to understand because of its old fashioned language.

This book is free. Our aim is to help you to enjoy reading the Scriptures. We want you to discover the wonderful message of salvation through Jesus Christ. After you have completed the whole book we can send other Bible material to help you.

Bible References

In this book, Bible references are written like this:

How to read this Book

Genesis 1 – this means the Book of Genesis, Chapter 1;

Or

Genesis 1:1, 3 – this means the Book of Genesis, Chapter 1, verses 1 and 3;

Or

Genesis 1:1-7 – this means the Book of Genesis, Chapter 1, verses 1 to 7 inclusive.

We do not want you to just accept what is written in this book. We want you to check for yourself that this really is what the Bible teaches. For this reason many Bible references are given in each chapter.

How to read the Book

Try to study one chapter each week, but make sure that you understand each one before going on to the next. It may be helpful to read each chapter three times:

- the first time – to obtain a general idea of what it is about;
- the second time – reading the verses in your own Bible, and then answering the questions;
- the third time – reading it right through again, together with the Bible reading given at the beginning of the chapter, and checking your answers.

At the end of each chapter you will find some other useful verses to read in your Bible, and one which you should try to learn. These verses will help you throughout your life.

Read your Bible prayerfully

Begin each session of Bible reading or study with a prayer to God, asking Him to help you understand His Word. Here is a prayer from the Book of Psalms:

“Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.” (*Psalms 119:18*)

If we ask Him, God will open our eyes and help us to understand His book, the Bible. We should read it every day.

Bible passage to read:

Genesis 1 – This is the first chapter of the Bible.

Questions on Chapter 1 – How to read this Book

- 1A. Why do you wish to study the Bible?
- 1B. How often should we read the Bible?
 - a) every day
 - b) once a week
 - c) once a month
 - d) a few times a year
 - e) other (please specify)?
- 1C. What should you do before starting each study session?
- 1D. In Psalm 119:105 the writer says that God's Word is 'a lamp to his feet'. What do you think he means?

2

WHO ARE THE CHRISTADELPHIANS?

Reading: John 15

The Christadelphians

This book is about the Bible. However, you may want to know who the Christadelphians are, so we will tell you something about ourselves.

The Christadelphians are a worldwide community of people who read the whole of the Bible and accept it all as the Word of God. They believe in the Old and New Testament promises concerning the Lord Jesus Christ and the future of the world. They are waiting for the return of the Lord Jesus from heaven to set up God's kingdom on this earth.

The name 'Christadelphian' comes from two Greek words that mean 'Brothers in Christ' (Colossians 1:2). It is a phrase taken from the New Testament, which was originally written in Greek.

Where do Christadelphians live?

There are Christadelphians in many parts of the world, for example in Britain and parts of Europe, many African countries, the Far East from India to Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands, North and South America from Canada to Argentina, and in the islands of the Caribbean. The community includes people of many races and cultures.

What do Christadelphians believe?

Christadelphians base their faith on the things which were believed and taught by Jesus Christ and his apostles about 2,000 years ago. These things are summarised in the New Testament as *'the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ'*.

This true message of Christianity has not changed throughout the centuries and there have always been groups of men and women who have believed true Bible teaching. Christadelphians keep to the truth of God's Word by reading the whole Bible, not just their favourite passages. A reading plan helps them to read the whole of the Old Testament once each year and the New Testament twice.

How did the Christadelphian Community begin?

In 1832 an English doctor named John Thomas took a ship going to New York because his father wanted to settle in America. The ship ran aground in a violent storm and Dr. Thomas thought that he was going to die. He realised that he knew very little about the future and vowed that if he reached land he would not rest until he had found the truth about life after death. He did reach New York and spent the next fifteen years studying the Bible very carefully and examining the teachings of many Christian groups. When he was sure that he understood the things written in the Old and New Testaments concerning Jesus Christ and the coming Kingdom of God on earth, he arranged to be baptized, by full immersion (going under water completely). He preached in America and Britain, and produced religious magazines and books.

Among those who believed the same Bible teachings and joined John Thomas in his work was a man called Robert Roberts. He helped to organise the growing number of fellow-believers into local groups or 'ecclesias'. 'Ecclesia' is the Greek word for 'church' in the Bible. It means 'an assembly (gathering) of people who have been called'. Christadelphians prefer to use 'ecclesia' instead of 'church' because people now think of a church as a building rather than a special group of people.

The name 'Christadelphian' was first used in 1864 when the believers in America asked their Government to be excused from joining the army at the time of the American Civil War. A name was needed to identify the believers as a community separate from other churches, and John Thomas chose 'Christadelphian'. These 19th Century Christadelphians preached in many parts of the world, so that by the end of the century there were groups of believers in many countries.

How do Christadelphians organise themselves?

There are various committees for organising missionary work and the care of our sick, elderly and lonely members. We have offices in a few countries for publishing magazines and books. However, we have no paid ministers and no priests (the Lord Jesus Christ, who is now in heaven, is the only priest – through him baptized believers confess their sins in prayer and are forgiven). Christadelphians have no central organisation, but members throughout the world share the same beliefs, hope and way of life and this binds them together as a community. The work of the community is financed by money given voluntarily by members.

Who are the Christadelphians?

Each ecclesia chooses its own elders, usually by voting once a year. Those who are chosen serve the ecclesia in various duties, such as secretary, treasurer, steward or chairing meetings, and they are not paid for their work. Christadelphians do not build large, elaborate church buildings. Of course, some ecclesias do own their hall or room for meeting, but others meet in houses, or rent village halls or rooms in schools.

The Same Beliefs

Christadelphians read and study their Bibles. They believe and fully accept all of its teaching as essential for salvation. It is acceptance of true Bible teaching that shows men and women the need to be baptised into the saving name of Jesus Christ. It also shows them the need to follow Jesus' example of Godly behaviour as they await his return to the earth and the establishing of the kingdom of God.

These are the things that bind Christadelphians together.

“There is one body ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”
(*Ephesians 4:4, 5*)

The People we try to be

We all need God's help, and we find it as we read the Bible every day. The Bible describes this as spiritual food and it is as important for our lives as our daily food. It is also very important to pray daily. Once a week we meet to eat a small piece of bread and drink a sip of wine to remind us of the death of Jesus. Christadelphians are joyful people because they have a sure and practical faith, but they are very serious about the way they live. Jesus Christ is coming back to the earth very soon and we wish to be ready for his coming. This means leading clean and honest lives. It means avoiding heavy drinking, gambling and other evil habits. It means having only one wife, and not having sex before or outside marriage. (We realise that some students reading this book may already have more than one wife, and this matter is discussed in Chapter 33.) Christadelphians are law-abiding citizens of their country. They try to do well, but they do not take part in politics, nor do they fight or take people to court.

The Christadelphian Bible Mission

The aim of the Christadelphian Bible Mission (CBM) is to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God all over the world. The CBM produces Bible courses and booklets and organises missionary work. CBM workers are unpaid Christadelphian volunteers who do this work as well as their normal employment. They want to help people to learn the Gospel, to encourage them to repent, be baptized, and follow the example of the Lord Jesus and the apostles.

Who are the Christadelphians?

We want to share true Bible teaching, hope and joy with you.

Christadelphians sincerely believe that their faith represents the true Gospel as found in the whole of the Bible. We hope that you too will enjoy discovering the truth of God's word and that it will bring you hope and joy in your life. May God bless you in your search for salvation.

Summary

1. The Bible is the only true message from God.
2. There is only One God, the Creator, who is in control of world affairs.
3. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, born of the virgin Mary. He was a sinless man. He died on the cross to save those who believe in him. He was raised from the grave and given everlasting life. He is now in heaven with his Father.
4. Jesus Christ will soon return from heaven. He will set up the Kingdom of God on the earth. He will rule as King of the world. His capital city will be Jerusalem in the land of Israel.
5. The Jews are God's witnesses to His purpose, even though many of them do not realise it. God made promises to Abraham and David which will be fulfilled when the Lord Jesus returns to the earth.
6. Death is the punishment for sin and we all sin. The only hope of life after death is bodily resurrection from the grave at the return of Jesus Christ.
7. There will be a day of judgement. The faithful followers of the Lord Jesus will be given a place in God's kingdom and will live for ever.

Who are the Christadelphians?

Verses to learn:

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.” (*John 15:13,14*)

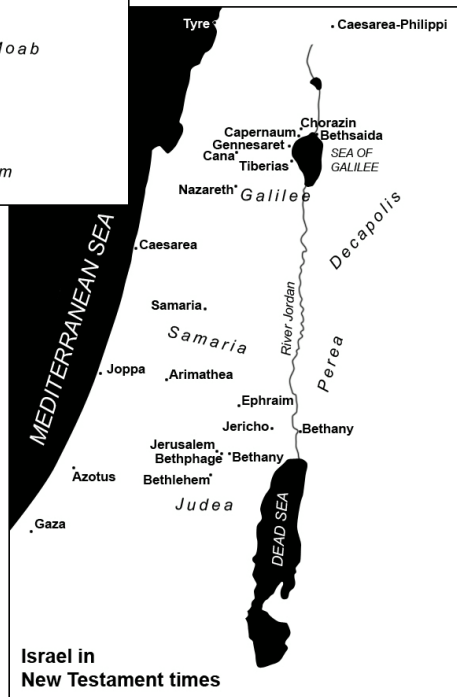
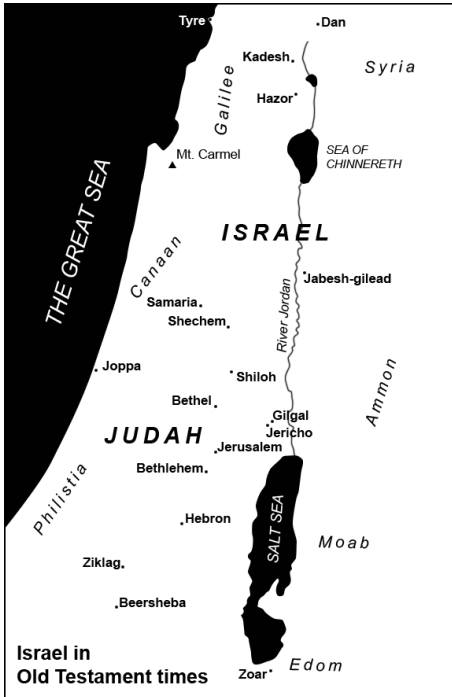
Verses to read:

“The unfolding of your (God’s) words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.” (*Psalms 119:130*)

“And he (Jesus) said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” (*Mark 16:15, 16*)

“And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” (*John 17:3*)

Who are the Christadelphians?



Who are the Christadelphians?

Questions on Chapter 2 – Who are the Christadelphians?

- 2A. What does the word 'ecclesia' mean?
- 2B. Why should we try to lead clean and honest lives?
- 2C. Who is the only priest for true believers?
- 2D. How did Christ show his great love for his disciples? (See John 15:13, 14 which is written out in the chapter).

3

THE BIBLE OUR GUIDE

Reading: Psalm 22

The Bible is God's Word

The Bible is the Word of God. It says that *“All Scripture is breathed out by God”* (2 Timothy 3:16). In some versions of the Bible this verse reads, *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God”*. The Bible word ‘inspiration’ means ‘God-breathed’. God ‘breathed’ His message into the minds of the men who wrote the Bible, so that they wrote His words. In this way God is the true author of the Bible. Many times the Old Testament prophets say, *“This is what the LORD says ...”* If the Bible is not the Word of God, then it is not important. But since it really is God’s message to mankind, then it is vital that we read it and try to do what it says. If we ignore the Bible, we are ignoring the Creator of the Universe.

How do we know that the Bible is true?

Here are five reasons.

- The Bible tells the future.
- Archaeologists have found evidence of many things spoken of in the Bible.
- The Dead Sea Scrolls show that the Bible text has not changed with time.
- Jesus believed the Old Testament.
- The Jews still exist!

We will look at each of these in more detail.

1. The Bible tells the future

We cannot be sure what will happen tomorrow. Yet in many places the Bible said what would happen in the future, even hundreds of years before the event happened. These prophecies have come true, even to the little details. The prophets who wrote these words were inspired by God. Here are some examples of Bible prophecies.

a. The birth of Jesus

Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Matthew 2 tells us that the wise men came to Herod (a ruler in Jerusalem) and asked, *“Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?”* When Herod asked the chief priests this question, they answered, *“In Bethlehem of Judea”*. How did they

know? They knew because hundreds of years before, Jesus' birth had been prophesied in the Old Testament (Micah 5:2).

b. The death of Jesus

In Psalm 22 there is a prophecy of the crucifixion of Jesus. The end of verse 16 reads, "*they have pierced my hands and feet*". Psalm 22 was written about 1,000 years before Jesus was crucified. This was a time when crucifixion was not known and criminals were put to death by stoning. The writer of this Psalm must have been inspired by God to be able to give this detail about the death of Jesus. In verse 18 the Psalm continues, "*they divide my garments among*

John 19:23, 24

"When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfil the Scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."

them, and for my clothing they cast lots". John 19:23, 24 show that this is exactly what the soldiers did after they had crucified Jesus.

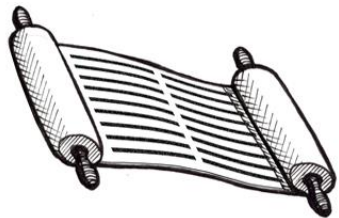
c. Great events foretold

"And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the splendour and pomp of the Chaldeans, will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them. It will never be inhabited or lived in for all generations; no Arab will pitch his tent there; no shepherds will make their flocks lie down there." (Isaiah 13:19, 20)

When the prophet Isaiah wrote these words about the city of Babylon, it was the rich and powerful capital of one of the greatest nations in the world at that time.

Today, in Iraq, where Babylon once stood, there are only ruins in an area of semi-desert. This prophecy of Isaiah has been fulfilled (come to pass). Only God could know that Babylon would be destroyed and that no-one would ever live there again.

There are many other prophecies like these that have been fulfilled. Only God Himself can see into the future. Bible prophecies prove that the Bible is God's Word.



2. Archaeologists have found evidence of many things spoken of in the Bible

Archaeologists have found that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19) did exist.

They have also found that many other places mentioned in the Bible did exist, including: Ai, Ashkelon, Bethel, Beth-shemesh, Gibeah, Hazor, Jericho, Lachish, Megiddo, Samaria and Shechem. Similarly, archaeologists have found evidence of people mentioned in the Old Testament, e.g. these kings from four different nations: Jehu, Mesha, Cyrus and Nebuchadnezzar.

3. The Dead Sea Scrolls show that the Bible text has not changed with time

Old Testament books were carefully copied on to scrolls about 2,000 years ago and hidden in caves near the Dead Sea, in the south of the land of Israel. They were not discovered until 1947. The scroll containing the book of Isaiah has been compared with what is written in our Bibles today, and the words written are almost exactly the same. The Bible text has not changed with time.

4. Jesus believed the Old Testament

There are people today who mock the idea that Adam and Eve were real people, or that Noah built an ark and took all those animals on board. They think that they know better than to believe a story like Jonah being swallowed by a big fish. But Jesus believed these things!

We cannot ignore the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was brought back to life by God after he had been dead for three days. Such a miracle could only have been performed by the power of God.

Jesus believed Old Testament teaching about...

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Adam and Eve | Matthew 19:4,5 |
| Noah and the flood | Luke 17:26,27 |
| Lot and his wife | Luke 17:29-32 |
| Abraham, Isaac and Jacob | Matthew 8:11 |
| David and Solomon | Matthew 12:3,42 |
| Jonah and the great fish | Matthew 12:40 |

5. The Jews still exist!

God chose the people of Israel (the Jews) to be His own special people (Exodus 19:5). He said that they would never be completely destroyed (Jeremiah 30:11; Romans 11:1, 2). They have been very wicked, even

putting to death God’s own Son, but they still exist today – after more than 3,000 years. The same is not true of other ancient peoples.

Some facts about the Bible

- The Bible was written over a period of about 1,600 years.
- It has 66 books – 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament.
- God used shepherds, kings, fishermen, a doctor, a tent-maker and others to write it.
- All the writers combine to give us one complete story – the story of God’s purpose with mankind.
- Nearly all the writers were Jews – much of the Bible is about the Jewish people.

Here is a quick guide to the various parts of the Bible.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

| Book | What It Is About |
|---------------------------|--|
| Genesis | The beginning of the world, the first man and the start of the Jewish race. |
| Exodus to Deuteronomy | These books tell us how God chose the Jews to be His own special people and brought them out of Egypt and gave them the land of Canaan (Israel) as a home. |
| Joshua to Esther | The history of the Jewish people is continued in these books. |
| Psalms to Song Of Solomon | These are books of poetry and wisdom. |
| Isaiah to Malachi | Books of the prophets. They told the Jews how to obey God and also spoke about many important events that were to happen in the world. |

THE NEW TESTAMENT

| Book | What It Is About |
|-------------|-------------------------|
|-------------|-------------------------|

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Matthew Mark Luke John | These are four separate accounts of the life of Jesus, his death and resurrection from the dead. They are often called the Gospels. |
| Acts of the Apostles | This is about the first churches (ecclesias) and how they were organised. |
| Romans to Jude | Various letters written to help the newly formed ecclesias. |
| Revelation | A book of prophecy with symbols and picture language. |

Are there other written Revelations from God?

The answer to this question is, “No”. The Bible is the only reliable way that we can learn about God and His purpose.

However, there are many religions in the world that have their own ‘holy book’. The Muslims, for example, have the Koran. The Church of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) has the Book of Mormon, which they claim was sent to them by God. Some of these books take part of their teaching from the Bible; some give wise and sensible advice; but in many places these books do not agree with the Bible message. It is quite clear that God would not say one thing in one book and something different in another. Only one can be the inspired Word of God. The Bible claims to be this Word.

The Bible – A Guide for Living

God saw the hopelessness and sorrow that sin caused in the lives of men and women and sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die on the cross, to make it possible for us to have our sins forgiven. The Bible shows us the way to salvation and offers us the hope of a wonderful life in the future when Jesus Christ returns to the earth.

Jesus showed us how God wants us to live. The Bible has many examples of people who pleased God. It also shows us how some failed. The story of the Jewish people helps us to learn from their mistakes. The Bible is a guide for living and shows us how to live a life pleasing to God.

Finally

It is a tremendous thought that God in heaven has given us a book so that we may come to know Him and live as He wants us to. God actually tells us why He made the world and what will happen in the future. The Bible tells the story of God's dealings with mankind, from the creation of the first man through to the time when the earth will be filled with the glory of God.

The Bible is the guide God has given us. There is no other book like it. It is not a dead textbook – it is a living Word. It is God's gift to us. If we read it every day, carefully and prayerfully, it will completely change our lives and make them pleasing to God.

Summary

1. The Bible is the Word of God. It is God's message to men and women.
2. It is the only reliable way that we can learn about God and His purpose. There is no other book like the Bible.
3. The Bible shows us how to live a life pleasing to God. It offers us the hope of a wonderful life in the future when Jesus Christ returns to the earth.
4. There are many proofs that the Bible is true. For example, its history is proved by modern discoveries and it contains many prophecies that have been fulfilled.
5. Jesus believed the Old Testament.
6. The Bible is God's gift to us. We should read it every day.

Verses to learn:

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16,17)

Verses to read:

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” (*Psalms 1: 1-3*)

Questions on Chapter 3 – The Bible our Guide

- 3A. In what ways is the Bible different from all other books?
- 3B. What word is used to describe the way in which God guided men to write the Bible?
- 3C. How does Psalm 22 help us to believe that the Bible was written by God?
- 3D. Which Bible verses show that Jesus believed that God created Adam and Eve?
- 3E. Is studying the Bible the only reliable way that we can learn about God and His purpose?
- 3F. Over what period of time was the Bible written?
- 3H. If we read God's Word regularly and prayerfully, what can it do for us?

4

THE GOSPEL

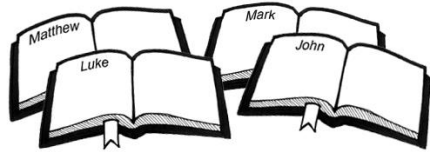
Reading: Isaiah 55

Good News

Everyone enjoys hearing good news, and the Gospel message is good news! Indeed, the word ‘Gospel’ means ‘good news’.

The first four books of the New Testament are often called The Gospels because they contain the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ.

*These Bible books are just
a part of the good news!*



Jesus is the Son of God. His mother was the virgin Mary. By the way he lived Jesus showed us the character of God, especially God’s love and kindness. He also showed the great power of God in the miracles he performed. But the most amazing thing about Jesus is that he never sinned. Even though he was tempted throughout his life he did not sin. One of his greatest temptations was to avoid the shame and terrible pain of dying on the cross, but he accepted this as God’s will (part of His plan). He knew that if he won the battle against sin his Father would raise him from the dead and give him everlasting life. The Lord Jesus is the only person who has been raised from the dead and stayed alive.

This is good news! Jesus has opened up a way for us to have our sins forgiven and receive everlasting life. He lived a perfect life and died in obedience to God’s will to make this possible. So the good news is that God has provided the way for us to escape from sin and death. We have good reason to be very thankful!

But there is More!

After his resurrection the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9-11) to be with his Father, and he is still there. However, he will soon return to this earth. Revelation 1:7 looks forward to the return of the Lord Jesus:

“Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.”

The Gospel

When he returns, Jesus Christ will set up the Kingdom of God here on earth. God's kingdom will cover the whole earth, and the world will be a very different place. Eventually there will be:

- no more war
- no more pain and suffering
- no more sorrow
- no more sin
- no more death.

Isaiah 25:8 speaks of this time:

“He (*God*) will swallow up death for ever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.”

God offers us a place in this kingdom on earth. It is a wonderful offer, and He wants us to accept it. Of course, there are conditions attached, so we need to read God's Word, the Bible, to find out what God wants us to do with our lives now.

The Gospel was known to People in Old Testament Times

The Gospel is the good news of the Kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. The New Testament tells us that the Gospel was preached to Abraham:

“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’” (*Galatians 3:8*)

God made promises to Abraham because of his faith and obedience. Abraham was told that he would inherit the land of Israel for ever. But Abraham grew old and died without owning any of the land that God had promised him.

Yet we know that God always keeps His promises. In order to receive the land that God promised him, Abraham must be raised from the dead, and we are told that he believed in resurrection:

“He (*Abraham*) considered that God was able even to raise him (*Abraham's son*) from the dead ...” (*Hebrews 11:19*)

Also, in order to receive the land of Israel *for ever*, Abraham must be given everlasting life. The land of Israel will be at the centre of the future kingdom. Abraham will be raised from the dead and given a place in God's kingdom on earth when the Lord Jesus returns.

So Abraham knew the good news about life after death and looked forward to God's kingdom:

“For he (*Abraham*) was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.” (*Hebrews 11:10*)

You will learn more about God’s promises to Abraham in later chapters.

When will Jesus Christ come back to the Earth?

We do not know exactly when the Lord Jesus will return to the earth. However, we do know, from things which are happening in the world today, that he will return soon. For almost 2,000 years the Jews had no land of their own but were scattered among the nations the world. Many Jews have now returned to the land of Israel. The Bible prophesied thousands of years ago that the Jews would return to their land before Christ’s second coming.

The world today is full of violence and crime, and people do just as they please, without self-control. There are wars, famines and dreadful diseases all over the world. People are frightened of the future. Jesus said that there would be “*people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world*” (Luke 21:26). Jesus also said that when all these things were happening, his return would be very near. You will learn more of this in later chapters.

Jesus Christ will come back to be King of the World

Jesus told Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, that he was born to be a king. Over his cross was written: “This is Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews”. But when Jesus returns he will not only be king of the Jews, he will be king over the whole world. God spoke of this thousands of years ago. The writer of Psalm 72 looked forward to this time. Verse 8 says:

“May he (*Jesus*) have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth!”

The city of Jerusalem in the land of Israel will become the capital of God’s future kingdom. Jesus Christ will reign from Jerusalem as king over the whole earth. David, Israel’s second king, looked forward to the time when his descendant, Jesus Christ, would reign from Jerusalem.

What will happen when Jesus Christ returns to this Earth?

Christ will raise from the dead those who have understood the Gospel. Then he will judge everyone who has understood the Gospel – both those alive when he returns and those who were raised from the dead. Only those who have made their lives right with God will be given everlasting life and a place in God’s kingdom on earth.

The Gospel

God's kingdom will be a time of great happiness, but it will not be perfect until Christ defeats all God's enemies. Only then will there be no more sin and death. God will be "*all in all*" and the world will finally be perfect – just as He planned from the beginning. Jesus told his disciples that they should pray, "*Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*" (Matthew 6:10).

Notice that the Gospel is not about going to heaven when we die – that is not Bible teaching. It is about everlasting life on earth.

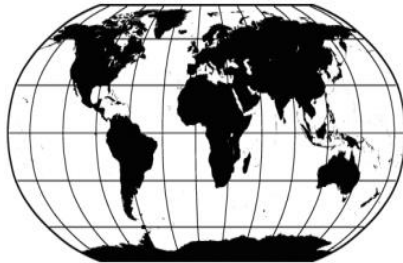
The apostle Paul looked forward to this time when he said:

"Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing." (2 Timothy 4:8)

"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea." (Habakkuk 2:14)

The wonderful that we can be kingdom.

How can we be God's Future Earth?



Gospel message is part of God's

given a place in Kingdom on

We need to recognise how sinful we are and do something about it. When the apostle Paul was in Athens he said,

"God... commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."
(Acts 17:30, 31)

God commands everyone to repent. This means to decide to change your life – to please God instead of yourself. We are all sinners, so we all need to repent and be baptized in water. We must try to live as

the Lord Jesus showed us. To those who do this, Jesus Christ will give everlasting life when he returns.

Summary

1. The word 'Gospel' means 'good news'. The good news is that God has provided the way for us to escape from sin and death.
2. People in Old and New Testament times knew the Gospel.
3. Jesus lived a perfect life and died in obedience to God's will to make it possible for us to be saved.
4. God raised Jesus from the dead and gave him everlasting life. He ascended to heaven to be with his Father and he is still there.
5. The Lord Jesus will return from heaven to set up God's kingdom here on earth.
6. He will judge everyone who has understood the Gospel. Those accepted will be given everlasting life and a place in God's kingdom on earth.
7. If we want to be part of God's kingdom on earth, we must repent and be baptized, and try to live as the Lord Jesus showed us.

A verse to learn:

"He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken."
(Isaiah 25:8)

Verses to read:

"For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it empty, he formed it to be inhabited!): "I am the LORD, and there is no other." *(Isaiah 45:18)*

This is a prophecy that Jesus would ride through Jerusalem on a donkey, and that one day he will be a king.

The Gospel

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (*Zechariah 9:9*)

This passage refers to the time of judgement after Christ returns to the earth as king.

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” (*Matthew 25:31-34*)

This is an invitation to learn the Gospel. It is freely offered to us.

“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, and of the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return

to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” (*Isaiah 55:1-11*)

The Gospel

Questions on Chapter 4 – The Gospel

- 4A. a) What does the word 'gospel' mean?
b) How is it good news for us?
- 4B. a) What was Abraham promised that he would inherit for ever?
b) Abraham is now dead. How can he receive this promise and so be part of God's kingdom when Jesus Christ returns?
- 4C. Write down at least four things you know about the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 4D. Give examples of how the world will be different after the Lord Jesus has set up God's kingdom on this earth.
- 4E. Why do we need to repent?








5

GOD AND CREATION

Reading: Genesis 1 and 2:1-7

The Creation

Genesis 1 tells us that God created the heavens and the earth. At first, the earth was empty, dark and covered with water. Then we read about the seven days of creation. The chart below shows what happened each day.

| | | |
|-------|---|---|
| Day 1 |  | Light shone – day was separated from night. |
| Day 2 | The waters were divided and heaven appeared. |  |
| Day 3 |  | Dry land appeared. Plants and trees started to grow. |
| Day 4 | God made the sun, moon and stars. |  |
| Day 5 |  | Fish and birds were created. |
| Day 6 | Animals were created; finally, God made the first man and woman. |  |
| Day 7 |  | God rested. |

“And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.” (*Genesis 1:31*)

God and Creation

Notice how everything follows in the right order. For example, the plants and trees were not made until the third day, when the dry land was ready for them. Animals were made on the sixth day, when there would be food for them to eat.

Every day we see God's excellent work around us. People have invented some wonderful things, such as aeroplanes, medicines, mobile phones and computers, but the skills needed to make these are nothing compared with God's power that created the universe. Just think how the spinning of the earth and its movement around the sun never changes, so that day follows night and season follows season.

Everything God makes is perfectly designed to suit its purpose. Even the smallest flower has amazing detail that is reproduced in its seeds. Birds have wings perfectly designed for flight, and some find their way thousands of kilometres around the world to their winter homes.

O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures." (*Psalms 104:24*)

The gods that are no gods

Throughout history people have seen the wonders of nature. But instead of worshipping God who made these things, many have worshipped the things He made! People have worshipped the sun, the moon and the stars. They have imagined that spirits were living in the water and the wind and worshipped them. People have even worshipped images of animals in wood and stone, because they imagined that spirits were living in them. Read what the apostle Paul says about this in Romans 1:20-23. Notice especially verse 23:

"... and (*they*) exchanged the glory of the immortal (*undying*) God for images resembling mortal (*dying*) man and birds and animals and reptiles."

The worship of false gods or idols is wrong and is condemned by God. The Bible tells us that the Lord God in heaven is the *only* living and true God. When people prayed to these false gods there was no answer, because their idols did not live and could not think. False gods or idols like these do not exist – except in the imagination of people! Worship of false gods or idols is sinful and in the past has led to many evil practices, like burning children in fire. Even the Jews, though they had been given God's righteous laws, were guilty of worshipping idols. God had warned them about this in Deuteronomy 4:15-19.

Read Ezekiel 14:1-8. In verse 3 God says that the idol-worshippers had *“taken their idols into their hearts”*. We can do this today, not by worshipping idols of wood or stone, but if there is anything in our lives which is more important than God, then it is an idol in our heart, something that we worship. So, for example, if we spend too much time seeking after money, playing football or watching television, and do not find time to read our Bibles and serve God, these things have become idols to us in our hearts.

If we want to please God, we will have nothing to do with idols, and we will not choose as our friends those who have idols in their lives. In 2

Corinthians 6:15, 16 the apostle Paul says,

“Or what portion (*part*) does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols?”

It is wrong to worship anything other than the true God of the Bible and His Son. 1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10 tells how the believers *“turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come”*.

The Beginning of the World

Today, many people believe that our wonderful world came about by chance. This idea is called the theory of evolution. People think that some spark of life just happened and from this beginning, by gradual changes over millions of years, there came the ordered and beautiful world we see today. So they claim that marvellous things like our eyes, ears and our complex brain just came about by chance. They also think that man came from apes, but the Bible says that God created the first man out of the dust of the earth. The Bible is very clear:

Ezekiel 14:3-5

“Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces. Should I indeed let myself be consulted by them? Therefore speak to them and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Any one of the house of Israel who takes his idols into his heart and sets the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to the prophet, I the LORD will answer him as he comes with the multitude of his idols, that I may lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel, who are all estranged from me through their idols.”

God and Creation

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”
(*Genesis 1:1*)

Although the Bible tells us that God created all things, it does not tell us how He did it. If it did, we would not understand. We have to accept God’s word in faith. We cannot believe the Bible teaching that God created the universe and everything in it, and at the same time believe that the world came about by chance.

“By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.” (*Psalms 33:6*)

A World which People have spoilt

It is evil to worship idols and wrong to believe that the world came about by chance. It is also wrong to spoil the world that God has made.

In the beginning our world was extremely beautiful, but people have done much to spoil it. Too many trees have been cut down, making deserts where forests once grew. The air and rivers have been polluted with chemicals. Scientists believe that by greedily using up oil and coal we are producing so much carbon dioxide gas that the earth is warming up, causing great environmental problems. In these and many other ways our world is being spoilt.

But it is still God’s world and He will not allow us to continue to spoil it for ever. In Acts 17:31 the apostle Paul says, “*He (God) has fixed a day on which he will judge the world*”. The day is coming when God will send Jesus Christ back to the earth to become king of the whole world. His wise rule and righteous laws will eventually make the world perfect. It will be the fulfilment of the promise that God made when He said that all the earth will be filled with His glory (Numbers 14:21).

The Almighty God

The wonderful things of nature show us something of God’s power and wisdom, but they do not tell us about God Himself. No-one has ever seen God. To learn about God we must read the Bible and especially look at the life and example of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us all we need to know about God. It is the only reliable way we can learn about Him and His purpose with the world.

Psalm 90:2 says, “*From everlasting to everlasting you are God*”. This is something our minds cannot fully understand. We know that in life all things have a beginning and an end; we are familiar with birth and death. But the Lord God has always existed and will always exist. He is immortal (cannot die).

1 Timothy 6:15,16

“He (God) who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honour and eternal dominion.”

1 Timothy 6 tells us that immortality comes only from God.

The Bible tells us that there is only one God. He is all-powerful and knows everything. He is perfect and cannot sin. God is gracious and loving – but He is also righteous, and expects us to honour and obey Him. God is longsuffering and forgiving – but He will punish those who refuse to honour and obey Him. God described Himself in this way to Moses:

“The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty.” (*Exodus 34:6,7*)

| God’s Nature | God’s Character |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He has always existed. He cannot die. • He is the source of all life. • He is perfect and cannot sin or be tempted to sin. • He is in heaven but everywhere present. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He is righteous and holy. • He is merciful, gracious, loving and slow to anger. • He will forgive sinners who repent but will punish those who refuse to honour and obey Him. |

We are part of God’s Creation

“Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!” (*Psalms 95:6*)

To be able to worship and praise God is a great privilege. Human beings are God’s very special creation and He seeks a special relationship with men and women. Jesus talks about true believers who come to worship God “*in spirit and truth*”. He says, “*the Father is seeking such people to worship him*” (John 4:23, 24). God seeks people who will believe and obey Him, and rejoice in the world He has made.

God wants us to read the Bible to learn about Him and His purpose, and to worship and serve Him now. He is preparing the people who do this for the time when they will be able to serve Him for ever when

God and Creation

the Lord Jesus returns to the earth. If we read His Word and honour and obey Him now, in that day we will be one of those who will say,

“Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him... let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.” (*Isaiah 25:9*)

Summary

1. The Lord God of the Bible is the only living and true God. He created the universe and everything in it.
2. We should worship God. We should have no false gods or idols in our lives.
3. God has always existed and cannot die. He is perfect and cannot sin. He is all-powerful and knows everything. God is gracious and loving – but He will punish those who refuse to honour and obey Him.
4. Jesus Christ will return to the earth to become king of the world. His wise rule and righteous laws will eventually make the world perfect. It will then be filled for ever with the glory of God.
5. If we read God’s Word and honour and obey Him now, we will be able to serve Him for ever when the Lord Jesus returns to the earth.

A verse to learn:

“By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” (*Hebrews 11:3*)

Verses to read:

This verse praises God.

“To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen.” (*1 Timothy 1:17*)

These verses show that God knows everything, even our thoughts.

“O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue; behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.” (*Psalms 139:1-4*)

This tells us about the creation of the first man.

“Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” (*Genesis 2:7*)

Also read Romans 1:18-23.

Questions on Chapter 5 – God and Creation

- 5A. How did life begin on earth?
- 5B. State five things you know about God.
- 5C. Why do you think men and women were made?
- 5D. Is it right to worship the things that God has made?
- 5E. a) What sort of idols do people worship today?
b) Which would tempt you?
- 5F. Should we believe the idea of evolution (that all life developed by chance)?
- 5G. a) What does Genesis 1:31 say about everything God made?
b) How will God ensure that people will not continue to spoil the world for ever (Acts 17:31)?

6

GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD

Reading: Isaiah 53

What is wrong with the World?

There is clearly something wrong with the world in which we live. Every day there is news of crime and violence. In many parts of the world there are wars or the threat of wars. Terrible diseases spread quickly. Many die of hunger, while others have plenty to eat. Many world leaders are not concerned for the welfare of their people.

Why are these things happening? The Bible tells us that God made this world “*very good*” (Genesis 1:31). He made it a wonderful place in which to live and intended something better than our world of trouble and uncertainty. Sin is the root cause of all the world’s troubles.

The Beginning of the Trouble

God made Adam and Eve and placed them in the beautiful Garden of Eden. God taught Adam His ways. He also gave Adam a simple law, and just as a father expects obedience from his children, so God expected obedience from Adam. God said to Adam,

“You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (*Genesis 2:16,17*)

Adam chose to disobey. He sinned: he broke God’s law. Adam’s disobedience led to the punishment of death, as God had said it would. Adam and Eve did not die immediately but became mortal (dying creatures). From that time they also found it easy to sin.

Notice that Adam died because he sinned. God did not promise Adam and Eve that they would go to heaven when they died – this would have been a reward. They were sentenced to death, which was a punishment not a reward.

We inherit Adam’s nature

From our birth we inherit the effects of Adam’s sin. Just as children inherit things (like the colour of their skin and eyes) from their parents, so we all inherit our nature from Adam. This human nature is the opposite of God’s nature.

God so loved the World

| God's Nature | Human Nature |
|---|--|
| God cannot sin or be tempted to sin. God is immortal (cannot die). | All people find it easy to sin. All people are mortal (dying creatures from birth). |

We are also punished for our Sins

Ever since Adam disobeyed God 6,000 years ago, every one of his descendants has also sinned (except Jesus). We are all descended from Adam and we too die because of our sins (Romans 5:12). The apostle Paul said,

“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.” (*Romans 7:18*)

Paul knew that he was sinful even though he tried to do what was right. Many people do not even want to do what is right. The prophet Jeremiah tells us that human beings are wicked:

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (*Jeremiah 17:9*)

Isaiah 53:6 says that we all go our own way (not God’s way):

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way.”

We all sin and so we all deserve to die. But death is not the only punishment for sin. At first, Adam enjoyed fellowship (a special relationship) with God. This fellowship with God was broken when Adam sinned. Sin separates us from God, so as sinners we cannot have fellowship with God. We can do nothing to save ourselves.

Saved by God’s Grace

The Bible tells us about both the justice and mercy of God’s character. Because God is just (or righteous) He must carry out the sentence of death for sin. Because God is merciful He does not want people to die and remain in the grave for ever. In His love God has provided a way by which people can live for ever. He has provided the way to overcome the sentence of death. We read in John 3:16:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

The apostle Paul says:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith.” (*Ephesians 2:8*)

God’s grace is His free gift of loving kindness to men and women. It is wonderfully shown by God’s gift of the Lord Jesus Christ to bring forgiveness of sins and salvation. We do not deserve salvation and we cannot earn it. By God’s grace he has given us Jesus and opened up the way for us to have:

- forgiveness of sins now
- fellowship with God now
- endless life in the future.

Ephesians 2:8 tells us that we can enjoy the blessings of God’s grace “*through faith*”. To have faith in God means to believe and trust in Him and His purpose. If we do not believe God’s Word, it is not possible for us to share in His grace:

“And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” (*Hebrews 11:6*)

The Sacrifice of Jesus

Jesus had human nature like us and was tempted just as we are – but unlike us he never sinned. Jesus always did everything that pleased God and was perfect in every way – yet he was crucified! God did not save him from this terrible death. The verse already quoted from Isaiah 53 continues:

“... the LORD (*God*) has laid on him (*Jesus*) the iniquity (*sin*) of us all.”

Through the perfect life of Jesus and through his death on the cross, in obedience to His Father’s will, it is possible for us to have our sins forgiven. Then we can have the hope of a wonderful life that will last for ever.

There is something amazing about this: the love of God in giving His only Son, and the love of Jesus in giving his life in loving obedience to his Father’s will. The way in which Jesus gave himself is described in the Bible as his sacrifice. The sacrifice of Jesus involved:

- a sinless life – he gave up (sacrificed) his own will and desires and followed his Father’s will in all things
- the giving up (sacrifice) of his life by dying on the cross.

So the way of salvation is through the Lord Jesus Christ and was made possible by his sacrifice. We have to believe that Jesus died for

God so loved the World

us and so accept his sacrifice. If we have faith in God and His offer of salvation through the Lord Jesus, we may look forward to a future life free from all the troubles of the world. This is the great hope of the Gospel and we have done nothing to deserve it!

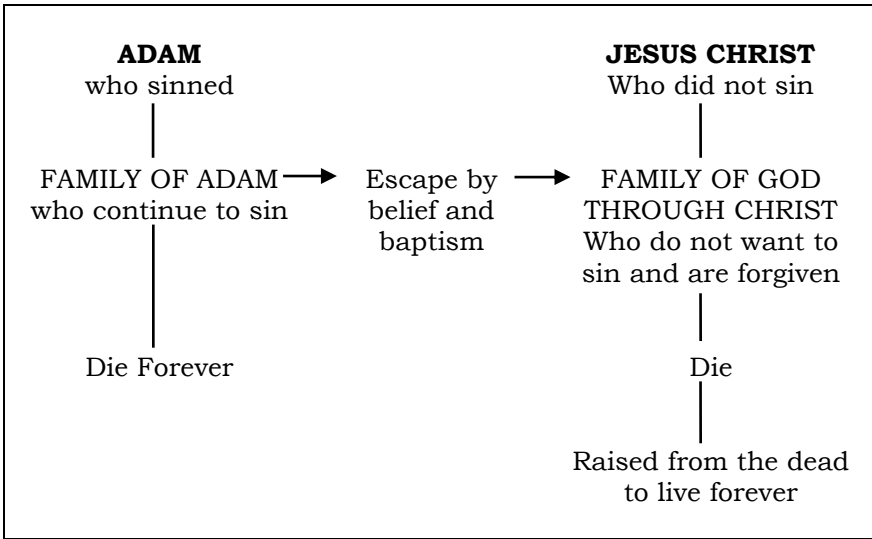
To which family do you belong?

One way to consider salvation is to think of families. We are all born into Adam's family, since the human race is descended from him. Adam sinned and brought death to the human race. Through his sacrifice the Lord Jesus Christ set up a new family. This family consists of people who do not want to belong to Adam's family but wish to turn to God.

The Bible describes those who belong to God's family through Christ as being 'in Christ'; but those belonging to Adam's dying family are described as being 'in Adam':

“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” (*1 Corinthians 15:22*)

So there are two families: Adam's family, and the family of God through Christ. We are all born into Adam's family, and if we do nothing about it we will die in Adam's family and perish for ever. The Lord Jesus wants us to join God's family. We can do so by learning about Jesus and the purpose of God and then being baptized. Baptism is a complete immersion in water (going completely under the water). Going under the water is a symbol of dying, and coming out of the water is a symbol of rising to a new life. We leave Adam's family by 'dying' in baptism and we 'rise' to start our new life as part of the family of God. So we die to the family of Adam and rise again into the family of God through Christ. We should be very grateful to God and the Lord Jesus for making it possible for us to escape from the family of Adam.



Believing and Obeying

We have already seen that to please God we must believe in Him and what He has done for us through the sacrifice of Jesus. John 3:16 tells us, “*whoever believes in him (Jesus) should not perish but have eternal life*”. This does not mean that we have only to say, “I believe in God and the Lord Jesus”, to be saved from sin and death. If we really believe something, we take action. If a child is sick and the parents believe that the doctor can help, they do not just say, “We believe in the doctor”, and let the child go on suffering. The parents send for the doctor and, because they have faith in him, they obey him in whatever he says.

It is just the same with believing in God. If we really believe, we will find out what God wants us to do and do it to the best of our abilities. We need to obey God by starting a new life dedicated to following the Lord Jesus. This begins with baptism. Only those who have real faith can hope to be among those who “*should not perish but have eternal life*”.

It is important to obey God:

- Adam disobeyed God and brought sin and death into the world
- Christ Jesus obeyed God and brings life to those who try to obey God.

God so loved the World

The Gift of Immortal Life

The blessing of a wonderful life that will last for ever is God's gift to those who believe His Word and try hard to obey Him. People who are given this great gift will be changed. They will no longer have their human nature but will share the nature of God Himself:

1. their minds will be changed – they will never be able to sin again;
2. their mortal bodies will be made immortal – they will never grow tired, be ill, feel pain or die.

Immortal life is the greatest of all gifts, and will be given to people who have waited faithfully for the Lord Jesus to return, trying to live in the way God wants. Such people pray, *“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”* (Matthew 6:10).

Summary

1. Sin is the root cause of all the world's troubles.
2. We all sin and so we all deserve to die – death is a punishment.
3. In His love God has provided the way by which people can have their sins forgiven and be saved from everlasting death.
4. We cannot save ourselves. We are saved by God's grace – salvation is a gift.
5. The way of salvation is through the Lord Jesus Christ and was made possible by his sacrifice.
6. Our part is to have faith – to believe and trust in God and His purpose.
7. Those who have real faith will be baptized and try hard to obey God by following the Lord Jesus.
8. Immortal life is God's gift to those who believe His Word and try hard to obey Him.

A verse to learn:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (*John 3:16*)

Verses to read:

The apostle Paul reminds believers that their sins had been forgiven through the death of Jesus.

“And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he (Jesus) has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.” (*Colossians 1:21-23*)

God’s great love and mercy is shown to sinners, who are saved by His grace if they show faith.

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses (sins), made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (*Ephesians 2:4-10*)

Also read Genesis 2:15 - 3:24.

God so loved the World

Questions on Chapter 6 – God so Loved the World

- 6A. Are the following right or wrong?
- a) We all sin.
 - b) Faith means 'belief'.
 - c) Adam died because he sinned.
 - d) Adam went to heaven when he died.
 - e) Jesus is the only person who never sinned.
 - f) Men and women are naturally good and only need to get better.
 - g) Men and women are lost and need to be converted and saved.
 - h) People who live good lives can earn God's salvation.
 - i) We all die because we are part of Adam's family.
- 6B. Why do we all deserve to die?
- 6C. What did Jesus do to make it possible for our sins to be removed?
- 6D. What does Jeremiah 17:9 say about human nature (ourselves)?
- 6E. How can we become part of God's family?
- 6F. What does believing in Jesus really mean?
- 6G. Isaiah 53 describes the sufferings and death of Jesus. You will need to read the chapter for yourself to answer this question.
- a) List three things it says about Jesus.
 - b) List two things it says about us.
 - c) When do you think it was written?

7

THE RETURN OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST TO THE EARTH

Reading: Acts 1

Two Thousand Years ago

Jesus had been crucified. His disciples (followers) were puzzled and disappointed. All their hopes had been placed in him, but now he lay dead in the tomb.

But after three days in the grave, God raised Jesus from the dead. His disciples did not believe that he was alive until they had actually seen him. Then they remembered what Jesus had said to them before his death:

“you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.” (*John 16:20*)

They were filled with joy when they saw their Lord and Master again!

“Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.” (*John 20:20*)

The Lord Jesus is taken into Heaven

Read the first eight verses of Acts 1. The apostles (Jesus’ special disciples) must have been so happy during the 40 days when the Lord Jesus was with them once again. At the end of those 40 days they were standing with their Lord on the Mount of Olives. Suddenly, the Lord Jesus was taken from them, upwards into heaven. They watched as he left the earth until he was hidden from their sight by a cloud. He had been taken from them again.

But this time they were neither puzzled nor disappointed. Luke tells us that the Lord Jesus “parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy” (Luke 24:51, 52).

The Secret of their Joy

Why were the apostles so joyful at this time? Partly because their sins had been forgiven through the death of Jesus – they would now preach this message of salvation for the rest of their lives. However, this was not the only reason for their joy. While the apostles were

The Return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Earth

watching the Lord Jesus go into heaven, two angels came to them with a message. They said,

Luke 21:27

“And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”
(Acts 1:11)

As the apostles went back to Jerusalem they knew without any doubt that Jesus Christ himself would come back to this earth to reign as king in God’s kingdom.

The resurrection of Jesus was God’s guarantee that this would happen.

Jesus spoke of his Return to this Earth

These events happened nearly 2,000 years ago and Christ has not returned yet; but he will come – he said so himself. In Luke 21 Jesus speaks about coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Notice that Jesus went to heaven in a cloud and the angels said that he would return in the same way (Acts 1:9-11).

Many of Jesus’ parables also speak of his second coming. The parable of the virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) tells the story of a bridegroom coming to his wedding. In the parable the bridegroom represents the Lord Jesus, and the story warns us that when he comes, there will be some who are not prepared for him. His return is certain and we need to be ready, but we do not know when he will return. Jesus ends the parable with this warning:

“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”
(Matthew 25:13)

The Apostle Peter preached about Christ’s Return

We read that Peter went to the temple in Jerusalem shortly after the Lord Jesus had gone into heaven. He spoke boldly about the death and resurrection of Jesus to the Jews who had put Jesus to death. In Acts 3:19-21 he says to them,

“Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.”

The Return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Earth

Many people today say that Christ will not return to the earth. But God Himself has promised to send the Lord Jesus, and we know that God will keep His promise. Peter says that God is waiting to give time for more people to repent:

“The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief ...” (2 Peter 3:9, 10)

The Apostle Paul wrote about Christ’s Return

In the New Testament there are two letters written by the apostle Paul to the believers at Thessalonica in Greece. In every chapter of these letters Paul mentions the return of the Lord Jesus from heaven. Here are two examples.

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>1 Thessalonians 4:16</p> <p>“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.”</p> | <p>2 Thessalonians 1:7-10</p> <p>“... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven ... inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus ... when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at among all who have believed.”</p> |
|--|--|

- a) 1 Thessalonians 4:16 speaks of the resurrection of the dead at the coming of Christ.
- b) 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 shows that some will be punished by Christ when he returns and others will welcome him.

What will happen when the Lord Jesus Christ returns?

The second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ will be a tremendous event. Many who are dead will be raised. The lives of everyone living at that time will be changed. It will be a very joyful time for some, but also a time when God brings His judgements on the world. This is sad but necessary. Without God’s judgements, sin and its effects will never be destroyed.

Christ will raise from the dead those who have known the Gospel. People who have died not knowing the Gospel will remain dead – they

The Return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Earth

will not be raised. This is because the Lord Jesus is coming to judge people on their response to the Gospel (Romans 2:16). People who have never heard the Gospel will not be judged on their response to it. If they have died, then they have gone for ever – they are “*like the beasts that perish*” (Psalm 49:20).

After the resurrection there will be two groups of people on the earth:

1. people who have known the Gospel (both those who were raised from the dead and those who are living when Christ returns)
2. people living at the time who do not know the Gospel.

We will look at what will happen to these groups.

People who have known the Gospel

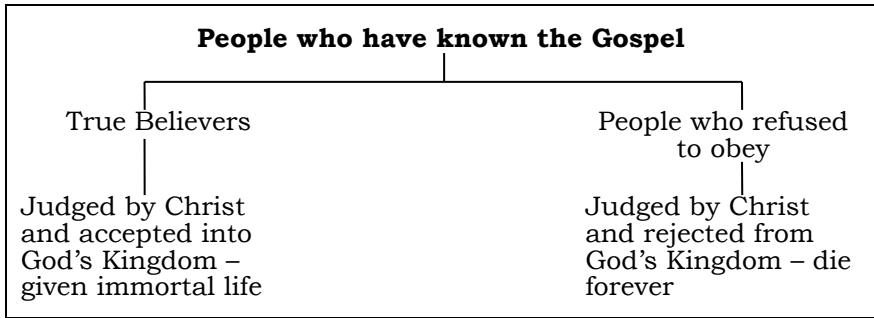
Jesus Christ will summons to judgement everyone who has known the Gospel (both those resurrected and those alive when he returns).

(a) True believers will be given immortal life – Baptized believers who have tried faithfully to follow the example of the Lord Jesus will receive a place in God’s kingdom on earth. There will be great joy. They will be changed to share a nature like God Himself – a nature that cannot sin and cannot die, and will have no pain or suffering.

(b) People who have known but refused to obey the Gospel will be rejected – These are people who have known the Gospel but decided not to follow the Lord Jesus. They will not be given a place in God’s kingdom because they chose to ignore the Bible message. They will depart from the judgement in shame, knowing they have not been able to share in the blessings of God’s kingdom. They will then die for ever.

The Old Testament prophet Daniel speaks of the reward of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked:

“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” (*Daniel 12:2*)



People alive when Christ returns who do not know the Gospel

In His mercy God will allow some people from all nations to live as mortal people in His kingdom when Christ reigns as king. Others will be punished and die.

1. The Jews

(a) Some of the Jews will accept Christ as their king – Jesus Christ will come back at a time when the nation of Israel is in a desperate state. They will be surrounded by enemies on all sides. The Lord Jesus Christ, with his power, will overcome those who are fighting against them. Then many of the Jews will realise at last that Jesus really is their promised king. They will repent of their nation's sin in crucifying him and gladly accept him as their king. The prophet Zechariah says, "... when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn" (Zechariah 12:10).

These Jews will be allowed to live in God's kingdom as mortal people when Jesus Christ reigns as king. They will live in the land of Israel and become the chief of the nations. Israel's capital city, Jerusalem, will become the capital of the world. It will be the centre of worship for all the people who live in God's kingdom. It will be a time of great happiness for the Jews, after all their suffering.

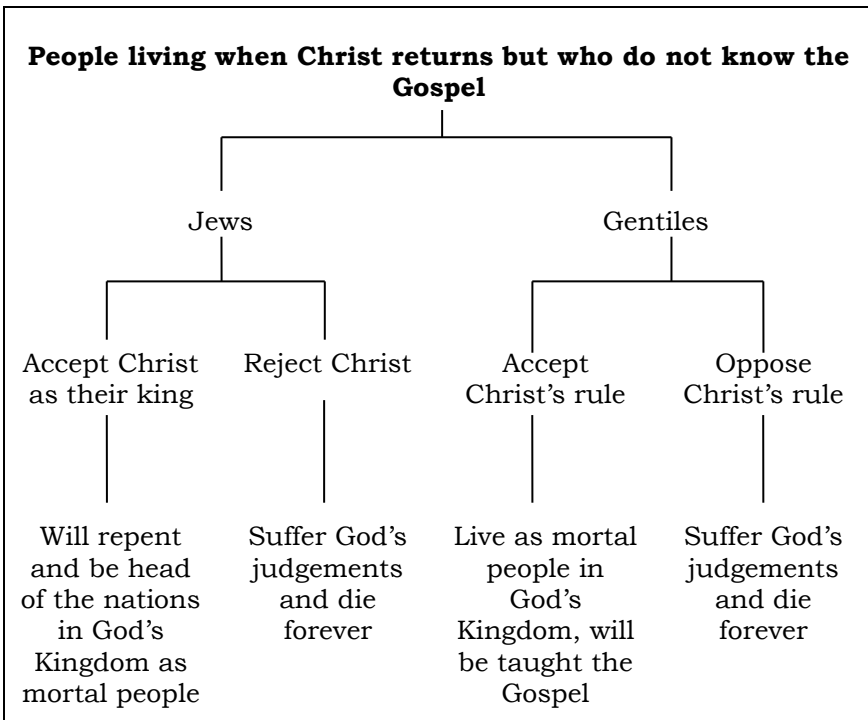
As mortal people they will still have human nature and be able to sin, and they will still grow old and die. They will have the opportunity to accept the Lord Jesus as their saviour, and some will later be given immortal life.

(b) Jews who refuse to accept Christ as their king will be punished – The people of Israel who reject the Lord Jesus Christ when he returns will receive God's judgements and be destroyed. They will never live again.

2. The Gentiles

(a) Some Gentiles will accept Christ's rule – God will allow these Gentiles to live as mortal people in His kingdom when Jesus Christ reigns as king. They will be taught God's ways by the Lord Jesus and the immortal believers. They will have the opportunity to accept the Lord Jesus as their saviour. Some will later be given immortal life.

(b) The Gentiles who do not want Christ to rule over them will be punished – The Gentile nations who do not want the Lord Jesus Christ to rule over them when he returns to set up God's kingdom on earth will fight against him. God's judgements will be poured out on these people and there will be a time of great trouble on the earth. After suffering the wrath of God for a short time, they will be completely destroyed. They will not suffer in fire for ever – this is not Bible teaching as you will learn from later chapters.



What will happen to you and me?

We have a choice.

- If we are baptized into the Lord Jesus Christ (Chapter 31 is about baptism) and are faithful to him now, then he will accept us into God's kingdom at his return. He will change

The Return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Earth

us to be like himself – we will live for ever and be unable to sin.

- If we are not baptized or are not faithful to him now, then he will reject us at his return and we will die for ever. Part of our punishment is that we shall see the glory of God's kingdom before we die but will never be part of it.

Summary

1. Jesus Christ will return to the earth. When he comes, he will give true believers immortal life and a place in God's kingdom.
2. People who have known but refused to obey the Gospel will be rejected and die.
3. Jews who are alive and accept Christ as their king when he returns will be allowed to live in God's kingdom as mortal people. The Lord Jesus will make them the chief of the nations. The Jews who reject him will be punished and die.
4. Gentiles who accept Christ's rule will be allowed to live in God's kingdom as mortal people. They will be taught God's ways by the Lord Jesus and immortal believers.
5. The Gentile nations who fight against the Lord Jesus will be destroyed.

A verse to learn:

“The angels said: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” *(Acts 1:11)*

Verses to read:

Matthew 25:1-13, 1 Thessalonians 4.

The Return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Earth

Questions on Chapter 7 - The Return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Earth

- 7A. What happened to Jesus on the third day after his death?
- 7B. What did the angels say as the Lord Jesus was taken into heaven?
- 7C. Approximately how long ago was Jesus taken into heaven?
- 7D. Give a verse to show that true believers will be raised from the dead when Christ Jesus returns.
- 7E. Give at least two ways in which we can prepare for the coming of the Lord Jesus.
- 7F.
 - a) When Christ returns, will Jews realise their nation's sin in crucifying him?
 - b) Will Jews then realise that he is their promised king?

8

SIGNS OF THE COMING OF JESUS CHRIST

Reading: Luke 21

The Lord Jesus will return to the Earth

The Bible clearly shows that the Lord Jesus Christ will return to the earth. His second coming is part of God's plan for the world. He will set up God's kingdom on earth. He will be 'King of Kings', ruling the world from his throne in Jerusalem in the land of Israel. This was the promise that God made to the Jews in Old Testament times, and it is the message of the New Testament. The early followers of the Lord Jesus looked forward to the day when:

“the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.” (*1 Thessalonians 4:16*)

The second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ will be an amazing event that will change the lives of everyone who is living on the earth at that time.

When will the Lord Jesus return?

We do not know the exact date of Christ's return. Jesus himself said,

“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.” (*Matthew 24:36*)

When Jesus told his disciples that the great temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed, they asked, “*Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?*” (*Matthew 24:3*)

The temple was indeed destroyed about 40 years later (AD 70), when the Roman army attacked Jerusalem and killed many thousands of Jews. In his answer, however, Jesus did not give any date for this destruction but warned his disciples of events that would happen just before it began. To people who knew his words and thought carefully about them, his prophecy acted as a warning so that they could escape from Jerusalem before the terrible slaughter of its inhabitants began.

Signs of the Coming of Jesus Christ

As well as the warning signs about the destruction of the temple, Jesus also spoke of signs that would happen in the world before his return to the earth. He did this so that the believers living at this time will be ready when he comes. He ended his answer by saying,

“So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates.” (*Matthew 24:33*)

We believe that we are living at the time close to Christ’s return. The Bible calls this time period ‘the last days’. Just as the disciples escaped the slaughter in Jerusalem because they acted upon Jesus’ words, so we need to watch for the signs of his second coming and prepare ourselves.

What Signs show that we are living in the Last Days?

1. Signs about the Jews

The Bible says that in the last days before Christ’s return:

- a) The Jews will return to the land of Israel.
- b) The Jews will become a nation again in their own land.
- c) Jerusalem will be freed from its enemies.

(a) The Jews were scattered among the nations of the world in AD 135, about 100 years after they had put Jesus to death. From that time, for nearly 2,000 years, they had no country of their own. But about 150 years ago the Jews began returning to their land. This fulfils Bible prophecy:

“For behold, days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah, says the LORD, and I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall take possession of it.” (*Jeremiah 30:3*)

(b) In May 1948 the State of Israel was set up, even though many nations were strongly against the idea. So Israel once again became a nation in its own land. Long before the birth of Jesus, God had said that this would happen:

“Behold, I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all around, and bring them to their own land. And I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel.” (*Ezekiel 37:21, 22*)

(c) Jerusalem is now the capital city of the State of Israel.

Read the words of Jesus in Luke 21:24 about the scattering of the Jewish people. He says that Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentile are fulfilled (anyone who is not a Jew by birth is a Gentile). For almost 2,000 years other nations controlled Jerusalem and very few Jews lived there. When the State of Israel was formed in 1948, its capital was the coastal city of Tel

Luke 21:24

“They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”

Aviv. However, in June 1967 the Jews fought the Six-Day War and partially freed Jerusalem from Gentile nations. This allowed Jerusalem to become the capital city. These events show that the times of the Gentiles are nearly fulfilled (at an end), and they are a clear sign that the coming of the Lord Jesus is near!

2. Signs in our World

(a) People not interested in God

Most people do not want to hear the truth written in the Bible. They do not want to know about Jesus Christ returning to set up God’s kingdom on earth. They prefer to go their own way. They listen to anyone who will tell them what they want to hear. The apostle Paul tells us:

“For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.” (2 Timothy 4:3,4).

The apostle Peter said that in the last days before the return of the Lord Jesus people would mock God’s Word. He said:

“that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing (mocking), following their own sinful desires. They will say, ‘Where is the promise of his (Jesus’) coming?’” (2 Peter 3:3, 4)

This is what people today say. We are in the last days!

(b) Falling moral standards

The apostle Paul described what the world would be like in the last days:

Signs of the Coming of Jesus Christ

“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.” (2 Timothy 3:1-4)

It is like this today. This is a direct result of people ignoring God and His laws. People lack self-control. They are greedy (the Bible calls this ‘covetousness’). They do not care how much others suffer as long as they have the riches or power they want.

(c) Troubles that world leaders cannot solve

Jesus knew that there would be huge problems in the world before his return. Look at Luke 21:25-28. Jesus talks about signs in the sun, moon and stars. These could be literal, but the heavenly bodies are sometimes used in the Bible to represent governments and organisations in our world. Similarly, the roaring of the sea in this passage could be literal, like the tsunami that killed thousands in December 2004, but it can also refer to unrest amongst the nations of the world (see Isaiah 57:20,21).

Jesus said that the nations would be in perplexity. The word ‘perplexity’ means ‘with no way out’ – and that is true of the problems the world faces today. People cannot find a way out of them. There are:

- problems of pollution
- increasing energy demands and decreasing natural resources
- violence and wars throughout the world
- bringing suffering and death
- problems of terrorism and suicide bombers
- diseases like AIDS which affect huge numbers of people
- millions of people starving, while others have plenty to eat.

Jesus also said that just before his return people would be fainting with fear at what was happening to the world. There is no doubt that more and more people are worried about the future of the earth and can see no solution to its problems.

So at a time when there seems to be no answer to all these problems, the Son of Man (the Lord Jesus himself) will return with power and great glory (Luke 21:27). We are very close to the time when the Lord Jesus Christ will come!

The prophet Daniel spoke of our time as *“a time of trouble, such as never has been”*, and we know that this is a true picture of the world today.

Note that the *“time of trouble”* in this passage must refer to the last days before the return of Christ, because the passage also speaks of the resurrection of the dead. This is what the Lord Jesus will do when he returns from heaven. These verses show that the Lord’s return is very near.

Israel and the Nations

The Jews have always been God’s witnesses (Isaiah 43:10) and an important part of His plan with the world. Israel is often in the news and we should watch what is happening there because significant changes have to take place in Israel immediately before the Lord Jesus returns. The modern State of Israel is one of our most important signs today.

Israel is surrounded by enemies. Many Arab nations want to completely destroy the Jewish nation and re-possess the land which they consider to be theirs. There is constantly trouble and unrest on Israel’s borders.

Luke 21:25-28

And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.

Daniel 12:1,2

And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time ... and many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

The Arabs believe that the land of Israel belongs to them, but long ago God promised it to the Jews. The struggle between Jews and Arabs continues.

Eventually all nations will fight against Israel. Zechariah 14:2-4 is a Bible prophecy that has not yet happened, but when it does, the Lord Jesus will return and help his people, the Jews. At that time the Lord Jesus will also give immortal life to people from all nations who have

Signs of the Coming of Jesus Christ

faithfully prepared for his second coming. Since this time is near we need to be ready, as we read in 2 Peter 3:11:

“Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness ...?”

That is a question we all have to answer for ourselves.

Summary

1. We do not know the exact date when Christ will return from heaven to the earth, but there are many signs to show that his coming is near. Here are some of them.
2. The return of the Jews to their land.
3. The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.
4. Jerusalem – the capital of Israel since 1967.
5. People not interested in God.
6. Falling moral standards.
7. World problems.
8. People fearful of the future.
9. Israel’s enemies waiting to attack her.

A verse to learn:

“You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” (*Luke 12:40*)

Verses to read:

“Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?” And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they

will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.”

“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

“For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. So, if they say to you, ‘Look, he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.”

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

“Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

(Matthew 24:1-14, 24-27, 29-30, 44)

Questions on Chapter 8 – Signs of the Coming of Jesus Christ

- 8A. Where will the Lord Jesus set up God's kingdom?
- 8B. What do you think is the most important sign to show that the Lord Jesus will soon return to this earth? Explain why you think that it is the most important.
- 8C. Which Bible passages given in the Chapter show the following?
- a) The Jews would return to their land.
 - b) There would be a time (like our times!) when most people will not listen to sound Bible teaching.
 - c) Only God knows exactly when the Lord Jesus will return.
- 8D. What does Luke 12:40 warn us about? (It is written out in the Chapter.)
- 8E. What is the capital city of Israel?
- 8F. Who are the Gentiles?
- 8G. a) What does the Bible word 'covetousness' mean?
b) In what ways can people be covetous today?
- 8H. What sort of people did Paul say there would be in the last days?

9

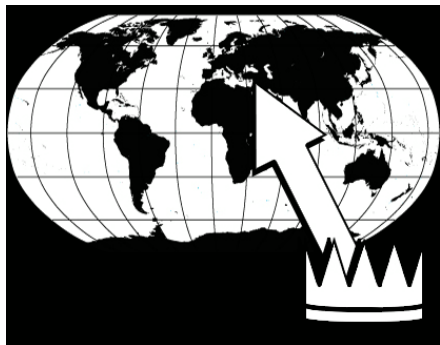
YOUR KINGDOM COME

Reading: 1 Chronicles 29

“Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven”

How many times have you said or heard these words? You will find them in Matthew 6:10. They are part of the prayer which Jesus taught his disciples. They are a prayer that God’s kingdom may come, and that His will may be done on earth as it is always done in heaven. We learn from these words that God’s kingdom will be here on this earth.

A Land for God’s Kingdom



Thousands of years ago God chose the land of Israel to be the centre of His future kingdom. Jerusalem is the capital city of Israel and it will be the capital of the world when Jesus Christ reigns as king on this earth. Jesus himself said,

“But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of

God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.” (*Matthew 5:34,35*)

Some of these words are taken from Psalm 48, which shows that Jesus read the Old Testament – and so should we! Verse 2 of the same Psalm says:

“...beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great King...”

Mount Zion is the hill in the city of Jerusalem on which King David’s palace was built. Notice that it is described as “*the joy of all the earth*”.

In Psalm 2 God says, “*As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill*” (verse 6). This Psalm is a prophecy of the time when Jesus Christ will reign from Mount Zion.

Your Kingdom Come

2 Chronicles 6:6 shows that God chose to place His name in Jerusalem:

“...I (God) have chosen Jerusalem that my name may be there.”

See also Isaiah 62:1-7 and 65:17-25, where God sets out His purpose with Jerusalem.

The Kingdom of God existed on Earth in Old Testament Times

Jesus taught his disciples to pray for God's future kingdom on earth. But the Kingdom of God also existed on earth in Old Testament times. Of course, it was not like the wonderful kingdom for which Jesus prayed. It did not have the wonderful leadership of the Lord Jesus Christ and its people were rarely faithful to God and His laws. This Old Testament Kingdom of God on earth was the Kingdom of Israel. David, its second king, said these words,

“And of all my sons (for the LORD has given me many sons) he has chosen Solomon my son to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel.” (*1 Chronicles 28:5*)

This shows that, although the Old Testament Kingdom of Israel had human kings, it was God's kingdom.

A kingdom has:

- a people
- a land where the people live
- laws to govern the people
- a king to rule over the people.

The Kingdom of Israel was God's kingdom because:

- God had chosen the people of Israel to be His own special people (Exodus 19:5)
- God had given them the land of Israel for a home
- God had given the laws by which they were to be governed
- God was their true King (although human kings ruled for God).

King David clearly understood that the Kingdom of Israel was God's kingdom:

“Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all.” (*1 Chronicles 29:11*)

The prophet Isaiah wrote that God was the true King of Israel:

“Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.’” (*Isaiah 44:6*)

Because God was the true King, Solomon is described as ruling from God's throne:

“Then Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD as king in place of David his father. And he prospered, and all Israel obeyed him.” (1 Chronicles 29:23)

The Kingdom of Israel had some righteous kings, like David. They realised that it was God's kingdom and that they were ruling for Him and not in their own right. They encouraged the people to serve Him.

One purpose of God's kingdom on earth in Old Testament times was to show the surrounding nations the benefits and blessings of serving the true God. During the reign of Solomon, the Queen of Sheba visited him and said,

“Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and set you on his throne as king for the LORD your God! Because your God loved Israel and would establish them for ever, he has made you king over them, that you may execute justice and righteousness.” (2 Chronicles 9:8)

Notice that the Queen of Sheba also recognised that God was the true King over Israel, and Solomon was ruling for Him.

God's Kingdom overthrown

After Solomon, hundreds of years passed with king after king reigning from Jerusalem, all of them descendants of David. Some were righteous kings, following God's ways, and others were very wicked, worshipping the idols of the surrounding nations. With the benefit of God's laws and secure in their own land, God's people should have been godly people, but much of the time they failed. Instead of being an example to the surrounding nations, they copied their wicked practices.

Eventually God's people were so wicked, and the king who reigned in Jerusalem was so evil, that God could not allow the kingdom to continue any longer. Ezekiel 21:25, 26 refers to Zedekiah, the last king, and shows that he would be punished and his crown removed:

“And you, O profane wicked one, prince of Israel, whose day has come, the time of your final punishment, thus says the Lord GOD: Remove the turban and take off the crown. Things shall not remain as they are.”

In the next verse God says that the kingdom will become a ruin and no longer exist (“*this also shall not be*”). This was the end of God's kingdom on earth in the past:

Your Kingdom Come

“A ruin, ruin, ruin I will make it (the kingdom). This also shall not be, until he comes, the one to whom judgement belongs, and I will give it to him.” (*Ezekiel 21:27*)

However, God also says in this verse that He will give the kingdom to someone else at a future time. This means that God will one day provide a king to restore His kingdom on earth. From the day that Zedekiah was removed from the throne, right up to the present day, there has never been a king of Israel ruling in Jerusalem.

This verse does not give us the name of the king who will restore the Kingdom of Israel. It simply tells us that eventually there will be a man who has the right to be king and God will give the kingdom to him.

Jesus Christ, the Coming King!

In Luke 1 we read that the throne in Jerusalem will be given to the Lord Jesus Christ – he is the rightful king. Verses 31-33 contain the words spoken by an angel to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Speaking of Jesus before his birth, the angel said in verse 32,

“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.
And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David
...”

The Lord Jesus has a right to the throne of the Kingdom of God for two reasons:

- he was God’s Son
- his mother, Mary, was descended from King David.

When the Lord Jesus returns he will restore God’s kingdom to Israel and reign with righteous judgement. God’s future kingdom will be the restored Kingdom of Israel.

God’s Kingdom and Ourselves

If the Kingdom of God is based on Israel, how is it relevant to Gentiles? The future Kingdom of God will indeed be centred on Israel but will cover the whole earth – that includes the country where you live.

There are many misunderstandings about the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ in the future Kingdom of God. It is essential to realise that:

- Jesus Christ will reign as king on this earth
- His throne will be the throne of David in Jerusalem

- Jerusalem will be the capital city of the Kingdom of God
- The Kingdom of God will be centred on Israel but will cover the whole earth.

This is why Jesus Christ is coming back to the earth. God tells us that His purpose is with people on the earth:

“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.” (*Habakkuk 2:14*)

Scripture does not teach that people go to heaven when they die, or that the Kingdom of God is in heaven. God does, of course, rule in heaven, but His purpose is to send the Lord Jesus to the earth to rule the world from Jerusalem. He will reign over Jews and people from all nations. The faithful people from all ages will be given immortal life.

Jesus claimed to be a king. Pilate asked him at his trial, “*So you are a king?*”, and Jesus replied, “*You say that I am a king*” (John 18:37). This is the Jewish way of saying, “Yes, I am”. Over Jesus’ cross was written, “*This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews*” (Matthew 27:37, John 19:19). His enemies meant to mock him, but what they said was true.

The Kingdom of God is at the centre of God’s plan of salvation. The Gospel that Jesus preached is the good news of the Kingdom of God:

“Soon afterward he (Jesus) went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God.” (*Luke 8:1*)

The good news is that the Lord Jesus will return to restore the Kingdom of God on earth.

So we pray, “*Your Kingdom come*”, and we also pray that when Christ Jesus returns, he may say to us:

“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” (*Matthew 25:34*)

| | God’s Kingdom in the Past | God’s Kingdom in the Future |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Capital city | Jerusalem | Jerusalem |

Your Kingdom Come

| | | |
|------------------------------|---|--|
| Land | Israel | Will cover the whole earth |
| People | The people of Israel (all mortal) | The immortal believers and mortal people from all nations of the world |
| Ruler(s) (for God) | Saul, David and all the kings descended from David | The Lord Jesus Christ, with immortal believers |
| Length of the kingdom | It lasted for about 500 years – the last king was Zedekiah, about 600 years before the birth of Jesus | Christ will reign for 1,000 years and then deliver the kingdom to God |

Summary

1. The Kingdom of God existed on earth in the past. This was the Old Testament Kingdom of Israel.
2. God was the true King (although human kings ruled for God).
3. God brought the Kingdom of Israel to an end but will restore it when Christ returns.
4. God's future kingdom will be the restored Kingdom of Israel. It will be centred on the land of Israel but will cover the whole earth.
5. The Lord Jesus Christ will reign as king from David's throne in Jerusalem over Jews and people from all nations.
6. God's faithful people from all ages will be given immortal life and will help the Lord Jesus in his great work of ruling the world.

A verse to learn:

"Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever." (*Revelation 11:15*)

Verses to read:

Samuel reminded Israel that God was their true King.

"And when you saw that Nahash the king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, 'No, but a king shall reign over us', when the LORD your God was your king." (*1 Samuel 12:12*)

Also read Isaiah 35 – this chapter gives a picture of the future kingdom.

Your Kingdom Come

Questions on Chapter 9 – Your Kingdom Come

- 9A. God had a kingdom on earth in the past.
- a) Where was it?
 - b) Who was its true King who gave the laws?
- 9B. God will have a kingdom in the future.
- a) Where will it be?
 - b) Who will be its king?
 - c) Which city will be its capital?
 - d) When will it be?
- 9C. The prayer that Jesus taught his disciples says, “Your will be done”.
- a) What do you think is meant by God’s will?
 - b) How can we do God’s will in our lives?
- 9D. Where is Mount Zion?
- 9E. 1 Chronicles 29:23 says that Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord. Why was it called the throne of the Lord?

10

GOD'S VIEW OF HISTORY

Reading: Daniel 2

The Bible as God's History Book

God does not see things in the same way as we do. He says in Isaiah 55:8, 9:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

God does not view history as we do. People may be impressed by powerful nations whereas God may consider them of little importance.

The Bible is God's history book and the Jews are His people. God's plan of salvation is centred on the Jews, although it extends to all nations. It is therefore not surprising that the Old Testament tells us about the history of the Jews. The New Testament tells us about the life of the Lord Jesus Christ and about the beginning of the Christian church.

People in the Old Testament

Here is a brief look at some of the people in the Old Testament.

ADAM was the first man. He was created by God. Adam disobeyed God and brought sin and death into the world (Genesis 3). Ever since, all people (except Jesus) have disobeyed God in one way or another, and all have died.

NOAH lived about 1,000 years after Adam was created. The people living at the time of Noah were so wicked that God sent a flood and destroyed them all – only righteous Noah and his family escaped, because they obeyed God (Genesis 6).

ABRAHAM was told by God to leave his home in Ur (in the south of modern Iraq) and move to a country that God would show him. God did not tell Abraham where he was eventually going to live, but he obeyed, knowing that God would guide him on his journey. God was pleased with Abraham's faith and obedience and made special promises to him (Genesis 12). The Bible describes Abraham as the friend of God.

God's View of History

ISAAC was the son of Abraham and Sarah. He was born by a miracle when Sarah was too old to have children (Genesis 21).

JACOB was Isaac's son. God changed his name to Israel, which means 'prince with God'. Jacob had twelve sons. They became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. Abraham's descendants through Isaac and Jacob are the people of Israel (also known as the Hebrews, or Israelites), later called the Jews.

JOSEPH was one of the twelve sons of Jacob. His brothers were jealous of him and sold him to traders, and he became a slave in Egypt. He faced many trials but God blessed him, and he eventually became head of the king of Egypt's government (Genesis 41:39, 40). Later, all of Jacob's family joined Joseph in Egypt (Genesis 46). Many years after Joseph's death, because Jacob's descendants had become a huge number of people, the Egyptians began to see them as a threat and made them slaves.

MOSES was born in Egypt during this time of slavery. His parents were Jews but he was brought up by the daughter of the king of Egypt. God used Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and through the wilderness (a barren and deserted land) to the land of Canaan, which He had promised them as a home. During the journey God formed the Israelites into a nation and gave them wise laws.

The people of Israel did not trust in God to help them conquer the promised land of Canaan. As a punishment God made them wander in the wilderness for 40 years, until all those who lacked faith had died.

JOSHUA led the new generation of Israelites into Canaan, the land that God had promised them as a home. Canaan is now known as Israel.

Judges rule the People

At last the people of Israel were living in the land of Canaan. God was their King and He provided judges to rule over them for Him. The nation often disobeyed God's laws and He punished them by sending other nations to fight them. When they were in trouble, the people returned to God, and He saved them through one of the judges. Many times the nation turned away from God, and many times He showed His love by rescuing them. Nehemiah 9:28 says, "*many times you (God) delivered them according to your mercies*".

The People want a King

After about 400 years in the land, the people of Israel asked for a human king. They did not want God – they wanted a king they could see, like the other nations.

SAUL was the first human king. He did not please God.

DAVID, the second king, was from the tribe of Judah and reigned from Jerusalem. He wrote many of the Psalms. Acts 13:22 describes him as a man after God's heart because he tried to do God's will in his life. Because David pleased God, he was given special promises, to be fulfilled by the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Samuel 7).

SOLOMON was the next king to reign for God. He wrote many of the wise sayings found in the book of Proverbs, and built the great temple in Jerusalem.

A Divided Kingdom

After Solomon, the Kingdom of Israel was divided into two parts. The ten tribes in the north became the northern kingdom, and kept the name Israel. The two other tribes formed the southern kingdom. It became known as Judah, because all of its kings came from the tribe of Judah – they were descendants of David and Solomon.

The people of Israel (the northern kingdom) grew so wicked that God brought the Assyrian army against them. They were taken into captivity and then scattered. They never returned to their own land as a nation.

Later, the people of Judah (the southern kingdom) were taken captive to Babylon, because they too had turned away from God. From that time, even to the present day, there has been no king in Jerusalem. After 70 years of captivity in Babylon, the people of the southern kingdom were allowed to return to their own land. However, other nations ruled over them, including the Romans, who were in control in the time of Jesus.

The New Testament

About 400 years after the close of the Old Testament, God provided His own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus was rejected by many of his own people, the Jews. Before he was led away to be crucified they cried, "*His blood be on us and on our children!*" (Matthew 27:25). The Jews could not have committed a worse crime. God later used the Romans to punish them. This resulted in the Jewish people being taken from their land and scattered among the nations of the world. They remained scattered until about 150 years ago, when they started to return to their land.

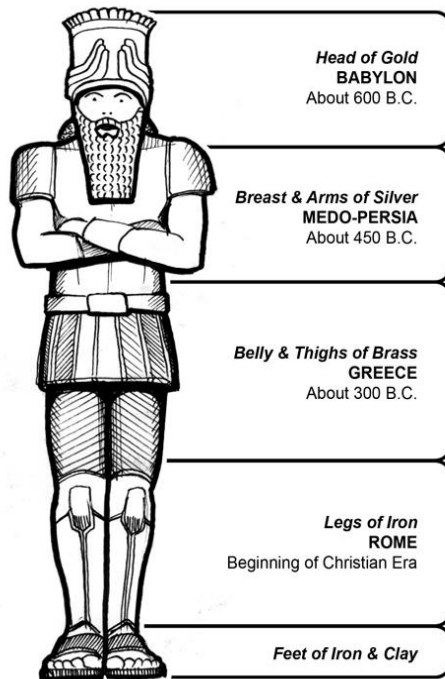
Nebuchadnezzar's Dream – A Vision of the Future (Daniel 2)

The Bible contains a prophecy which spans history from the time of the Babylonian Empire (BC 600), through to our own day and beyond to the time when God's kingdom is restored on earth. The prophecy shows that God controls world events and the time will come when the "kingdom of men" (Daniel 4:17) will give place to the Kingdom of God.

A young Jewish prince called **DANIEL** was taken captive to Babylon when the southern kingdom of Judah was coming to an end. One night Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had a very strange dream. This dream was a prophecy given by God, who showed Daniel its meaning.

In his dream the king saw a great image, perhaps like the one shown here. The image gives a picture of five periods of history, which would follow one after the other. Daniel explained to the king of Babylon that the head of gold represented his Babylonian empire (Daniel 2:37, 38).

Nebuchadnezzar was told that after his empire would come a less powerful empire, represented by the silver breast and arms of the image in the dream. We know that this was the empire of the Medes and Persians. A third great empire would follow, represented by the brass stomach and thighs. This refers to the Greek Empire. The legs of iron refer to the Roman Empire which came to dominate the world. The Roman Empire spread further than any of the others. It was during the Roman Empire that Jesus was born, and Roman soldiers were involved in his crucifixion. A few hundred years later the Roman Empire broke up and there has never since been an empire to dominate this area of the world and rule over the Jewish nation.



History books confirm that four great empires followed each other just as described in Daniel 2. This remarkable prophecy shows that we can trust the Bible.

The time from the end of the Roman Empire until our time, a period of nearly 2,000 years, is represented in the dream by the feet of the image – a mixture of iron and clay, strong nations and weak nations. They are divided and separate, just as bits of iron will not mix with clay. We are living in this time – a time of divisions – nations can agree on very little.

In the dream Nebuchadnezzar saw a small stone hitting the feet and smashing the image to powder. The powder was blown away in the wind, leaving only the stone. The stone then became a great mountain that filled the whole earth. Daniel 2:44, 45 explains what is to happen in the time of the feet (our times!):

“And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold.”

The image represents the kingdom of men. The stone “*cut from a mountain by no human hand*” represents the Lord Jesus Christ, who had no human father. When he returns to the earth, he will end the rule of all the kingdoms of the world and restore God's kingdom, which will fill the whole earth.

Much of Nebuchadnezzar's dream has come to pass – and we can be quite sure that the last part will also be fulfilled. Notice that the future kingdom will be here on this earth.

Summary

1. The Old Testament tells us about the history of God's people, the Jews.
2. The New Testament tells us about Jesus and the beginning of the Christian church.
3. The prophecy of Daniel 2 describes four great empires that followed one after the other, followed by a time of strong and weak nations. We live in the time represented by the feet of the image, and are waiting for the Lord Jesus Christ (represented by the stone) to return.
4. Christ will bring to an end the kingdom of men and restore God's kingdom, which will fill the whole earth.

A verse to learn:

“And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever.” *(Daniel 2:44)*

Verses to read:

The people of Israel are God's chosen nation.

“For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” *(Deuteronomy 7:6-8)*

The apostle Paul gave this history lesson.

“The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. And for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. And after destroying seven

nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance. All this took about 450 years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.' Of this man's offspring God has brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus, as he promised."
(Acts 13:17-23)

Also read Nehemiah 9:7-31, Acts 7.

Questions on Chapter 10 – God's View of History

- 10A. Pick the right person! The names can be found in Chapter 10.
- a) He was saved from drowning because he obeyed God.
 - b) He led the people of Israel out of Egypt.
 - c) There is a country named after him.
 - d) He was the first human king of Israel.
 - e) He was a king of Babylon who had a dream about future world history.
 - f) He left his house and country because God told him to do so.
 - g) Immediately after his reign the Kingdom of Israel was divided into two parts.
 - h) He was the first man to disobey God.
 - i) He is described as a man after God's heart.
- 10B. Nebuchadnezzar saw an image in his dream.
- a) Which part refers to our time?
 - b) The image was destroyed by the stone. What does this mean?
 - c) The stone grew and filled the whole earth. What does this represent?

11

THE KINGDOM OF GOD – PEACE ON EARTH

Reading: Isaiah 35

Peace on Earth – when?

The United Nations building in New York displays this Bible quotation from Isaiah 2:4:

‘They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.’

This verse is one of several in Scripture that describe a time of lasting peace. Yet there has never been any real and lasting peace on earth. Indeed, there never will be true peace until people obey God. While they continue to go their own way there will always be trouble. Real and lasting peace will only come on earth when the Lord Jesus returns and restores the Kingdom of God.

Isaiah 9:6 is a prophecy about the Lord Jesus Christ and describes him as ‘The Prince of Peace’. The following verse says,

“Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end.”

Zechariah 9:10 tells us that God will destroy weapons of war and Christ will bring peace to the whole world:

“I (*God*) will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he (*Christ*) shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.”

The Extent of God’s Kingdom

This verse from Zechariah shows that the Lord Jesus Christ will reign over the whole earth. In Chapter 10 we learned that a small stone smashed to powder the image in Daniel 2 and grew into a large mountain that filled the whole earth. This represents Christ returning to the earth, ending the rule of human governments and restoring God’s kingdom, which will fill the whole earth.

In Psalm 2:8 God speaks of Jesus: “Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.”

Psalm 122:6, 7

“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! May they be secure who love you! Peace be within your walls and security within your towers!”

The Lord Jesus will rule the whole world from Jerusalem. At present it is a troubled city. We are encouraged to pray for its peace – the time when Jesus Christ will reign as king in “*the city of the great King*” (Matthew 5:35).

God’s Plan for His Kingdom

Life will be very different for men and women who are accepted into God’s kingdom. They will be given a nature like God’s – they will be incorruptible

(unable to sin) and immortal (unable to die).

However, we learned in Chapter 7 that some mortal people will live in God’s kingdom when Jesus Christ is king. These will be people living at the time of Christ’s return who do not know the Gospel. In His mercy God has set aside this time so that they can learn about salvation through the Lord Jesus. If they repent, accept the Lord Jesus as their saviour and live faithful lives during this time, they too will eventually be given immortal life.

This period of time when Christ Jesus reigns as king will last for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:4, 6). We call this period the Millennium (the word ‘millennium’ means 1,000 years, just as ‘century’ can mean 100 years). The Millennium will be a wonderful time, particularly for those who are immortal, but it will not be perfect. The mortal people will still have human nature and be able to sin, and they will still grow old and die.

After the Millennium

From the beginning of time God’s purpose has been to fill His beautiful earth with faithful people who have chosen to serve Him and are free from sin. This purpose will be accomplished at the end of the Millennium. The world will then be perfect – no human nature will remain, and sin and death will have been removed. Only immortal believers will be privileged to live after the 1,000 years (those who were given immortal life at Christ’s return, as well as those who accepted God’s salvation during the Millennium). Christ will deliver the kingdom to God. This will be the time when God will live among sinless people for ever. The Bible describes this as a time when God will be “*all in all*” (1 Corinthians 15:28).

So there will be two very different phases (or ages) after the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to this earth:

- the 1,000 year reign of Christ – the Millennium
- the time after this, when all sin and death will be removed – God will live with immortal believers for ever in a perfect world.

The People living during the Millennium

1. True believers given immortal life at Christ's return – They will rule the world with Christ as members of his government. They will also teach the mortal people God's ways. Revelation 5:9-11 describes these immortal believers praising Christ:

“And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.’”

2. Jews living at Christ's return who accept him as their king when they see him – These Jews will be allowed to live in God's kingdom as mortal people. They will live in the land of Israel and become the chief of the nations (Deuteronomy 28:13). They will be greatly blessed and will be taught God's ways. The twelve apostles will govern them for Christ (Matthew 19:28, Luke 22:28-30).

3. People from other nations (Gentiles) who are alive at Christ's return and who accept Christ as king – They will be allowed to live as mortal people at this time and learn about God. Isaiah 2:2, 3 says:

“It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths’. For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”

Jerusalem – the World Capital

The Lord Jesus will reign as king from the city of Jerusalem, which will become the capital of the world. The passage above shows that the Word of God will go out from Jerusalem throughout the whole

The Kingdom of God – Peace on Earth

earth. It will bring love, joy and peace for all who listen and obey the king.

Christ's government will be perfect, ruling the nations with righteousness, wisdom and authority. Our world's problems, like poverty, oppression and starvation, will be solved. Wickedness amongst the mortal population will be brought under control:

“For when your judgements are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.” (*Isaiah 26:9*)

The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah confirms that Jerusalem will become the capital city of the whole world and shows that sin will be restrained:

“At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem, and they shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart.” (*Jeremiah 3:17*)

Life during the Millennium

1. Plenty of food for everyone – The curse on the ground, which God gave because of Adam's sin (Genesis 3:17-19), will be removed and the earth will become wonderfully fruitful. Psalm 72:16 says:

“May there be abundance of grain in the land; on the tops of the mountains may it wave; may its fruit be like Lebanon...”

Mountain-tops are usually bare. If there are crops on the top of the mountains, there will be great abundance in the valleys! Even the deserts will be fertile in those days:

“...the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing.” (*Isaiah 35:1, 2*)

2. Healing of mind and body – Far better health will accompany this blessing. When Jesus lived on the earth 2,000 years ago, he used God's power to heal many who were sick. In God's kingdom this power will be seen again. Isaiah 35:5, 6 provides this picture:

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.”

3. Mortal people will live longer – Isaiah 65:19, 20 show that mortal people will live longer than they do now, so that someone who dies at 100 years old will be considered young:

“I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of

distress. No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.”

God keeps His Promises

These promises come from God and can be trusted. Read Isaiah 55:6-11 – notice particularly what God says in verse 11:

“... so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

So we may look forward with joy to that time when “the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isaiah 35:10).

The end of the Millennium and a time of Perfection

So the Millennium will be a time when the world is gradually restored to the condition it was in when God first created it. It needs to become ‘very good’ once more to prepare it for God Himself to live with people. Towards the end of the 1,000 years some of the mortal people will rebel against the rule of the Lord Jesus in one final act of human wickedness. Christ will, of course, completely overcome this rebellion. He will reign until all God’s enemies have been destroyed, finally removing sin and death from the earth. He will then deliver the kingdom to his Father:

“Then comes the end, when he (Christ) delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”
(1 Corinthians 15:24-26)

“He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.” (Isaiah 25:8)

Only then will this earth enjoy peace that will never end. The world will finally be a place where God, who is totally holy and sinless, can live with men and women. The whole earth will be filled with the glory of God. He – the great Creator – will fill the earth with His spirit.

Revelation 21:3, 4

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away’.”

| | | | | |
|-----------------|--|---|---|-------------------------------|
| Present Time | Christ’s return to the earth - end of man’s rule | Future reign of Christ – the Millennium | Christ delivers the kingdom to his Father | Far Future God all and in all |
| Everyone mortal | Resurrection to Judgement. | Mortal and immortal people | End of all sin and death. | Only immortal people |
| -----TIME----- | | | | |

Summary

1. When Jesus Christ returns he will become king of the world.
2. His capital city will be Jerusalem.
3. In the Millennium there will be:
4. immortal believers who will rule the world with Christ and will teach the mortal people about God;
5. mortal people living at Christ’s return who do not know the Gospel and who accept Christ as king – they will be taught God’s ways.
6. At the end of the Millennium, Christ will deliver the kingdom to God. The world will then be perfect and God will live among immortal men and women.

Verses to learn:

“All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations.” (*Psalm 22:27,28*)

Verses to read:

These verses show what a wonderful place God’s kingdom will be.

“He (Christ Jesus) shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.” (*Isaiah 11:3-9*)

Also read Psalm 72:12-19 – these verses give another picture of the kingdom.

Questions on Chapter 11 – The Kingdom of God – Peace on Earth

- 11A. a) What does 'immortal' mean?
b) Who will be made immortal?
c) At the time of the future kingdom, will people live in heaven or on earth?
- 11B. The Millennium will be a wonderful time – but explain why it will not be perfect.
- 11C. Who will be living on earth when the Lord Jesus Christ reigns as king? Answer 'Yes' or 'No' to each of the following:
a) Only Gentile believers.
b) Only Jews.
c) Some people who will later die.
d) Believers from all nations who have been given immortal life.
e) Only the people who are alive when Jesus Christ returns.
- 11D. What will life be like in God's kingdom on earth? Use Psalm 72 and Isaiah 35 to help you.
- 11E. True believers will be made immortal and live on earth during Christ's 1,000 year reign. Write out a verse from Isaiah 65:17-25 to show that there will also be mortal people on earth during the Millennium.

12

GOD'S PROMISES TO ABRAHAM

Reading: Genesis 13

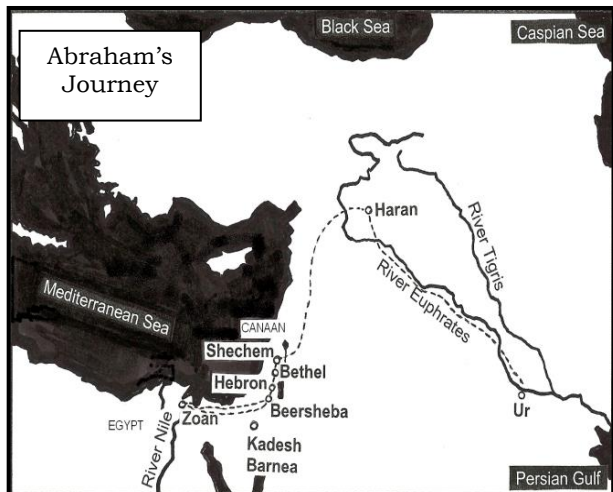
The Friend of God

It is amazing that a man can be described as the friend of God, but this is how the Bible describes Abraham (Isaiah 41:8) because of his remarkable faith. He was first called Abram and he lived in the town of Ur about 2,000 years before Jesus was born. Ur was situated in the land of Mesopotamia (modern Iraq), about 1,000 kilometres east of Canaan (Israel). The people of Ur did not know about the true God and worshipped many false gods. The ruins of a temple built to a moon god have been found there.

A Message from God

One day Abraham received a message from the Almighty God. God told Abraham to move from his home and his family and go to a country that God would show him:

“Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.’” (Genesis 12:1)



Abraham obeyed God. The New Testament tells us that Abraham “went out, not knowing where he was going” (Hebrews 11:8). Abraham’s faith in God was so strong that he obeyed and left his home, not knowing where God would eventually settle him. Abraham was a man of such faith and obedience that God describes Himself as “the God of Abraham” (Exodus 3:6).

God's Promises to Abraham

With this command to leave Ur, God made these promises to Abraham, explaining that He had a purpose with him:

“And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”
(*Genesis 12:2, 3*)

These are amazing words. God promised to make Abraham's descendants into a great nation. This is the first of several great promises that God made to Abraham. God also said that through Abraham all families of the earth will be blessed – clearly it is important that we understand these promises.

More Wonderful Promises

Abraham travelled first to Haran and then on to Canaan (Israel). He reached Canaan with his wife, Sarah (first called Sarai), and his nephew, Lot. Genesis 13 describes how Abraham then separated from his kindred (Lot). Lot chose the best of the land for his flocks and herds and Abraham was left to find pastures in the more barren parts of the country. However, God was with Abraham and, because of Abraham's total obedience, added more promises to those made in Ur:

“The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, ‘Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northwards and southwards and eastwards and westwards, for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring for ever. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you’.” (*Genesis 13:14-17*)

The land that God showed Abraham was the land of Canaan. A careful reading of this passage shows that God promised Abraham the land for ever. This passage also says that the land would be given to Abraham's offspring, so this offspring would share the land with Abraham.

The Promised Child

God had promised to make Abraham's descendants into a great nation. He had also promised that Abraham's offspring would share the land of Canaan with him for ever. But Abraham had no children, and so in Genesis 15:4 God promised him a son through whom these promises would come to pass (be fulfilled).

However, Abraham and Sarah were growing older and no child was born to them. Romans 4:18-22 tells us that it was not possible for Abraham and Sarah to have a child, yet Abraham trusted God. Abraham was about 100 years old and his wife about 90 when at last the promised son, Isaac, was miraculously born. However, before Isaac's birth, Abraham had taken Hagar, Sarah's servant, for a wife. She gave him a son called Ishmael. God said that Ishmael would be blessed and have many descendants – many of the Arab nations are descended from him. But the Bible is clear that God's promises to Abraham would be fulfilled through Isaac (Genesis 17:15-21).

Genesis 22 shows us more about Abraham's remarkable faith. As a test of faith, God told Abraham to kill his son, Isaac, as a sacrifice, although the promises were to be fulfilled through Isaac. Abraham knew that God would keep His promises and so he was even prepared to offer up his beloved son, believing that God would raise him from the dead. We are told this in the New Testament:

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead ...” (*Hebrews 11:17-19*)

God was again pleased with Abraham's faith and obedience. Just as Abraham was about to offer his son, God provided him a lamb to sacrifice instead (Genesis 22:1-14). This pointed forward to the Lord Jesus as “*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). In Genesis 22:15-18 we read about the promises that God made to Abraham following this test of faith. They include this important promise, which is similar to one made in Chapter 12:

“... and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” (*verse 18*)

| Some Of God's Promises To Abraham | |
|--|--|
| Reference | Promise |
| Genesis 12:2; 13:16 | Abraham's descendants to become a great nation. |
| Genesis 13:15; 15:7,18; 17:8 | Abraham and his offspring to inherit the land of Israel (Canaan) for ever. |
| Genesis 12:3; 22:16-18 | The whole world to be blessed through Abraham and his offspring. |

Understanding the Promises

1. Abraham's descendants to become a great nation – The Bible is clear that the Jews are descendants of Abraham (see Abraham's family tree in Chapter 10). The Jews are the great nation promised to Abraham.

2. Abraham and his offspring to inherit the land of Israel (Canaan) for ever – Acts 7 tells us that Abraham never received the land he was promised – and because Abraham is dead, he certainly could not inherit it for ever! But God never breaks His promises. To possess the land for ever, Abraham needs to live for ever. So God was promising Abraham resurrection from the dead and immortal life. Jesus confirms that Abraham will be given a place in God's kingdom (Luke 13:28). Then Abraham will receive the land that he was promised.

When Abraham was promised the land, God ended the promise with the words: *“Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you”* (Genesis 13:17). God was not promising immortal life in heaven but in the land which Abraham saw and walked through – the land we now call Israel.

The promise of immortal life on earth also applies to Abraham's offspring. We talk of one sheep and many sheep, not many 'sheeps'! Similarly, the word 'offspring', like the word 'seed' in older English versions of the Bible, can mean one descendant or many descendants. In some passages it clearly refers to the fact that Abraham would have many descendants (children, grandchildren, great grandchildren etc.) but in others the word refers to just one person. Galatians 3:16 says:

“Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring’, who is Christ.”

We are told here that the special (singular) descendant in some of the promises is the Lord Jesus Christ. The promise that Abraham and his offspring would live for ever in the land of Israel therefore also applies to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is only through this special 'son' of Abraham that these promises can be fulfilled. Abraham can only be raised from the dead to live for ever because the Lord Jesus conquered sin and death.

The fact that the Lord Jesus is descended from Abraham is so important that it is recorded in the very first verse of the New Testament: "*Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham*" (Matthew 1:1).

3. The whole world to be blessed through Abraham and his offspring – Another example of where the word 'offspring' refers to one person, the Lord Jesus, is in this promise from Genesis 22:18. The apostle Peter quotes this verse when preaching to the Jews and explains this promise:

"You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' God, having raised up his servant (Jesus Christ), sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness." (Acts 3:25, 26)

The apostle Peter says:

- all families of the earth can be blessed through Abraham's offspring
- the offspring that brings the blessing is Jesus Christ (see earlier verses in Acts 3)
- Jesus Christ brings the blessing of forgiveness of sins
- the offer of forgiveness was first made to the Jews, but then extended to "*all the families of the earth*".

The blessing that the Lord Jesus brings is forgiveness of sins. This is the Gospel message taught by Jesus. Galatians 3:8 shows that Abraham knew the Gospel and believed it!

Abraham's Spiritual Descendants – how we can share in the Promises

Although the Jews are Abraham's natural descendants, baptized believers from all nations can also be his children – his spiritual descendants – and so share in the promises:

"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave

God's Promises to Abraham

nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise." (*Galatians 3:27-29*)

We also need to follow Abraham's example of faith and obedience (*Galatians 3:7-9*). Thus we can become part of the many offspring of Abraham – his spiritual descendants – who will join with him and live for ever in the promised kingdom on earth when Christ Jesus returns.

The hope of the Gospel is built upon the promises that God made to Abraham, through which people from all nations can be blessed in Christ.

| God's Promises To Abraham | |
|--|---|
| Promise | Fulfilment |
| Abraham's descendants to become a great nation. | Abraham's natural descendants through Isaac and Jacob are the Jews, but true baptized believers from all nations can be Abraham's spiritual descendants. |
| The whole world to be blessed through Abraham and his offspring. | Forgiveness of sins through the Lord Jesus Christ. |
| Abraham and his offspring to inherit the land of Israel (Canaan) for ever. | Resurrection from the dead for Abraham and his faithful descendants, whether Jews or Gentiles. Immortal life in God's kingdom on earth, with the Lord Jesus Christ. |

Summary

1. Abraham was told by God to leave Ur and go to a country that God would show him.
2. This country was the land of Israel. God promised that Abraham would possess it for ever.
3. God also promised that Abraham would have a son and that his descendants would become a great nation.
4. God promised that Abraham's special descendant would share the land with Abraham and be a blessing to all nations. The New Testament shows that this special descendant is the Lord Jesus Christ, who brings forgiveness of sins.
5. If we belong to Christ (through belief and baptism), we are counted as children of Abraham, and may share the promises made to him.

Verses to learn:

“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.” (*Galatians 3:27-29*)

Verses to read:

“He remembers his covenant for ever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac, which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant, saying, “To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance.” (*Psalms 105:8-11*)

Also read Romans 4.

Questions on Chapter 12 – God's Promises to Abraham

- 12A. When Abraham (then called Abram) was living in Ur, what did God tell him to do?
- 12B. a) God promised that Abraham's descendants would become a great nation. Which nation is this?
b) What is the name of the promised child of Abraham and Sarah through whom this nation came?
- 12C. a) Which land was promised to Abraham forever?
b) Was the land Abraham was promised on earth or in heaven?
c) Give a verse to show that the land was promised to Abraham himself, as well as to his descendants.
d) Did Abraham receive the land he was promised?
e) When will Abraham receive the land he was promised?
- 12D. a) What did God tell Abraham to do to Isaac?
b) Why do you think God told him to do this?
c) What do we learn about Abraham from the way he acted at this time?
d) Why do you think Abraham thought God would raise Isaac from the dead?
- 12E. Acts 3:25, 26 is part of Peter's speech to the Jews (people of Israel).
a) Write out the promise made to Abraham that is quoted in verse 25.
b) Who is the special descendant (the 'offspring' or 'seed') through whom the blessing comes?
c) What is that blessing?
d) Which phrase in these verses shows that this blessing is not just for the Jews?
- 12F. How can we share in the promises made to Abraham?

13

THE JEWS IN HISTORY (PART 1)

Reading: Deuteronomy 28

The Beginning of the Jewish Nation

The Jews are God's people, and their story begins with Abraham. Because of Abraham's remarkable faith, God chose him to be the father of His people. God made special promises to Abraham (see Chapter 12). These were repeated to his son, Isaac, and grandson, Jacob. God changed Jacob's name to Israel, from whom the nation obtained its name. Jacob had twelve sons, who became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel (see Abraham's family tree – Chapter 10).

Jacob and his family lived in the land of Canaan, now known as Israel. The youngest but one of his sons was called Joseph. The story of Joseph's life, found at the end of Genesis, is important in the history of God's people.

Joseph's jealous brothers sold him to traders and he became a slave in Egypt. Later, after many trials, he became the head of the king of Egypt's government. In time of famine Jacob and the family moved from Canaan to join Joseph in Egypt, because God provided food for them there through Joseph.

Many years after Joseph's death, when the family had grown into a huge number of people, the Egyptians

saw them as a threat and made them slaves. God brought them out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses and led them through the wilderness (a barren and deserted land) to the borders of the land of Canaan, the land promised to Abraham and his descendants.



A Law Given by God

As they journeyed through the wilderness the people of Israel came to Mount Sinai. It was here that God spoke to them and they became His special nation. God said to them,

“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples.” (*Exodus 19:5*)

The people replied, “*All that the LORD has spoken we will do*” (*Exodus 19:8*).

Then God gave His laws to the people through Moses. We often refer to them as the Law of Moses, although they came from God. They were excellent laws – which included the Ten Commandments – and covered every part of life, and would have brought the Jews great blessings if they had tried to follow them. Then other nations would have wanted to live like them and serve the true God.

God wants people from all nations to come to Him. He chose the Jews to be His people so that they could be His witnesses in the world. Keeping the Law of Moses would make them separate from the other nations. This would prevent them from being influenced by those nations, who served false gods and were very wicked. This is a lesson for us in our lives.

As a sign that the people of Israel were His special people, God told them to keep the last day of every week (Saturday) as a holy day (‘holy’ means ‘separate’ or ‘set apart’). This day was called the Sabbath. On this day they were to rest from their every day work and think about their blessings from God. But throughout Old Testament times the Jews failed to keep the Sabbath and repeatedly broke God’s laws. Instead of showing the surrounding nations how God wanted them to live, they copied those wicked nations.

The Law of Moses was given to Israel to guide them until the teachings of Jesus Christ (*Galatians 3:19-24*). So Christians do not have to keep the Law of Moses or the Sabbath. However, it is helpful to set aside one day of the week for worship. Christians try to keep Sunday as a special day because this is what New Testament believers did.

The journey from Egypt through the wilderness to Canaan should have only taken a few weeks. However, the people of Israel were afraid of the inhabitants of Canaan and did not trust in God to help them conquer the land. As a punishment God would not let them enter the land and made them wander for 40 years in the wilderness, until all those who lacked faith had died. Despite this, God still fed them and cared for them during these 40 years:

“You (God) gave your good Spirit to instruct them and did not withhold your manna from their mouth and gave them water for their thirst. For forty years you sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell.” (*Nehemiah 9:20, 21*)

At last the nation entered Canaan (now known as Israel); the land God gave them as a home. God was their King and He provided priests to teach them His ways and judges to rule over them.

The Jews demand a King

Nearly 400 years passed. The Jews asked for a human king. They wanted to be like the nations around them. In doing this they were rejecting God as their King. Samuel, their judge and prophet, realised that this was wrong and prayed about it. God told him, *“they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them”* (1 Samuel 8:7).

God gave them a human king – 1 Samuel 9 and 10 record the anointing of Saul. He was unfaithful to God. After his death God gave the kingdom to David, who was from the southern tribe of Judah. David reigned for 40 years and pleased God. Solomon, David’s son, was the next king. God blessed Solomon and he became very rich and lived in a wonderful palace, but he taxed the people heavily and they became very unhappy. At the start of his reign he was faithful to God but he later worshipped idols. As a punishment God said that the kingdom would be torn into two parts, with the larger part given to Solomon’s servant. God said that this would happen during Solomon’s son’s reign.

A Divided Kingdom

On Solomon’s death his son, Rehoboam, became king. The people asked him to reduce their taxes. Instead of listening to the wise old men who had been his father’s advisers, he listened to his young friends and told the people that he would raise their taxes. This was not what the people wanted to hear. Rebellion followed and the Kingdom of Israel was torn into two parts. Ten of the tribes became the northern kingdom under Solomon’s servant, Jeroboam. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained faithful to Rehoboam and became the southern kingdom. The division happened just as God had foretold.

The books of 1 and 2 Kings contain the history of these two kingdoms side by side. The southern kingdom became known as Judah, because all of its kings came from the tribe of Judah. The northern kingdom kept the name Israel.

The term 'Israel' is used of:

- Jacob (whose name was changed by God to Israel)
- Jacob's descendants, the Jewish people
- The land God promised to Abraham and his descendants
- The united kingdom (before it was divided in the time of Rehoboam)
- The northern kingdom (after the division).

The Continued Disobedience of the Jews

In 1 and 2 Kings we read that on many occasions the people of Israel and Judah disobeyed God. Their worship of God was meaningless – it did not come from their hearts. They also worshipped idols. The situation became so bad that God finally punished the people, as He had repeatedly warned through His prophets. Israel (the northern kingdom) was the first to be punished. God brought the King of Assyria against them. The people were taken captive to Assyria and then scattered. They never returned to their own land as a nation.

Later, God pleaded with Judah (the southern kingdom) to listen to Him and repent of their ways. 2 Chronicles 36:15, 16 shows how God did this through the prophets:

“The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy.”

So the Kingdom of Judah was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. God promised that after 70 years they would be allowed to return to their own land, and many did, although from that time other nations ruled over them. Encouraged by God's prophets, they rebuilt the temple of God in Jerusalem, which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. But many times after this they still disobeyed God. The last three books of the Old Testament, the prophecies of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, were written during the time of the return from captivity.

| The Southern Kingdom | The Northern Kingdom |
|--|--|
| Known as Judah. | Known as Israel (also Samaria or Ephraim). |
| Capital city: Jerusalem. | Capital city: Samaria. |
| Two tribes (Judah and Benjamin). | Ten tribes. |
| The first king was Rehoboam, Solomon's son. | The first king was Jeroboam, Solomon's servant. |
| After, ruled by kings descended from David and Solomon (from the tribe of Judah). | After, ruled by various kings, not always descended from each other. |
| Many kings were wicked, but some served God faithfully and encouraged the nation to worship Him. | All of its kings were wicked and worshipped idols, and so did the people. |
| After about 400 years it was overthrown by the Babylonians. | After about 220 years it was overthrown by the Assyrians. |
| Many people were taken captive to Babylon. Some returned 70 years later. | Many people were taken captive to Assyria and then scattered. They never returned to their own land as a nation. |

Between the Old and New Testaments

After the last three Old Testament prophets there was a period of about 400 years with no direct message from God, as foretold in Amos 8:11. This period of time comes between the last book of the Old Testament and the first book of the New Testament. So there was great interest when John the Baptist appeared. After 400 years of silence, God was again speaking to His people.

The Greatest Jew

John the Baptist was sent by God to prepare the way for someone even greater. God was about to send His own Son to save His people. So in the land of Israel, about 2,000 years ago, Jesus was born. Jesus was a Jew, descended from Abraham and David.

Adam → → Noah → → Abraham → Isaac → Jacob → → David →
→ **Jesus**

Despite hearing his words and seeing the wonderful miracles that Jesus did, the Jews rejected their promised Messiah. They persuaded Pilate, the Roman governor, to crucify him. When Pilate said, “*I am innocent of this man’s blood*”, the Jews answered, “*His blood be on us and on our children!*” (Matthew 27:24, 25). The Jews could not have committed a worse crime. They put to death the totally sinless Son of God. God graciously gave them the opportunity to repent through the preaching of the apostles. However, most of the Jews refused God’s offer of salvation and punishment had to come.

A People without a Home

God used the Romans to punish the Jews. In AD 70, about 40 years after the death of Jesus, the Roman army came against them. It was a time of dreadful suffering. Many thousands of Jews were killed. The horrors of that war are some of the worst in history. The city of Jerusalem was taken by the Romans and the temple destroyed. Later, in AD 135, the Jews that survived were taken from the land of Israel and scattered among the nations of the world. In the time of Moses, God had warned the Jews that they would be scattered if they ignored His ways:

“And the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other ...” (*Deuteronomy 28:64*)

For nearly 2,000 years the Jews had no land of their own. They also suffered terrible persecutions and other dreadful punishments prophesied in Deuteronomy 28. Some of these persecutions happened in the concentration camps of Hitler during the Second World War. Over six million Jews were killed with a cruelty that shocked the world. Deuteronomy 28:64-67, written about 3,500 years ago, has come true in recent times.

Despite their wickedness in putting many of God’s prophets and His own sinless Son to death, God still has a plan for His people. God has not rejected them, as the apostle Paul explained some time after the crucifixion:

“I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.” (*Romans 11:1, 2*)

Today, God is bringing the Jews back to the land of Israel. The next Chapter continues the history of God's people.

Summary

The dates given in this table are approximate.

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| 3,500 years ago | God brought the Jews out of Egypt and gave them the land of Israel as a home. God taught them His ways, but often throughout Old Testament times they disobeyed Him. |
| 2,500 years ago | God finally punished the Jews by sending them into captivity. Many people from the southern kingdom of Judah returned to the land after 70 years, but they still disobeyed God. |
| 2,000 years ago | Eventually, the Jews were driven out of the land of Israel and scattered among the nations of the world. For nearly 2,000 years they were homeless and persecuted. |
| Today | God is bringing the Jews back to the land of Israel. |

Verses to learn:

"I am the LORD, and besides me there is no saviour. I declared and saved and proclaimed, when there was no strange god among you; and you are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and I am God." (*Isaiah 43:11,12*)

Verses to read:

Leviticus 20:26; 1 Samuel 12:22; 1 Chronicles 17:21, 22; 2 Chronicles 36:11-23; Jeremiah 31:35, 36; Acts 13:16-39

Questions from Chapter 13 – The Jews in History (Part 1)

- 13A. From which Bible character are the twelve tribes of Israel descended?
- 13B. What did Joseph's brothers do to him? Why did they do this?
- 13C. Moses was the man that God chose to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. What sort of person was he (see Numbers 12:3)?
- 13D. The Law that God gave His people through Moses at Mount Sinai was to make them holy (separate).
- a) Why was it important for them to be separate from the other nations?
 - b) Why is it important for true believers to be separate from people of the world?
 - c) Give examples of ways Christians should be separate.
- 13E. Saturday was the Jewish Sabbath. It is helpful to set aside one day of the week for worship. Does this have to be the Sabbath?
- 13F. When Israel rejected God as their King, who was their first human king?
- 13G. a) Why did God allow His people to be taken to another land as prisoners?
- b) Into which country were the people of Judah taken?
 - c) How long were they there?
- 13H. What happened to the Jews about 40 years after the death of Jesus?

14

THE JEWS IN HISTORY (PART 2)

Reading: Ezekiel 37

The Valley of Dry Bones

In Ezekiel 37 we read about a vision that God gave to the prophet Ezekiel. It was a message for the people of Israel. What Ezekiel saw did not actually happen – it was a prophecy using picture language. Ezekiel lived at the time of the captivity in Babylon, so this vision was given almost 600 years before Jesus' birth.



The vision has three separate stages.

1. In the vision Ezekiel saw an open valley with a huge number of very dry bones scattered over the valley floor.
2. In the vision God told Ezekiel to prophesy to these bones and, with a great noise, the bones came together, until there were many complete skeletons. Ezekiel saw muscles and flesh come upon the skeletons and then skin covering them, to form dead bodies.
3. In the final part of the vision God told Ezekiel to prophesy to the wind so that the dead bodies would be filled with breath. As the breath entered, so the dead bodies came to life and stood up, and became an enormous army.

God explained the meaning of this prophecy to Ezekiel in verses 11-14, where it clearly states that the bones represent the nation of Israel.

| Stage | What Ezekiel Saw | What God Says About This Stage | Meaning Of This Stage |
|--------------|---|---|---|
| 1 | Dry bones scattered in the valley. | “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely’” (verse 11). | The nation of Israel scattered throughout the world and without hope. |
| 2 | The bones come together to form skeletons and then dead bodies. | “Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel” (verse 12). | God bringing His scattered people back to the land of Israel – a rebirth of the nation. |
| 3 | The dead bodies were filled with breath and brought to life. | “I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it” (verse 14). | The spiritual rebirth of the nation – they will recognise the authority of the Lord God over their lives. |

The Fulfilment of the Vision

Stage 1 – This has already taken place. Soon after New Testament times the Jews were scattered among the nations of the world (as explained at the end of Chapter 13). They were scattered for nearly 2,000 years and suffered terrible persecutions during this time.

Stage 2 – From about 1850 onwards, the people of Israel started to return to their land. In 1917 the Balfour Declaration was signed by the British government, which was at that time in control of the land of Palestine (Israel). This was a promise that Britain would make the land of Palestine a national home for the Jews. However, it was only after Hitler came to power in Germany that the Jews started returning in large numbers. These were mainly European Jews who had survived terrible persecutions under Hitler. Because of their

sufferings they wanted to move to the land of Israel and have a country of their own, where they would be free from persecution. In 1948 the State of Israel was declared. Jews are still returning to the land.

These events happened under God’s control. The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah showed that the Jews would survive and return to their land.

“For I am with you to save you, declares the LORD; I will make a full end of all the nations among whom I scattered you, but of you I will not make a full end.” (*Jeremiah 30:11*)

“He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock.” (*Jeremiah 31:10*)

So stage 2 is being fulfilled now, in our lifetime!

Stage 3 – This has not happened yet. Most Jews today do not accept that Jesus Christ is God’s Son and their promised Messiah. They are still waiting for a different Messiah. They do not recognise that God is in control of world events and working out His purpose through them. But the time will come when the nation of Israel will have a change of heart. Zechariah 14:2-4 shows why!

| Zechariah 14:2-4 | Meaning |
|--|---|
| <p>“For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the women raped. Half of the city shall go out into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city.”</p> | <p>The time is coming when all nations will be gathered against Israel. Israel will suffer defeat and be desperate.</p> |
| <p>“Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle.”</p> | <p>God will rescue Israel from complete destruction.</p> |
| <p>“On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives... and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley.”</p> | <p>Jesus Christ will return from heaven and will come to the Mount of Olives. There will be a great earthquake.</p> |

The Jews in History – Part 2

God will rescue the Jews by sending the Lord Jesus. They will realise that he has returned from heaven and saved them. At last they will recognise him as God's Son and their promised Messiah, and they will realise how wrong their nation was to crucify him. The prophet Zechariah tells us:

“... when they (the Jews) look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child.” (12:10)

Many of the people of Israel will repent of their nation's sin – they will have a change of heart and accept Christ Jesus as their king. In Ezekiel 37:21-25 God says,

“ I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone ... I will make them one nation in the land ... one king shall be king over them all ... They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions ... I will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God ... They shall walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes. They shall dwell in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children shall dwell there forever.”

The previous chapter (Ezekiel 36) contains the same message as the prophecy of the Valley of Dry Bones, and has the same three stages:

| | | |
|-------------------|---------|---|
| Ezekiel 36:16-20 | Stage 1 | The people of Israel are scattered and punished for their wickedness. |
| Ezekiel 36: 21-24 | Stage 2 | God regathers Israel. |
| Ezekiel 36: 25-28 | Stage 3 | The people of Israel are changed so they recognise God. |

Approximate number of Jews in the land of Palestine / Israel

| DATE | NUMBER |
|------|-----------|
| 1839 | 6,000 |
| 1914 | 60,000 |
| 1931 | 175,000 |
| 1941 | 474,000 |
| 1948 | 716,000 |
| 2013 | 6,000,000 |

Here is a prophecy about the sufferings of the Jews. It was written about 1,500 BC.

Deuteronomy 28:64-67

“And the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other... And among these nations you shall find no respite, and there shall be no resting place for the sole of your foot, but the LORD will give you there a trembling heart and failing eyes and a languishing soul. Your life shall hang in doubt before you. Night and day you shall be in dread and have no assurance of your life. In the morning you shall say, ‘If only it were evening!’ and at evening you shall say, ‘If only it were morning!’ because of the dread that your heart shall feel, and the sights that your eyes shall see.”

The Jews are God’s Witnesses

God wanted the Jews to show the other nations how to serve Him, but they failed and let Him down. But they are still God’s witnesses. God has made many prophecies about them so that other nations can see that He is the living and true God:

“Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land.” (*Ezekiel 36:22-24*)

The prophecies about God regathering the Jews to their land were made thousands of years ago. Almost all of the nations that existed when these prophecies were made have disappeared long ago – but the Jews have survived. People have done their best to destroy the Jews. During the Second World War, Hitler tried to destroy all the Jews in Europe and over six million died in terrible circumstances. Yet the Jews are still here – and back in their land as prophesied, despite the fact that they have been unfaithful to God. The Jews are witnesses to God’s power and authority. They are a sign in today’s world that God does exist and that He is working out His plan for the earth.

But, as shown earlier, the Jews will change and not stay unfaithful. As explained in Chapter 11, they will learn God’s ways at the return of Christ. Jeremiah also foretold this:

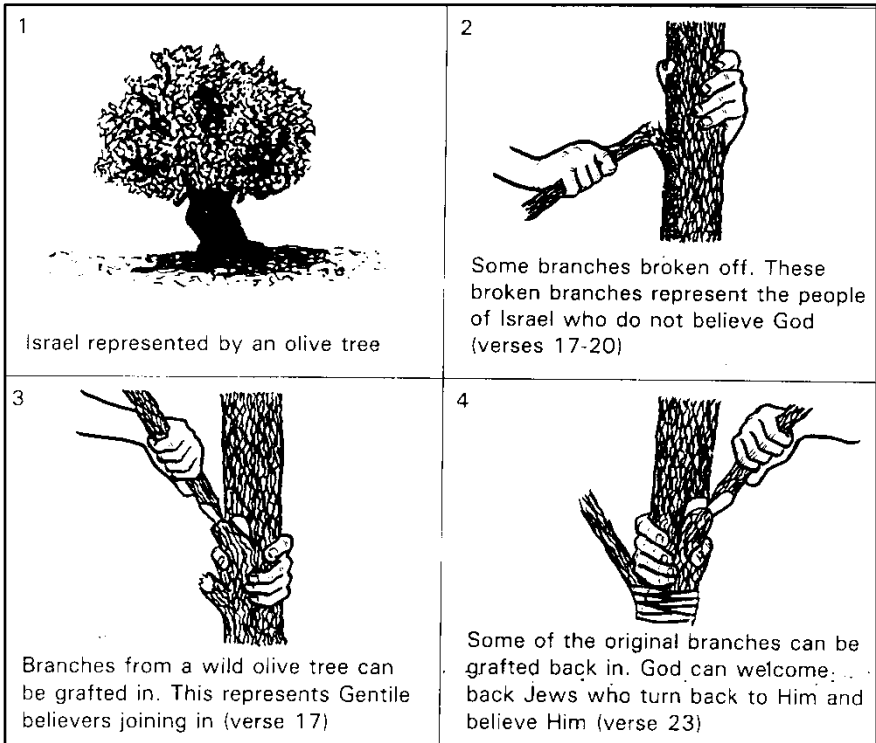
“But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” (*Jeremiah 31:33, 34*)

What about the Gentiles?

In Old Testament times Gentile believers like Rahab and Ruth were allowed to join the Jews in worshipping the true God. Many Jews in the time of Jesus wrongly thought that God was not interested in the Gentiles. They thought that they alone deserved God’s blessings because they were Abraham’s descendants through Jacob. But God wants everyone, Jews and Gentiles, to repent and be saved. God showed the apostle Peter that Gentiles were included in His plan of salvation (Acts 10).

The apostle Paul spent many years travelling to preach to Gentiles. When writing to Gentile believers in Rome, Paul used the picture of an olive tree to show that Gentiles can share the blessings promised to Abraham and his descendants. They, like Abraham, can be given immortal life on earth when Christ Jesus returns.

Read about the Parable of the Olive Tree in Romans 11 (especially verses 13-25) and note the warnings Paul gives. The parable is about Jews and Gentiles in the purpose of God, and is explained in the following pictures.



The Jews are often in the news because they are still God’s witnesses. The struggle between the Jews and Arabs continues and will draw in other nations. Zechariah 12:3 describes Jerusalem as:

“a heavy stone for all the peoples. All who lift it will surely hurt themselves. And all the nations of the earth will gather against it.”

This is when the Lord Jesus will return and bring peace to the earth. Jews and Gentiles will enjoy the blessings of living during the Millennium. Isaiah 19:23-25 shows that this includes people from Arab nations:

“In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyria will come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, ‘Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance’.”

Summary

1. The Jews were scattered throughout the world for nearly 2,000 years. They suffered terrible persecutions during this time.
2. God is now regathering them to the land of Israel, as prophesied long ago.
3. In 1948 the State of Israel was declared.
4. The Jews are God’s witnesses. They show that God exists. They also show that God is working out His plan for the earth.
5. Many Jews will have a change of heart when Christ Jesus returns and accept him as their king.
6. God wants everyone, Jews and Gentiles, to repent and be saved.

A verse to learn:

“May he (Jesus) have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth!” (*Psalm 72:8*)

Verses to read:

Deuteronomy 30:1-6; Ezekiel 36; Zechariah 14; Romans 11

Questions on Chapter 14 – The Jews in History (Part 2)

- 14A. After the time of Jesus, the Jews were scattered throughout the world for almost 2,000 years.
- a) Which Bible passage shows that they would be persecuted during this time?
 - b) Why did the Jews have a great longing for a country of their own?
 - c) Which land do they now occupy as a nation?
- 14B. Complete the chart to explain the meaning of the Valley of Dry Bones prophecy and the Olive Tree parable. The first has been done for you.

| Symbol | Meaning |
|---|---|
| The scattered dry bones. | The nation of Israel scattered throughout the world and without hope. |
| The bones come together to form skeletons and then dead bodies. | |
| | The spiritual rebirth of the nation. |
| The olive tree. | |
| | The removal of the people of Israel who do not believe in God. |
| Branches from a wild olive tree are grafted in. | |
| Some of the original branches are grafted back in. | |

- 14C. What does Zechariah 12:10 say about the people of Israel who will be alive when the Lord Jesus returns?
- 14D. Which verses in Zechariah 14 suggest the following?
- a) All nations will come to battle against Jerusalem.
 - b) God will fight for Israel.

15

GOD'S PROMISES TO DAVID

Reading: 2 Samuel 7

A Key Verse

Why does the first verse of the New Testament introduce the Lord Jesus as the son of David and the son of Abraham?

“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” (*Matthew 1:1*)

It is because God wants to remind us of the important promises that He has made about Jesus in the Old Testament. We know that Jesus Christ is the special descendant promised to Abraham (Chapter 12). He is also the special descendant promised to David.

Why did God give Special Promises to David?

Just like Abraham, David was a man of remarkable faith. David lived about 1,000 years before the birth of Jesus. He was born in the same place as Jesus – Bethlehem, a small town near Jerusalem. He was the youngest son of Jesse.

David wrote many of the Psalms in the Bible. They show his love for God and for God's Word. This is why he is described as a man after God's heart (Acts 13:22).

While Saul was still king of Israel, God chose David to be the next king. David was a young shepherd boy when God sent the prophet Samuel to Jesse's house to anoint the future king. Samuel was surprised that God did not choose Jesse's eldest son. But God said to Samuel:

“Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.” (*1 Samuel 16:7*)

God was pleased with what He saw in David's heart. We need to remember that God can see into our hearts too!

In 1 Samuel 17 we read of an example of David's great faith. The nation of Israel was threatened by the Philistines. The Philistine army was led by their champion fighter, Goliath, a giant of a man. King Saul and his army were terrified of Goliath and failed to put their

trust in God. Young David knew that this enemy of God's people could be defeated with God's help. He stepped out in faith with just a sling and five stones and killed Goliath. After this the Philistine army ran away. Through David's faith in God the people of Israel were saved from their enemy.

Saul became very jealous of David's success. On several occasions he tried to kill David, who became a refugee. These problems prepared David for his time as king. The Bible teaches that true believers will experience difficulties in their lives, through which their trust in God can grow.

While Saul was hunting David, there were times when David could easily have killed him and taken the throne. But David knew that this was wrong because Saul was God's anointed king, and God would remove him when He chose to do so. David was a righteous man who let God control events in his life – another lesson for us.

David becomes King

After Saul's death, David became king over God's people and reigned from Jerusalem, where he built a palace. David was concerned about the Ark of God. The Ark was a gold covered chest. It was the symbol of God's presence right at the heart of His nation. Since the time of Moses the Ark had been kept in the Tabernacle, a special tent where God met with His people. Just before Saul's reign the Philistines had taken the Ark. It was later returned but not put back in the Tabernacle. David had a fine palace and so he wanted to build a house of God (temple) at Jerusalem for the Ark. David told Nathan, the prophet of God, what he wanted to do. That night God spoke to Nathan, giving him a special message for David. This message contained God's promises to David.

God's Message to David

God told David not to build a house for Him. Instead, God promised that He would set up a house for David:

“Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house.” (2 Samuel 7:11)

God then made further promises to David:

“I will raise up your offspring after you ... and I will establish his kingdom.” (2 Samuel 7:12)

Here the word 'offspring' is used, but some older Bible versions say 'seed'. In this verse these words refer to one special son, not many descendants, because the verse reads “*his kingdom*” (remember the

God's Promises to David

words 'offspring' and 'seed' can refer to one or many descendants – see Chapter 12).

God said of this promised son: *“He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever”* (verse 13). Verse 16 shows that this refers to David's throne and kingdom – the Kingdom of God.

Notice that these promises were to be fulfilled after David's death, for it was to happen when *“your days are fulfilled and you (David) lie down with your fathers”* (verse 12).

We can summarise these promises:

- God promised David a special son who will reign from David's throne and over David's kingdom (i.e. God's kingdom) for ever
- God promised to set up a house for David
- God promised that the special son will build a house for His name.

Understanding the Promises

1. A special son whose throne and kingdom will last for ever – The promised son was to be very important. God says of him, *“I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son”* (2 Samuel 7:14). This shows that David's promised descendant is God's own son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

David had a son called Solomon. God's promises to David were partly fulfilled in Solomon. He reigned after David from Jerusalem and built the temple, the house of God. However, he did not completely fulfil God's promises because:

- Solomon became king while David was still alive, not after his death
- he did not reign for ever
- he was not God's son.

God's promises to David will be completely fulfilled when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to restore God's kingdom and reign from David's throne in Jerusalem because:

- Jesus is descended from David through his mother, Mary, and so he can be described as David's son
- he will reign for ever
- God is his Father.

The New Testament confirms that Jesus is the special son of David. In Luke 1 we read of an angel coming to Mary and promising her that

she would have a son, Jesus. This son was to be born, not through a human father, but through the power of God. Mary was told:

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy – the Son of God.” (*Luke 1:35*)

Concerning this son the angel also told Mary:

“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” (*Luke 1:32,33*)

| <p style="text-align: center;">David Was Promised (In 2 Samuel 7)</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Mary Was Promised (In Luke 1)</p> |
|---|---|
| <p>A son to reign from his (David's) throne.</p> | <p>Her son would be given the throne of David.</p> |
| <p>The son's kingdom would last for ever.</p> | <p>There would be no end of her son's kingdom.</p> |
| <p>God wants us to link these passages!</p> <p>The son promised to David was the one Mary was to bear – God's own Son.</p> | |

The apostle Paul spoke of David's wonderful character and also showed that Jesus is the promised descendant:

“... he (God) raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.' Of this man's offspring God has brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus, as he promised.” (*Acts 13:22, 23*)

2. God would set up a house for David – David was not allowed to build a temple (house of God). It was his son, Solomon, who actually built the temple, and this became the centre for Israel's worship. It was a real building – before his death David prepared materials to build it.

The word 'house' normally refers to a building, but it can also refer to an important family with a long history. For example, in Britain the present royal family is known as *The House of Windsor* – in this way 'house' refers to a special family. This is true where the angel told Mary that her son would “*reign over the house (family) of Jacob for ever.*” (*Luke 1:33*)

God's Promises to David

When God said that He would set up a house for David, He meant a royal family – one that would last for ever (2 Samuel 7:11, 16). This refers to David's descendant, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the future king of the world.

3. The special son would also build a house for God's name –

When God said of the Lord Jesus, "*He shall build a house for my name*" (2 Samuel 7:13), God did not mean a real building, but again a family. The house (family) that the Lord Jesus is building is God's family – the family of believers from all ages. The Bible describes this family as a spiritual temple. The apostle Paul, while writing to Gentile Christians in Ephesians 2:19-21, refers to this great house of believers:

"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord."

A Reminder of God's Promises to David (2 Samuel 7)

| Verse | Text | Notes |
|--------------|---|---|
| 11 | "Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. | God would build up David's family, which includes Jesus. |
| 12 | When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. | When David's life was over and he was dead, God would raise up one of his descendants, and God would set up the descendant's kingdom. |

| | | |
|----|--|--|
| 13 | <p>He shall build a house for my name,</p> <p>and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever.</p> <p>I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son.</p> | <p>The descendant would build God a house (Solomon built the temple; Christ is building a spiritual house).</p> <p>God would secure his (Christ's) throne for ever (Solomon did not reign for ever).</p> <p>God would be the father of this descendant of David, and the descendant would be God's Son (Jesus is God's Son).</p> |
| 14 | <p>When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him"</p> | <p>Jesus did not commit sin, but we read that he had to learn obedience (Hebrews 5:8).</p> |

The King of the Jews

David was promised a son who would reign for ever. Other Scriptures show that the Lord Jesus will be this king. The wise men, when they came to worship Jesus as a young child, asked, "*Where is he who has been born King of the Jews?*" (Matthew 2:2). When Jesus was arrested and taken before Pilate to be tried, Pilate said to him, "*Are you the King of the Jews?*" Jesus answered, "*You have said so*" (Mark 15:2). This was the Jewish way of saying, "Yes, I am". Jesus Christ will return to this earth to be King of the Jews and to reign from Jerusalem, which the Bible describes as David's throne.

A Worldwide Kingdom

Christ Jesus will not only be the king of the Jews when he returns. God's future kingdom will be centred on Israel but will extend over the whole earth, and Christ will reign over all nations as king of the world. God says of him in Psalm 72:8, 11:

"May he have dominion from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth! May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him!"

Something to which true Believers can look forward

In Acts 2 the apostle Peter tells us that David was dead and in the grave (verse 29) and had not gone to heaven (verse 34). Abraham and David and many other faithful people died knowing that in the day

God's Promises to David

of Jesus Christ's coming they would be raised from the grave and "*made perfect*" – given immortal life on earth. But Hebrews 11:39, 40 shows that immortal life will not be just for these faithful people – it can be for us also:

"And all these (*the people listed in the chapter*), though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect."

God wants us to accept His wonderful offer of salvation so that we can share in the tremendous blessings promised to all faithful believers.

Summary

1. David was promised a special son who would reign from his throne and over his kingdom (God's kingdom) for ever.
2. This special son of David is the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is descended from David through his mother, Mary.
3. God's promises to David will be completely fulfilled when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to restore God's kingdom and reign from David's throne in Jerusalem.

Verses to learn:

"When your days are fulfilled to walk with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever." (*1 Chronicles 17:11,12*)

Verses to read:

1 Samuel 17; 1 Chronicles 17

Questions on Chapter 15 – God's Promises to David

- 15A. a) What promises did God make to King David?
- b) David's son, Solomon, reigned after him. How do we know that the promises to David were not completely fulfilled in Solomon?
 - c) Who is the special son in God's promises to David?
 - d) This son will reign from David's throne. Where was David's throne?
 - e) The virgin Mary was descended from King David. In Luke 1:32 what did God promise to give her son?
 - f) When will this promise in Luke 1:32 be fulfilled?
- 15B. In Matthew 1:1, Jesus Christ is introduced as 'Son of David' and 'Son of Abraham'. What is special about these two people?
- 15C. a) Where is David now?
- b) What will happen to David when the Lord Jesus returns?

16

THE FATHER AND THE SON

Reading: Isaiah 45

The Gift of Salvation

Salvation is the gift of God. It comes only through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ:

“... there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (*Acts 4:12*).

The Bible tells us about the special relationship between God and His Son. We need to learn about this properly in order to appreciate Jesus’ work of salvation.

God is One

The Bible tells us that the God of heaven is the only living and true God. We read in Deuteronomy 6:4:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.”

God says of Himself:

“Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no saviour.” (*Isaiah 43:10, 11*)

“I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God.” (*Isaiah 45:5*)

The apostle Paul says:

“To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.” (*1 Timothy 1:17*)

The majesty and power of God are beyond anything we can imagine. But God is also kind and merciful. He has given the Lord Jesus Christ to take away the sins of those who truly love Him and His Son.

The Son of God

The Bible is clear that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God:

“... so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (*John 20:31*)

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!”

(1 Peter 1:3)

God knows all things, even the future, and His plans are certain (Isaiah 46:8-11). God knew that Adam and Eve would sin, and so from the very beginning God planned to send His Son. This is why there are many prophecies of Jesus in the Old Testament. So Jesus was in God’s mind and purpose from the very beginning. The promises to Abraham and David show that Jesus was in God’s plan long before his birth.

Jesus did not Pre-exist – his Life started when he was Born

When birth takes place, a new life starts. The birth of Jesus was just the same. Some people believe that Jesus existed in heaven before he was born of Mary – but this is not what the Bible says. The Bible teaches that Jesus was part of God’s plan from the very beginning, but the life of Jesus only started when he was born. Jesus did not live before his birth.

| 1 Peter 1:20 | Meaning |
|--|--|
| “He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times.” | Jesus was in God’s mind and purpose from creation but he only appeared much later. |

God told the prophet Jeremiah:

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” (Jeremiah 1:5)

Just as Jeremiah was in God’s plan before he existed, so was the Lord Jesus. From the foundation of the world God also knew about all true believers. They were in the mind of God although none of them was actually living. This is what the apostle Paul says about true believers:

“... (God) chose us in him (Jesus) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.” (Ephesians 1:4)

So when the Bible uses similar language to describe the Lord Jesus, it does not mean that he was personally alive before his birth. It is explaining to us that Christ was in the mind of God as someone that He would bring into being at the right time:

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman.” (Galatians 4:4)

The Father and the Son

It was not until Mary's baby was born that Jesus became a living being. See also 2 Timothy 1:9, 10.

Other reasons for believing that Jesus did not exist before he was born:

- we do not read of anything Jesus said or did before his birth (Hebrews 1:2)
- his name, Jesus, was only given at his birth (Isaiah 49:1)
- there is nothing in the Old Testament to suggest that the Son of God was already living in heaven and would later appear on earth
- The records of his birth never mention a previous existence.

Jesus had Human Nature before his Death

Because Jesus was conceived by God's power, the Holy Spirit, he is the Son of God:

“And the angel answered her (Mary), ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.’” (*Luke 1:35*)

Because Jesus had a human mother, Mary, he had a nature just like ours. The Bible is clear that Jesus was born with human nature. Jesus described himself as the Son of Man. The apostle Peter said in Acts 2:22,

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst.”

Hebrews 2:17 says that Jesus “*had to be made like his brothers in every respect*”. The same chapter also tells us that since “*the children (believers) share in flesh and blood (human nature), he (Jesus) himself likewise partook of the same things*” (verse 14).

The verses above show that it was necessary for Jesus to have human nature. The verses below explain why.

| Verses | Notes |
|---|--|
| <p>“Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.” <i>(Hebrews 5:8, 9)</i></p> | <p>If Jesus had been born with a nature like God’s, he would not have needed to learn obedience. It was because Jesus had human nature that he could be tempted to sin. Jesus could only defeat sin by experiencing and overcoming temptation.</p> |
| <p>“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” <i>(Hebrews 4:15)</i></p> | <p>During his life on earth Jesus was tempted in every way like us, yet he never sinned. It is because Jesus was tempted to sin as we are that he understands our problems.</p> |
| <p>“But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.” <i>(Hebrews 2:9)</i></p> | <p>Angels are immortal beings, far greater than humans. But because Jesus had human nature, he was lower than the angels. It was only because Jesus had human nature that he could die.</p> |

It is impossible for men and women to see God, so Jesus showed us what He is like. Quoting the prophet Isaiah, Matthew 1:23 says of Jesus:

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel’ (which means, God with us).”

Because of his character and godly way of life, Jesus showed us perfectly what God is like – this is why he was described as “*God with us*”. Jesus was much more than an ordinary man:

“For in him (Jesus) all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.”
(Colossians 1:19)

Jesus resisted every temptation because of his love for his Father. His special relationship with his Father helped him to overcome sin. He was also helped by a wonderful understanding of the Old

The Father and the Son

Testament scriptures. But we know that it was incredibly hard for Jesus to overcome sin. He was determined in every aspect of his life to do his Father's will and not his own. It is only because Jesus conquered sin and death that we have the hope of immortal life.

Jesus had human nature because he could only defeat sin by experiencing and overcoming temptation, and could only die on the cross if he was mortal.

Jesus now has a Nature like God

After his resurrection the Lord Jesus was given a glorious nature like his Father (divine nature). This means that he cannot sin or die. God has exalted him above the angels and he now sits at God's right hand in heaven. Apart from God Himself, there is no greater being in the whole universe. In Acts 2:36 Peter says to the Jews,

“God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

God has given Christ Jesus authority over everything. After his resurrection Jesus said,

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”
(*Matthew 28:18*)

| Jesus Christ before his death | Jesus Christ now |
|--|--|
| He was tempted and was able to sin. | He cannot sin or be tempted. |
| He was mortal – so he could feel pain, be ill and die. | He is immortal – he cannot die and no longer suffers physically. |
| He was lower than the angels. | He is greater than the angels. |

The following passage provides a summary:

| Philippians 2:6-11 | Notes |
|--|--|
| <p>“though he (Jesus) was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”</p> | <p>Jesus was in the form of God because God was his Father and he spoke God’s words and did His works. He accepted that God was greater than himself. He was born a man and made himself the servant of all.</p> |
| <p>“And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”</p> | <p>Jesus accepted the shame and pain of crucifixion. He obeyed his Father in all things, finally in dying on the cross.</p> |
| <p>“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”</p> | <p>Because of his obedience, God has exalted the Lord Jesus. God wants all creation to honour and worship His Son. This will give glory to God.</p> |

A Wrong Idea

Many people ignore Bible teaching about God and believe what they call the Trinity. These people believe that God has always consisted of three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, all equal with each other. The Trinity claims that Jesus is ‘God the Son’ and is associated with the wrong belief that Jesus pre-existed. (We will learn about the Holy Ghost, or the Holy Spirit, in Chapter 20.)

The word ‘Trinity’ and the phrases ‘God the Son’ and ‘God the Holy Ghost’ do not occur in the Bible. We have already seen the plain Bible teaching that God is One, and that the Lord Jesus is His Son. In the same way that a good son is obedient to his father, so the Lord Jesus

The Father and the Son

is subject to God. Jesus never claimed to be equal with God, but depended on his Father for all things. He said,

“Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing.” (*John 5:19*)

See also John 3:35; 5:30; 7:16; 8:28; 12:49, 50 and 14:24, 28.

In John 10:30 Jesus said, “*I and the Father are one*”. Jesus cannot mean that he and His Father are equal because the verse before says, “*My Father ... is greater than all*” (John 10:29). Jesus meant that he and his Father were united in mind and purpose, and he prayed that in the same way his disciples would be one:

“ ... that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (*John 17:21*)

In these verses from the Gospel of John, Jesus explains that God was greater than he. 1 Corinthians 11:3, written after the Lord Jesus had ascended to heaven, shows that God continues to be greater. Even at the end of the Millennium, God will be greater:

“When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.” (*1 Corinthians 15:28*)

The false idea of the Trinity is not taught in the Bible. It denies Jesus' work of salvation. If Jesus was 'God the Son', as the Trinity claims, he would have been born with a nature like God and so could not have been tempted to sin, and could not have died on the cross.

The Lord Jesus – the Mediator

The Lord Jesus bridges the gap between God and mankind. He is therefore a mediator (a go-between):

“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” (*1 Timothy 2:5*)

Christians are truly thankful that the Lord Jesus Christ gave himself to save others.

Summary

1. There is only one God.
2. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, born of Mary. He is not 'God the Son'.
3. Before his death, Jesus had human nature like us. But because God was his Father, he was much more than an ordinary man.
4. After his resurrection the Lord Jesus was given a nature like God's and exalted above the angels. He now sits at God's right hand in heaven. Apart from God Himself, there is no greater being in the whole universe.

A verse to learn:

"For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." (*1 Timothy 2:5*)

Verses to read:

Deuteronomy 6:1-15; Matthew 1:18-25; 2 Timothy 1:9, 10; Hebrews 2

Questions on Chapter 16 – The Father and the Son

16A. Are the following right (R) or wrong (W)?

- a) The mother of Jesus was Mary.
- b) The father of Jesus was Joseph.
- c) Jesus existed in heaven before he was born.
- d) God knew from before creation that He would send Jesus.
- e) Jesus had human nature (like us) before his death.
- f) Jesus is called 'God the Son' in the Bible.

Rewrite correctly those that are wrong.

16B. Before Jesus' death the order of importance was:

GOD, ANGELS, JESUS, MAN, ANIMALS

What is the order of importance now?

16C. State three facts that Psalm 103:8, 13, 14 tell us about God.

16D. What does Jesus say in John 14:28 about his relationship with God?

16E. 1 Corinthians 15:28 explains the position of Christ at the end of his 1,000 year reign. Will he be:

- (a) greater than God, or
- (b) equal with God, or
- (c) less important than God?

16F. Jesus said, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). Since God is always greater than Jesus, in what sense are they 'one'?

16G. Revelation 13:8 talks about the Lamb slain from the foundation (creation) of the world.

- a) Who is the Lamb?
- b) Approximately how long ago did he die?
- c) What does the verse mean by saying that he died from the foundation of the world?

16H. a) What is meant by 'human nature'?

- b) How does God's nature differ from ours?
- c) Was it possible for Jesus to sin before he was crucified?

17

THE LIFE OF JESUS

Reading: Luke 2

God's Message to Mary

What an amazing message the angel brought to the virgin Mary! She would give birth to the Son of God. The angel told her that God would use His power, the Holy Spirit, to bring about the conception of His Son. No man was to be involved. The baby was to be called Jesus, meaning 'God shall save', for he came to "*save his people from their sins*" (Matthew 1:21).

Luke 1:30-33

"And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.'

The birth of Jesus is recorded in the first two chapters of Matthew and Luke. These chapters do not say that Jesus existed in heaven before his birth. Such an idea does not agree with what the Bible says about the conception and birth of Jesus.

The life and work of the Lord Jesus is recorded in the Gospels of Matthew,

Mark, Luke and John. Very little is recorded of the time from his birth through to his baptism at 30 years of age. But we are told that as a child "*Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man*" (Luke 2:52). The Bible would not say this if Jesus had already existed as a perfect being in heaven before his birth, as some people wrongly believe.

The Baptism of Jesus

Jesus was baptized in the River Jordan by John the Baptist. Baptism is not a sprinkling but a complete immersion in water. When Jesus "*came up out of the water*" he received the Holy Spirit and a voice from heaven said, "*You are my beloved Son; with you I am well*

pleased" (Mark 1:10, 11). In this way God showed His approval. By being baptized himself, Jesus shows us the importance of baptism.

After his baptism Jesus went into the wilderness, where he was "*tempted by the devil*" (Matthew 4:1).

Was Jesus really tempted by an All-Powerful Evil Being?

The Bible tells us that temptation comes from our minds (James 1:13-15). There is no all-powerful wicked being that makes people do evil. So what really happened in the wilderness?

In the first of the three temptations recorded, Jesus was tempted to turn stones into bread (Matthew 4:2-4). He was very hungry because he had not eaten for 40 days. Jesus did not need a wicked being to tempt him to make food! The Holy Spirit had just been given to him, so he would be tempted to try it out. But Jesus knew that God's power must only be used to do God's will. It would be wrong to use it to satisfy his own desires, even though he was very hungry.

A careful look at the other two temptations shows that there could not be an all-powerful evil being present. Problems arise if we try to understand them literally.

For example, in the temptation of Matthew 4:8,9:

Matthew 4:8, 9

"Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.'"

1. There is no mountain from which the whole world can be seen – the world is round! Jesus could not have been literally taken to such a place.

2. Jesus knew his Bible: he understood that the world belongs to God and no one else was able to offer it to him. The Old Testament says that the "*earth is the LORD'S and the fullness thereof*" (Psalm 24:1) and "*the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will*" (Daniel 4:32).

In the Luke account of this temptation we read that Jesus was shown the kingdoms of the world "*in a moment of time*" (Luke 4:5). This suggests that the temptation took place in his mind. Jesus knew that in God's future kingdom he would rule the whole world. In his mind he could picture the kingdoms of the world. It would be tempting to use the Holy Spirit to take at that time what was promised to him in the future, but Jesus knew that he should be obedient to his Father's will, which was for him to overcome sin and die on the cross to bring salvation.

Luke 4:9-11

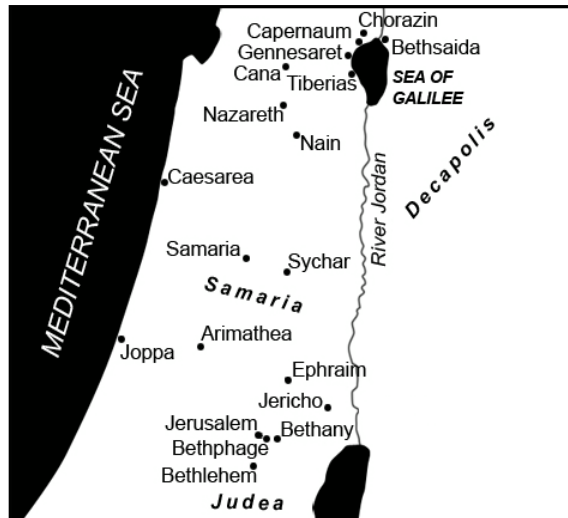
“And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you’, and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’”

In the temptation of Luke 4:9-11 we are told that the devil took Jesus to Jerusalem. Would Jesus really follow a supernatural evil being all the way from the wilderness to Jerusalem, climb to the pinnacle of the temple, and only then say, “*It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test’*” (Luke 4:12)? If there were a literal devil, Jesus would have recognised him and refused to follow him.

This temptation could have easily occurred in the mind of Jesus. Knowing that God’s angels would protect him, Jesus could have thought that throwing himself

down from the temple would be a good way to attract attention and prove that he was God’s Son. That would make his work of preaching easier. But Jesus knew that it is wrong to take advantage of God’s care.

So we suggest that these temptations took place in the mind of Jesus while he was in the wilderness. The scriptures here use the idea of the devil (or Satan) as a symbol to represent the powerful force of human nature, the temptations to sin that arise in all our minds. The temptations of Jesus in the wilderness show that he had human nature like us and was tempted as we are. But Jesus never gave in to temptation and so he did not sin.



Jesus answered each temptation with the words of Scripture (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). We can learn a very important lesson from this

The Life of Jesus

– we must read the Bible and allow its message to influence us, to help us to make the right decisions when we are tempted.

The Ministry of Jesus

After his baptism and temptation in the wilderness, Jesus travelled “*through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God*” (Luke 8:1). His public ministry covered a period of about three and a half years and ended with his death on the cross.

At first, Jesus attracted many disciples (‘disciple’ means ‘one who learns from a teacher’). He chose twelve of them to become his special disciples. Later, he sent them out to help him preach the Gospel and called them apostles (‘apostle’ means ‘one who is sent’).

The Teaching of Jesus

1. Jesus taught the people directly – In Matthew Chapters 5-7 the Sermon on the Mount is recorded, in which Jesus shows us how God wants us to live. The first lesson Jesus taught is about the need for us to be humble. He said,

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (*Matthew 5:3*)

Because Jesus spoke of the kingdom of heaven, some people think that the kingdom is in heaven. But the Bible never talks about a kingdom in heaven. Verse 5 shows that the reward of the righteous is on earth: “*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*”. The phrase ‘kingdom of heaven’ only occurs in Matthew’s Gospel and refers to God’s kingdom (see Matthew 19:23, 24; also compare Matthew 8:11 with Luke 13:28, 29). God’s kingdom is described as a heavenly kingdom because it will be a time when God’s will is done on earth as it is always done in heaven.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also taught people that:

- they should love their enemies
- they should not judge others
- looking on a woman lustfully (with desire for sex) was as wrong as actually committing adultery
- when they gave money it should be done in secret

- they should live faithful lives which give God glory
- they should not worry about the things of this life but trust in God’s care
- seeking God’s kingdom and His righteousness should be the most important thing in life.

In Matthew 7:13-23, Jesus warned:

- that only a few will enter God's kingdom – those who do His will
- that many would be rejected from God's kingdom (even though they claimed to have done wonderful things in His Name).

2. Jesus taught using parables – A parable is a simple story of everyday life with a deeper spiritual meaning. Matthew 13 has many parables about the future kingdom.

Jesus spoke in parables to separate between true disciples and those who were only attracted by his miracles. Those seeking God's truth looked for the deeper spiritual lessons in Jesus' parables. If we want to be among his true disciples, we need to carefully search the scriptures for ourselves.

3. Jesus taught by prophecy – Jesus warned about the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the scattering of the Jewish nation. He also spoke of signs that would happen in the world just before his return (see Chapter 8).

4. Jesus taught by the way he lived – The Son of God was born in a stable. He had no home of his own and did not live a life of luxury. He said,

“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” (*Luke 9:58*)

Jesus helped others, both by preaching the Gospel and by healing people who were sick. He showed us how to love our neighbour as ourselves, and how to love our enemies!

Just before his death, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. This task was usually done by a servant. Although he was the Son of the great Creator of the universe, Jesus was humble and served others.

Jesus spent much time in prayer to his Heavenly Father. Before he chose his twelve special disciples, he spent all night in prayer. He did not pray openly, to show people how good he was, and he condemned the way the religious leaders did this.

Jesus taught, “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind ... You shall love your neighbour as yourself*” (Matthew 22:37-39). This is what he did. Jesus is the example of how God wants us to live. He showed us the character of God Himself.

The Miracles of Jesus

Jesus used the Holy Spirit to perform amazing miracles. He turned water into wine, walked on the sea, fed thousands of people from only a few loaves of bread and some fish. He used the Holy Spirit to help others and not himself. He never used it to impress people or show off. His miracles were a sign that he was sent by God. They showed that God was working through him and that he was teaching God's ways (Acts 2:22).

The Gospels are full of wonderful miracles of healing that Jesus performed. He had pity on those who were suffering and wanted to help them. He even raised the dead. These miracles were a sign that Jesus would bring salvation from sin and death (Mark 2:10).

Preparation for Death

Jesus took with him three of his disciples and went up a mountain to pray (Matthew 17:1-13). As they watched while he prayed, he was "*transfigured*" (his appearance altered) – his face and clothes shone brightly. The Old Testament characters, Moses and Elijah, appeared. They talked with Jesus about his coming death on the cross. What the disciples saw was a vision of the Lord Jesus in glory. It was a picture of him in God's kingdom. It must have helped him to look forward to that kingdom, as he faced his coming death.

Jesus knew from Old Testament prophecies that he would die a cruel death (e.g. Psalms 22 and 69, and Isaiah 53). He warned his disciples that he would suffer and die, but he also told them that he would rise from the dead (Luke 9:22).

The religious leaders repeatedly tried to trick Jesus into doing wrong, so they could accuse him. Jesus knew they hated him. They tried to stone him twice, but "*his hour was not yet come*" – it was not the time for him to die. However, when "*the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem*" (Luke 9:51).

Jesus accepted that he had to die. He knew that this was the only way people could be saved from their sins. But he could only help them in this way if he were sinless himself. Each day he battled against sin. He refused to do things that were selfish or would hurt others. He disciplined himself so that he always did God's will. He

left us a wonderful example. And he told his disciples that they should follow him:

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23)

This means that each day we should follow the example of the Lord Jesus by serving God rather than ourselves. Part of doing this is to help others in a self-sacrificing way. In his parable of Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus spoke about the future judgement. Those welcomed into God's kingdom had lovingly cared for others. It was as if they had cared for Jesus himself.

Summary

The Lord Jesus provided a wonderful example for us to follow in our lives. He showed us the character of God Himself.

A verse to learn:

“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David.” (*Luke 1:32*)

Verses to read:

Matthew 5, 6 and 7; Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 9

Questions on Chapter 17 – The Life of Jesus

- 17A. a) Was Jesus alive in Old Testament times?
b) Did an all-powerful evil being speak to Jesus in the wilderness?
If your answer to part b) is 'No', explain what you think happened.
- 17B. In the Sermon on the Mount, what did Jesus teach about the following? All references are from Matthew's Gospel.
- a) The reason we should do good works (5:16).
 - b) Lust (5:27, 28).
 - c) Our enemies (5:43-48).
 - d) Giving (6:1-4).
 - e) Treasure (6:19-21).
 - f) Serving two masters (6:24).
 - g) Being anxious and what is most important in life (6:25-34).
 - h) Judging others (7:1-5).
 - i) False teachers (or prophets) (7:15-23).
- 17C. What should we learn from the Lord Jesus' way of life?

18

THE DEATH OF JESUS

Reading: Mark 14 and 15

The Problem of Sin

Sin is a terrible problem for mankind. It is the root cause of all the world's troubles. It separates people from God and leads to certain death. It is impossible for mankind to conquer sin by its own efforts. Even the most sincere person has never been able to solve the problem of sin. However good a person may be, he will always fall short of God's glory (Romans 3:23).

The Bible provides God's answer to the sin of mankind. God gave His only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to be the sacrifice that was necessary for mankind to break free from sin. The Lord Jesus joined with his Father in this work by offering himself as a willing, obedient sacrifice for sin. It was a life-long sacrifice – he gave up his own will

and desires and chose to follow his Father's will at all times. Dying on the cross was the last great act of willing obedience in a life of sacrifice. Because Jesus was sinless to the end, he overcame death. He also made it possible for his true disciples to have their sins forgiven and so escape everlasting death.

Psalm 22:6-8

"But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!"

Psalm 22:15, 16

"My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet."

The Sufferings of Jesus

In the Gospels we read about the unjust trial of Jesus, the cruel mocking, his savage beating and flogging. There was also the distress of seeing his mother's suffering as she watched him die. He would be deeply saddened by the knowledge that it was the Jews, his own people, who

The. Death of Jesus

were rejecting him, and he knew that later they would be punished.

We learn more of Jesus' suffering through some of the Old Testament writings. Psalm 22 helps us to understand how he felt during the crucifixion. As well as the terrible pain, he felt the great shame of crucifixion.

Events leading to the Death of Jesus

The Pharisees and Sadducees were the Jewish religious leaders in the time of Jesus. These groups usually opposed each other, but because they both hated Jesus, they worked together to destroy him. They were jealous of his popularity, power and authority. They hated seeing great crowds listening to him, amazed by his miracles. It was clear that no ordinary man could do miracles like Jesus – they were signs that he was God's Son. But the religious leaders did not want to see the truth – they were blinded by their jealousy and hatred.

Jesus was in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. The religious leaders wanted to arrest him quietly, without causing a protest among the people. Their opportunity came when Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples, offered to betray him. Judas led them to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus and his other disciples were alone (John 18:1-3).

Jesus was arrested and brought before the council of religious leaders. They failed to find a genuine reason for putting him to death. It is impossible to find fault with a sinless person! In the end the High Priest said, *"I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God"* (Matthew 26:63). When Jesus agreed that he was God's Son, the religious leaders accused him of blasphemy. According to the Law of Moses, the punishment for blasphemy was death. Of course, it was a false accusation. Jesus had not blasphemed – he had spoken the truth.

At this time the Romans ruled over Israel, so the Jewish leaders brought Jesus to the Roman Governor of the area, Pontius Pilate, and demanded that he should be crucified – this was the way the Romans executed criminals. But Pilate could find no fault in Jesus. When he heard that Jesus came from Herod's area, Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, who was in Jerusalem at the time. When Jesus remained silent, Herod mocked him and sent him back to Pilate. These men became friends:

"And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other."
(Luke 23:12)

Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent. He repeatedly told the Jews that neither he nor Herod could find any fault with him (Luke 23:4, 14, 15, 22). Pilate knew that the Jews wanted to put Jesus to death because of jealousy. The Jews told Pilate that since Jesus claimed to be a king, he was a threat to the Roman Emperor, and so it would be disloyal to the Emperor to release Jesus. Pilate weakly gave in. He allowed a murderer, Barabbas, to live and sent the Lord of life to his death – a dreadful injustice. Pilate handed over Jesus to Roman soldiers, to die by crucifixion – perhaps the most painful and agonising death ever invented.

Both Jews and Romans were therefore involved in the death of Jesus. God had planned from the very beginning to save mankind by His Son and knew that these wicked men would behave as they did. Later the apostle Peter said to the Jews,

“This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.” (*Acts 2:23*)

There was no other Way

Jesus knew that his Father had brought him into the world to bring salvation. Throughout his life he was totally obedient to his Father, even to suffering and death on the cross. Jesus said that he wanted to “*do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work*” (John 4:34). In the Garden of Gethsemane, when he faced his greatest test of obedience, Jesus prayed three times to his Father, “*If it be possible, let this cup pass from me*”, but was careful to add, “*Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will*” (Matthew 26:39-44). If it had been possible, God would have spared His Son the agony, but it was the only way. On the cross, as he neared death, Jesus said, “*It is finished*” (John 19:30). He had finished the work that God gave him to do (John 17:4).

Why did Jesus Die?

Adam sinned and so he died. Death is the punishment for sin. This is God’s law. Romans 6:23 says: “*For the wages of sin is death*”. Just as we earn wages by working, so we earn death by sinning. We all sin and so we all deserve to die.

SIN → DEATH

Jesus died on the cross to take away the sins of the world. This was his Father’s will, and he was obedient even to death. However, he also died because he was mortal like us. If Jesus had not died on the cross, he would have died at some time later.

The. Death of Jesus

Jesus was also tempted just as we are, and in some ways more than we are, but he never sinned. In Hebrews 4:15 we read that Jesus “*in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin*”.

Although he shared Adam’s dying nature, Jesus did not deserve death because he was sinless. Therefore, God raised Jesus from the dead without breaking His own law that “*the wages of sin is death*”. Jesus died to gain his own redemption, and to make ours possible.

Jesus agreed with his Father that sin should be punished by death, which is why he refused to give in to sin. He knew that the only way to conquer death was to conquer sin in himself. He knew that His Father would raise him from the dead if he was sinless.

After his resurrection God gave the Lord Jesus a new nature – a nature like God Himself – that cannot sin and cannot die. Romans 6:9 says:

“We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.”

What about Us?

Jesus died at the feast of Passover. At the original Passover, each Israelite household killed a perfect lamb and placed its blood on the door posts at the entrance to their home, to save them from death (Exodus 12). This pointed forward to the death of Jesus (1 Corinthians 5:7). He was an acceptable sacrifice – he was like a perfectly formed lamb with no scars or blemishes (1 Peter 1:19). God was willing to accept this perfect sacrifice as the offering for all who believe in Jesus as “*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). Speaking of Jesus, long before his birth, the prophet Isaiah said:

“But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (*Isaiah 53:5, 6*)

Romans 5:6-8 speaks of God’s love in allowing His Son to die for sinners:

“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

John 15:13 shows the love of the Lord Jesus in giving his life for those he came to save:

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.”

God and His Son have done all they can for us. God has given us His beloved Son as a sacrifice. Jesus has laid down his life for us. We have to realise that we are sinners and desperately need salvation. Unless we acknowledge how sinful we are and how much God and His Son have done for us, the sacrifice of Jesus will not help us.

The Crucifixion allowed People to come close to God

Sin separates people from God. Through the sacrifice of Jesus it is possible for our sins to be forgiven. The barrier between God and ourselves is then removed and we can be brought close to Him. This is described in the Bible as reconciliation, and through it we can have fellowship (a special relationship) with God through the Lord Jesus, our mediator in heaven. In 2 Corinthians 5:19 the apostle Paul clearly shows that God was working through His Son to reconcile sinners to Himself. This message of reconciliation to God was preached by the apostles:

“... in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.”

Taking up our Cross

The crucifixion is at the heart of the Gospel. It is the source of salvation provided by God in His love and is made possible by the love of His Son. Forgiveness is God’s gift to those who repent of their sins and come to Him through belief and baptism:

“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.” (*Acts 2:38*)

But more than baptism is needed. Jesus said,

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (*Mark 8:34*)

The idea of taking up our cross is that we need to make self-sacrifices each day. If we want to follow the Lord Jesus we have to please God and not ourselves. We have to make every effort to stop sinning, and walk with Christ in a new way of life. The apostle Paul says:

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (*Galatians 5:24*)

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Crucifying the flesh involves putting to death (completely destroying) our sinful desires. We must try really hard not to allow sin to rule over us in our lives.

Some Lessons from the Crucifixion

1. The crucifixion of Jesus was a terrible event. It showed mankind at its worst as people took the perfect and lovely Son of God and killed him brutally. The crucifixion shows how evil people are, and the awfulness of sin.

It also shows how much God loves all true disciples of Christ. The apostle Paul says:

“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he (God) not also with him graciously give us all things?” (*Romans 8:32*)

2. A huge price was paid so that true believers can have immortal life. It was the cost of a completely sinless life. The apostle Peter, writing to believers, says:

“... knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.” (*1 Peter 1:18,19*)

3. Jesus gave us a wonderful example of how to behave.
 - He did not protest that he was right when people said evil things about him (*1 Peter 2:21-23*).
 - He forgave those who crucified him (*Luke 23:34*).
 - Even when in great pain and distress, he cared for others (*John 19:26, 27; Luke 23:27-31*).
 - He obeyed his Father in all things, completely trusting Him.

Summary

1. We all sin and so we all deserve to die.
2. In His love God has given us His beloved Son as a sacrifice for sin.
3. Jesus joined with his Father in this work by willingly laying down his life for us.
4. God raised Jesus from the dead, because he was sinless and so did not deserve death. God gave the Lord Jesus immortal life.
5. Through the sacrifice of Jesus it is possible for our sins to be forgiven. Then we can share the hope of immortal life in God's kingdom.
6. We must acknowledge our sins, repent and be baptized, and walk with Christ in a new way of life.

A verse to learn:

“God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (*Romans 5:8*)

Verse to read:

“He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.”
(*2 Corinthians 5:15*)

Also read

2 Corinthians 5; 1 Peter 1

Questions on Chapter 18 – The Death of Jesus

- 18A. Are the statements about Jesus right (R) or wrong (W)?
- a) He had divine nature from birth.
 - b) He died because he shared Adam's dying nature.
 - c) He has human nature now.
 - d) He was a Gentile.
 - e) He was willing to suffer the horrors of crucifixion for us.
 - f) He made it possible for our sins to be removed by sacrificing himself.
 - g) It is impossible for him to sin now.
 - h) He was a sacrifice to please an angry God.
 - i) He completely won the battle against sin.
 - j) He only removes the sins of people who repent, are baptized, and who are trying hard to follow his example.
- 18B. Why did the Jewish leaders want to put Jesus to death?
- 18C. What does 2 Corinthians 5:15 mean to you?
- 18D. Jesus' sacrifice healed the division between God and man that was caused by sin. What is the Bible word for this?

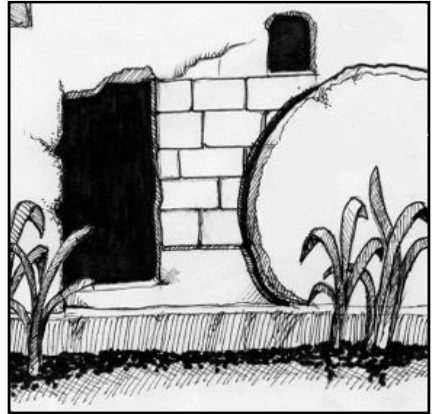
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THE RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION OF JESUS CHRIST

Reading: John 20

The Third Day

It was early in the morning on the first day of the week, the third day after Jesus' death. With great sadness some of his women followers went to his tomb (grave). They carried spices to anoint his body. But they did not know how they were going to move the huge stone that sealed the entrance to the tomb. When they arrived, the stone was rolled away and the tomb was empty! Two angels appeared and said to them,



“Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.” (*Luke 24:5, 6*)

The women went and told the disciples. Peter and John ran to the tomb to see for themselves. Certainly the tomb was empty, and Jesus' grave clothes were lying inside.

One of the women, Mary Magdalene, returned to the tomb and wept. She thought that someone had stolen the body, despite what the angels had said. Then Jesus came and talked with her, but she thought that he was the gardener (*John 20:14-18*). Then Jesus said, “*Mary!*” He spoke her name and suddenly she knew that it was her Lord. He really was alive!

Did Jesus really rise from the Dead?

Some people do not believe that Jesus rose from the dead. Here are some of the reasons they give for not believing in the resurrection.

1. People say: “Jesus did not die on the cross. It just looked as if he were dead. He recovered later inside the cool tomb.”

BUT... the Bible says that Jesus did die on the cross. The Roman soldiers broke the legs of the two men crucified with Jesus, so that

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they would die quickly; but the soldiers did not break Jesus' legs – they knew that he was already dead (John 19:31-33). Also, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus for burial. When Pilate asked a Roman centurion if Jesus was already dead, the centurion confirmed that he was dead (Mark 15:43-45). Centurions could be trusted to know whether a man was dead or alive.

2. People say: “His disciples stole the body.”

BUT... this is not true. The Jewish religious leaders had placed guards at the tomb to prevent this. They were afraid that Jesus' disciples would steal his body and claim that he had been raised from the dead (Matthew 27:62-66). When the angel appeared and rolled back the stone at the entrance to the tomb, the guards were powerless. The leaders later bribed the guards to say that the disciples had stolen the body (Matthew 28:2-4, 11-15).

There is nothing in the Bible to suggest that the disciples stole the body. It would have been impossible for them to move the large stone sealing the tomb while the guards were present. After Jesus' death the disciples were frightened, unhappy and disbelieving. They were too scared to trick the Jewish leaders.

The disciples did not believe that Jesus was alive until they had actually seen him (John 20:19, 20). When they were sure that he was alive, the disciples became changed men. They risked their lives preaching about the resurrection. Some even died for their faith. They would not have done such things if they had stolen the body.

3. People say: “He left his body behind, and came back as a spirit.”

BUT... Jesus was raised from the dead with a body. He did not come back as a spirit. Thomas saw the holes in Jesus' hands and side that were caused by the nails and the centurion's spear at the crucifixion. Jesus told him to feel these holes (John 20:27).

Jesus said to his disciples, “*Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have*” (Luke 24:39). Jesus asked for food and ate it as his disciples watched (Luke 24:41-43).

4. People say: “The women went to the wrong tomb.”

BUT... the women knew where Jesus' tomb was, because some of them were present when his body was laid there (Luke 23:55). Mark 16:6 shows that the women went to the correct tomb and the angels spoke to them there. Some of the women and disciples saw the grave clothes in the empty tomb.

The religious leaders did not want the people to think that Jesus had risen from the dead. They would have quickly pointed out the

women's mistake and shown the body, if Jesus had not been raised. The leaders knew the correct tomb because they had placed guards there.

It needs faith to accept that Jesus rose from the dead. Even the disciple, Thomas, did not believe it at first. He was not convinced until he saw Jesus for himself. Jesus said to him, "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*" (John 20:29).

There was never any question about whether the sinless Son of God would rise from the dead. Death is the punishment for sin. God raised Jesus from the dead because he was totally sinless and did not deserve death:

"God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it." (*Acts 2:24*)

Had the Time for God's Kingdom Come?

When Jesus entered Jerusalem shortly before his death, crowds of disciples gathered along the road and praised him:

"Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!" (*John 12:13, Mark 11:10*)

They understood that Jesus was the special son whom God had promised David. They also understood that Jesus would restore God's kingdom on earth and become king. But they thought that it was to happen while he was with them, rather than some time in the future.

Similarly, when the disciples finally realised that Jesus really was alive again, they hoped that he would restore God's kingdom immediately. During the 40 days before his ascension, the Lord spent time with them speaking about that kingdom (*Acts 1:3*). They asked,

"Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (*Acts 1:6*)

Jesus answered,

"It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority." (*Acts 1:7*)

There was work to be done before the setting up of God's kingdom. The apostles were to be sent into the world to preach the Gospel. All this happened nearly 2,000 years ago, but the work of preaching continues today. The delay gives the opportunity for more people to turn to God:

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“But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief.” (2 Peter 3:8-10)

The Ascension of the Lord Jesus to Heaven

While the Lord Jesus was talking to his disciples about these things on the Mount of Olives, just outside Jerusalem, he was taken up from them into heaven to be with his Father. As they watched him ascend into heaven, two angels spoke to the disciples. The words of the angels in Acts 1:10, 11 tell us that Jesus will return.

Jesus was taken up into heaven in bodily form (remember, he was not a spirit). It will be this same Jesus who returns. He will come back in the same way as he went. Christ Jesus will come again in bodily form to reign as king over the whole earth. Then he will restore the kingdom to Israel.

The Lord Jesus has been raised to a highly exalted Position

After his resurrection the Lord Jesus was exalted to a position of great glory. God gave all authority to him (Matthew 28:18). He is now in heaven, sitting at his Father’s right hand. Apart from God Himself, there is no greater being in the whole universe.

“And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’” (Acts 1:10, 11)

The apostle Peter says:

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| Acts 2:36... God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified | 1 Peter 1:21... (God) raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God | 1 Peter 3:22... (Jesus) has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him |
|---|--|---|

The Lord Jesus Christ has the authority to give immortal life to those who are found acceptable:

“For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.” (*John 5:21*)

We can join with the multitude of angels who praise the Lord Jesus Christ, saying:

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!" (*Revelation 5:12*)

The Importance of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus

The whole Gospel message depends on the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. If the Lord Jesus, who was sinless, did not rise from the dead, then no one will. The apostle Paul explains this to believers in 1 Corinthians 15. He says that if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then their faith is worthless, and their sins are not forgiven. If this is the case, then those who have died have perished without hope:

“... And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.” (*1 Corinthians 15:17*)

What a miserable picture! Thankfully, we know that this is not true – the Lord Jesus did rise from the dead – so Paul adds the following:

| 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 | Comments |
|--|---|
| “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” | Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first – others will follow, made possible through Jesus. |
| “For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.” | Everyone dies, because everyone is descended from Adam. Those belonging to Christ will be made alive. |
| “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.” | Christ was the first to be raised to immortal life. Those who belong to him will receive immortality when he returns to this earth. |

The resurrection of Christ guarantees that those who belong to him will be raised. This means that if we die before Christ Jesus returns, we too can be raised from the dead and receive immortal life. But we will only be given a place in God’s kingdom on earth if we are “in

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Christ". We can "*belong to Christ*" only if we are baptized into his death (Galatians 3:27-29).

How are the dead raised? With what kind of Body?

This was what people wanted to know in Paul's time (1 Corinthians 15:35). Just as the Lord Jesus had a body when he rose from the dead, so true believers will have bodies when they are raised from the dead – they will not be spirits.

The Lord Jesus was given an immortal body when he rose from the dead. When true believers are given a place in God's kingdom their bodies will be changed (1 Corinthians 15:51-54). Philippians 3:20, 21 says that those whose minds are set on heavenly things await the return of Jesus Christ who will then change their bodies:

"But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself."

At present we have mortal (dying) bodies. This is why we can feel tired, suffer pain and become ill – it is all part of the punishment for sin. Those who are given a place in God's kingdom will be made immortal – their bodies will be changed and become undying, free from pain and illness.

What a wonderful offer God has made to us!

- We can have our sins forgiven through the Lord Jesus Christ.
- We can rise from the dead as he did.
- We can be given immortal bodies like him.
- We can have a place in God's kingdom on earth.

It is not surprising that the apostle Paul praises God for this:

"But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:57)

This is the great message of salvation. The Lord Jesus told his disciples to preach the message to the whole world. We want to pass it on to you and others!

Summary

1. God raised Jesus from the dead because he was sinless and did not deserve death.
2. Jesus was raised from the dead with a body – he did not come back as a spirit.
3. After his resurrection the Lord Jesus was exalted to a position of great glory.
4. He ascended to heaven to be with his Father. He now sits at his Father's right hand. Apart from God Himself, no greater being exists.
5. Jesus Christ will return to the earth in the same way as he went into heaven.
6. If we belong to Christ, we too can be raised from the dead and be given immortal bodies.

A verse to learn:

“God raised him (Jesus) up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.”

(Acts 2:24)

Verses to read:

Matthew 28, Luke 24, Acts 1

Questions on Chapter 19 – The Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ

- 19A. Who raised Jesus from the dead?
- 19B. After his death the Lord Jesus was exalted to a position of great glory. Where is he now?
- 19C. a) Did the Lord Jesus have a body when he rose from the dead?
b) Will he have a body when he returns to the earth?
- 19D. 1 Corinthians 15:51 says, “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed”.
- a) What does this mean?
b) To whom does this refer?
c) When will it happen?
- 19E. Jesus had to die because of his human nature. Why did he have to rise from the dead?

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GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT

Reading: Mark 1

The Spirit of God

When we look up at the night sky and see the moon and the stars, we begin to realise the incredible size of the universe. God created the universe by His Spirit:

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” (*Genesis 1:1-3*)

Jeremiah tells us that God’s great power was at work when He created the earth:

“It is I (*God*) who by my great power and my outstretched arm have made the earth, with the men and animals that are on the earth.” (*Jeremiah 27:5*)

Psalm 33 describes creation in this way:

“By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host. He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap; he puts the deeps in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.” (*Psalm 33:6-9*)

God only had to speak the words and His will was carried out by the power of His Spirit. When God said, “*Let there be light*”, His words had enormous power and authority. This is what Psalm 33 tells us when it says: “*By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host ...*”

By His Spirit, God keeps creation alive. He did not create the world and then abandon it:

“The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath

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and everything... In him we live and move and have our being.”
(Acts 17:24-28).

“The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.” (Job 33:4)

See also Psalm 104:10-15, 27-30 and Isaiah 42:5.

God is everywhere present by His Spirit and knows all Things

Despite the enormous size of the universe, God is everywhere:

“Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD.” (Jeremiah 23:24)

Not only is God everywhere, He also knows all things. He knows everything about us, even our thoughts. We cannot hide anything from Him:

“O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether ... Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, (the grave) you are there!” (Psalm 139:1-3, 7, 8)

How is God able to “fill heaven and earth” and know everything? It is by His Spirit. This is why David says in Psalm 139, “Where shall I go from your Spirit?”

God used His Spirit to communicate with People

In Bible times God used His Spirit to direct the minds of the prophets to speak His message:

“They (the people) made their hearts diamond-hard lest they should hear the law and the words that the LORD of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets. Therefore great anger came from the LORD of hosts.” (Zechariah 7:12)

The Spirit of God is His power through which He makes and supports all things. Through it He is everywhere present and knows all things. God used His Spirit in Bible times to reveal His plan and purpose to mankind, and He uses it to carry out His purpose. Everything God does is by His Spirit.

Inspiration and the Spirit of God

God also used His Spirit to direct the minds of those who wrote the Bible, so that they wrote His words. This is known as inspiration. Through inspiration, God is the true author of the Bible:

“... no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 1:20, 21)

This passage is not just about men foretelling the future. In the Bible, the word ‘prophecy’ means revealing God's words, whether about the past, present or future.



At least 35 writers, living in many different places, wrote the words of the Bible. It was written over a period of about 1,600 years. If God had not inspired its writing, the Bible would be a complete mixture of ideas and standards. Instead, the same message runs throughout the whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. This shows that the Bible is God's Word.

The Holy Spirit and the Lord Jesus Christ

God's Spirit is sometimes called the Holy Spirit. Most references to the Holy Spirit are in the New Testament. The word ‘holy’ means ‘separate’ or ‘set apart’, with the idea of God's Spirit being totally different from the wickedness of mankind. Older translations of the Bible use ‘Holy Ghost’ instead of ‘Holy Spirit’. ‘Ghost’ is the old word for ‘spirit’ but can be misunderstood today. The Holy Spirit is the power of God by which He works out His purpose concerning salvation – so people can eventually be holy like Him.

The first New Testament use of the phrase ‘Holy Spirit’ tells us that it brought about the birth of Jesus. The virgin Mary was “*found to be with child from the Holy Spirit*” (Matthew 1:18).

At his baptism in the River Jordan, Jesus was given the Holy Spirit without measure (without any limit, John 3:34). Through His Spirit, God gave limited abilities (e.g. the ability to do miracles) to selected people in Bible times; but no other person ever received the Holy Spirit totally as Jesus did. Jesus never used the Holy Spirit to do his own will, but he always used it in the purpose of God (Acts 2:22). He performed miracles to help his preaching. They were a sign that he was God's Son. They showed that God was working through him and that he was teaching God's ways (Isaiah 61:1, 2).

God's Holy Spirit

God used His Spirit to raise His Son from the dead and exalt him (Ephesians 1:19-22).

The Apostles were given the Gifts of the Holy Spirit

The Lord Jesus promised his apostles that they would be given the Holy Spirit after he had gone into heaven. He told them to stay in Jerusalem and “*wait for the promise of the Father*” for they would “*be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now*” (Acts 1:4, 5).

This promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), about ten days after Jesus had ascended to heaven. We read how the Holy Spirit came with a sound “*like a mighty rushing wind*”, shaking the house where the apostles were gathered together. Tongues of fire were seen over each one of them. This was a sign that the Holy Spirit had been given to them. They then had special abilities including the power to do miracles and speak in tongues (different languages). These special abilities are sometimes called the “*gifts of the Holy Spirit*” (Hebrews 2:4).

The Lord Jesus had instructed his apostles to continue his work of preaching after he had gone to heaven. They needed the gifts of the Holy Spirit to help them do this. For example, they needed to remember what Jesus had said and done during his ministry, so that they could teach others. Jesus said to his apostles,

“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” (*John 14:25,26*)

Here the Holy Spirit is called the Helper (‘Comforter’ in some versions). The original Greek word means ‘one called alongside to help’. The Holy Spirit provided the help that the apostles needed.

Why did Jesus sometimes speak of the Holy Spirit as if it were a Person?

When the quotation above says “*he will teach you all things*”, it sounds as if the Holy Spirit is a person. Why, then, does Jesus sometimes speak of the Holy Spirit as if it were a person? The same sort of language is used in Romans 9:17:

“For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you.’ ”

Clearly the Scripture is not a person and cannot “*say*” anything. It is God’s words that are recorded. Luke 11:49 uses similar language:

“Therefore also the Wisdom of God said ...”

Similarly, Psalm 65:13 says:

“... the valleys deck themselves with corn, they shout and sing together for joy.”

The valleys are not literally shouting and singing. This is the Psalmist's poetical way of describing a beautiful scene. Proverbs 3:13-19 is another example – it talks about wisdom as if it were a beautiful and righteous woman. The Bible uses this sort of language to show how real something is. So when Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit in this way, he is just showing us what a very real thing the Spirit of God is.

The Holy Spirit is not separate from God

Some people wrongly believe that the Holy Spirit is a separate person from God. They use the phrases ‘God the Holy Spirit’ and ‘God the Holy Ghost’ which never occur in the Bible. God's Spirit is not a separate being from Him – it is part of God Himself, just as our strength is part of us. How can we separate God from His great power, His wisdom, His understanding? They are not separate persons for we read in Jeremiah 51:15:

“It is he (*God*) who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens.”

If the Holy Spirit were a separate person from God, then the Holy Spirit (and not God Himself) would be the father of Jesus (Matthew 1:18). This is clearly not the case.

God's Spirit and Us

To understand God's Spirit is to try to understand God Himself, and this we can never completely do with our mortal minds. God's Spirit is more than just power. Nehemiah 9:20 says that God gave His “*good spirit*” to instruct the people of Israel, referring to the help given to Moses. God's Spirit is full of goodness, and the way He uses it shows that He is a merciful and gracious God. This is the type of spirit, or attitude, people should have in their lives.

The gifts (special abilities) of the Holy Spirit are no longer needed and no-one has them today (there is more about this in the next chapter). Today, God speaks to us through His Word, the Bible, which was written through the Holy Spirit. When we read the Word of God and allow it to influence and guide everything we do, it gradually changes us to be more Christ-like. In this way God's Word can be said to be at work within us. The apostle Paul said to the believers at Thessalonica:

God's Holy Spirit

“... when you received the word of God ... you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.” (*1 Thessalonians 2:13*)

The following verses show how important God's Word is if we want to be born of the Spirit (start a new life serving God):

“you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.” (*1 Peter 1:23*)

“Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” (*James 1:18*)

We are by nature sinful. The apostle Paul in Romans 8:5-7 says:

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God.”

Paul uses the term ‘flesh’ to describe man's thinking; he uses the term ‘spirit’ to describe the things of God which are revealed to us in the Bible, inspired by the Holy Spirit. We need to overcome the flesh (our human evil thinking) and replace it with spiritual, godly thinking. The working of the Bible in our lives changes us to become spiritually minded people. In this way the Spirit of God can be in us. Paul says to the baptized believers,

“You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.” (*Romans 8:9, 10*)

Finally, we must remember that God is everywhere present by His Spirit and knows all about us. We cannot hide our sins from Him:

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” (*Hebrews 4:12, 13*)

Summary

1. The Spirit of God is His power through which He makes and supports all things. By it He created the universe and keeps creation alive.
2. By His Spirit, God is everywhere present and knows all things.
3. Jesus was born by the Holy Spirit. He was given the Spirit without limit.
4. The apostles were given the gifts (special abilities) of the Holy Spirit, including the power to do miracles and speak in different languages.
5. In Bible times God used His Spirit to communicate with people.
6. Today, God speaks to us through His Word, the Bible, which was written through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Verses to learn:

“O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.” *(Psalm 139:1,2)*

Verses to read:

Psalm 104; John 14; Acts 10:34-43; Galatians 5:16-26

God's Holy Spirit

Questions on Chapter 20 – God's Holy Spirit

- 20A. Is the Spirit of God a person?
- 20B. Explain why reading the Scriptures is a way through which we can receive the Spirit of God today.
- 20C. Do you believe that the Holy Spirit has affected your life? If so, how?

21

HOLY SPIRIT GIFTS

Reading: Acts 8

The Apostles are given Holy Spirit Gifts

We learned in Chapter 20 that the Holy Spirit was given to the apostles on the day of Pentecost, about ten days after the Lord Jesus had ascended to heaven. It was given to help them remember what Jesus had said and done, so that they could teach others.

The apostles were also able to perform miracles (Mark 16:17, 18). The Lord Jesus had instructed them to “*go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation*” (Mark 16:15). Without their Lord and Master, this was a huge task. People were unlikely to listen to ordinary, uneducated men, especially if they preached about a man being raised from the dead after three days in the grave. Just as Jesus had performed miracles to show that he was God’s Son, so the apostles were able to perform miracles to show that they were sent by God and the Lord Jesus. The miracles were a sign that their message was from God.

Before he ascended into heaven the Lord Jesus said to them,

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

Mark 16:20 tells us:

The Day of Pentecost

Having received the Holy Spirit, the apostles immediately went and preached to the Jewish crowd who had gathered in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. The people who listened had come from many different countries and spoke many different languages, and:

“they were amazed and astonished, saying, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?’ ” (Acts 2:7, 8)

Many realised that the apostles were speaking in languages that they had never learnt, so they could see that this was God’s Spirit at work. This special ability of speaking in other languages helped the apostles to preach the Gospel to people from other nations. In this way the gifts of the Holy Spirit supported their preaching.

The Spirit Gifts were also given to set up the first churches

As a result of the preaching on the day of Pentecost, about 3,000 people were baptized (Acts 2:41). This was the start of the Christian church. Such a large group of believers would need guidance and to be shown how to worship. They could not learn from the New Testament because it was not yet written. So the Holy Spirit was given to early baptized believers, to help them set up and organise the first Christian churches.

In 1 Corinthians 12:4-22 the apostle Paul shows how different members of the church possessed different gifts. He also shows that each member was to work for the good of the others. In verse 28 he says,

“And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.”

Special Times

This was a special time in the development of God’s purpose. There are only a few other such occasions in the Bible when God empowered people in this way; that is, when He gave selected people special abilities and powers, to help them do a particular work for Him. When that work was finished, the special abilities and powers finished too.

The New Testament was written through inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Today, we can read about the life of Jesus, the preaching of the apostles, and letters that the apostles wrote to the first churches. But the early baptized believers had no written record, and so apostles, prophets and teachers with special abilities from God were very necessary.

The Holy Spirit gifts were given at this time:

- to show that the true Gospel was being taught
- to support the preaching work
- to help set up and organise the first Christian churches
- to help write the New Testament.

When Christianity was established and the New Testament complete, these gifts were withdrawn. No-one has these Holy Spirit gifts today.

The Apostles passed on the Gifts to Baptized Believers

The Holy Spirit gifts were passed on to baptized believers by the laying on of the apostles’ hands. We read of the apostles Peter and John doing this in Acts 8. A believer called Philip (not the apostle)

was preaching in the region of Samaria. He performed great miracles to support his preaching (Acts 8:6). The story is continued in the table.

| Acts | Bible Passage | Notes |
|-------------|--|--|
| 8:12 | “But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” | Philip preached the Gospel (the good news about God’s kingdom and the saving work of Jesus Christ). Many believed and were baptized. |
| 8:13 | “Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.” | A man called Simon believed and was baptized. Simon had been a magician (verse 9) and had deceived the people of Samaria with his clever tricks. Naturally, he was amazed at Philip’s genuine miracles. He realised that Philip was empowered by God’s Spirit. |
| 8:14,15 | “Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit,” | All the apostles were still in Jerusalem (8:1). Peter and John had to travel to Samaria to help Philip. The apostles prayed that the newly baptized believers might receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. |

Holy Spirit Gifts

| | | |
|---------|--|--|
| 8:16 | “for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” | Even though Simon and the others were baptized, they had not received the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit gifts were not automatically given whenever a person was baptized. |
| 8:17 | “Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.” | The newly baptized believers received the Holy Spirit from the apostles (Peter and John), not from Philip. |
| 8:18,19 | “Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money, saying, “Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” | Even though Simon had received the Holy Spirit from the apostles, he could not pass it on to others. This is what he wanted to be able to do. |
| 8:20 | “But Peter said to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!” | Peter told him that he was quite wrong to try to buy the ability to pass on the Holy Spirit gifts. This also shows that although he possessed the Holy Spirit he could still do wrong. |

From this we learn that Simon, who was given the gifts of the Holy Spirit, could not pass them on to others. Similarly, Philip, who was able to do great miracles that impressed people, was unable to pass on the gifts to others. Instead, the apostles Peter and John had to travel all the way from Jerusalem to pass on the gifts to the newly baptized believers. This shows that very few people, perhaps only the apostles, could pass on to others the gifts of the Holy Spirit. After

their death, the gifts could no longer be passed on to others and so they gradually disappeared. Holy Spirit gifts do not exist today.

Cornelius

Acts 10 records how the apostle Peter was instructed by God to visit a Roman centurion, Cornelius, who was being called to salvation. Until this time only Jews had been baptized. While Peter was speaking to Cornelius and the other Gentiles with him, “*the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word*” (Acts 10:44). These Gentiles began to speak in tongues (other languages). Peter and those who were with him “*were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles*” (verse 45). This was a clear sign from the Lord that Gentiles could also be Christians. This is why Peter realised that they should be baptized with water.

This is the only example of Spirit gifts being given before baptism. It was a special case to show Peter that Gentiles could be also baptized. As Acts 8 showed, the gifts were only given to baptized believers, by the laying on of the apostles’ hands – it was not automatically given at baptism.

The End of the Gifts

By the end of the first century Christianity was established and the New Testament complete and God now guided and helped people through His written Word, the Bible, so the Spirit gifts were taken away. The apostle Paul showed that the gifts were temporary. He said that they were given:

“to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God ...” (*Ephesians 4:12,13*)

Hebrews 6:5 describes the gifts as “*powers of the age to come*”, showing that in God’s kingdom there will be more gifts than ever. So if the gifts were to be taken away but will also be given again when Christ returns, then we must be in the time when they do not exist.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

“Love never ends. As for prophecies (*from the gift of prophesying*), they will pass away; as for tongues (*the gift of speaking foreign languages*), they will cease; as for knowledge (*the gift of knowledge*), it will pass away.” (*1 Corinthians 13:8*)

Verse 8 shows that the Spirit gifts would be taken away; verse 13 shows that faith, hope and love would remain:

Holy Spirit Gifts

“So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

Therefore, hope and faith are needed longer than the Spirit gifts. But hope and faith will not be needed when the Lord Jesus has returned (since our hope is that Christ will return, and we have faith that it will happen). So at some time between the days of the apostles and Christ’s return the Holy Spirit gifts would be taken away.

We should not be surprised that the Holy Spirit gifts were only temporary. In Matthew 10 we read of Jesus giving his twelve disciples the power to do miracles. This power did not remain with them for long because it had to be given to them again at Pentecost.

Does anyone possess these Gifts today?

Some people claim to have the gifts of the Spirit today. In particular, they claim to be able to speak in tongues and to heal the sick. How can we test this claim?

1. The miracles in the Bible were immediate and complete, and they never failed. The blind could see clearly, the lame stood up immediately – all totally healed. Even the dead were raised. But today, no-one can raise the dead or perform miracles like those listed in Mark 16:17, 18:

“And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

2. The Holy Spirit gifts were given to help the true church. They also showed that the true church believes and preaches the Word of God. Most, if not all, of those people who claim to have these powers today preach things not taught in the Bible. Their claims therefore cannot be true. Jesus gave a strong warning about those who would falsely claim to have the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 7:21-23).

Holy Spirit Gifts never made people do what was right

Certain people in the Bible received Spirit gifts from God. However, none of them became morally better because of this. In the Old Testament, men were given gifts to help them build the Tabernacle, yet they disobeyed God and died in the wilderness. The apostle Paul and the apostle Peter both possessed the Holy Spirit but disagreed

about what was best to do. Paul accused Peter of being in the wrong and of showing a bad example to others. So even apostles, who had the Holy Spirit, could do wrong (Galatians 2:11-14). The Holy Spirit was never given to make people righteous. We are only accounted righteous by God when we use our own free will to believe and obey Him. There are very few times in Scripture when God made it possible for people to do miraculous or supernatural things. Even great men of God, like Abraham and David, did no miracles, yet God considered them righteous. It is the influence of God's Word in our lives that can change us and help us to grow more pleasing to God.

Matthew 7:21-23

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?'

And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

God is still Working

God's Spirit is still at work today. It keeps all of creation alive – Job 34:14, 15 shows that everything would die if God did not support His creation in this way. By His Spirit, God controls world affairs as He works out His purpose; and by His Spirit, God also answers believers' prayers. However, God no longer gives men and women special abilities and powers of the Holy Spirit. God speaks to us through His Word – we do not need any other revelations.

Holy Spirit Gifts

Summary

Holy Spirit gifts were given to selected people at special times, to help them do a particular work for God. When that work was finished, the special abilities and powers finished too. No-one possesses Holy Spirit gifts today.

A verse to learn:

“Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.” *(1 Corinthians 13:8)*

Verses to read:

1 Corinthians 12 and 13

Questions on Chapter 21 – Holy Spirit Gifts

- 21A. a) When the Holy Spirit was given to the apostles at Pentecost, what did it allow them to do?
b) How did the people in Jerusalem at the time benefit from this?
- 21B. a) Why were the Holy Spirit gifts given in the first century?
b) How long were they to last?
- 21C. What is meant by the gift of speaking in tongues?
- 21D. Which people were able to pass on the gifts of the Holy Spirit to others?
- 21E. Do you think that Holy Spirit gifts exist today?
- 21F. What is more important than all the gifts (1 Corinthians 13)?
- 21G. In what ways does God work by His Spirit today?
a) Does God answer the prayers of believers?
b) Does God give people the power to do miracles?
c) Does God keep His creation alive?
d) Does God control world affairs?
e) Do People speak with tongues?
- 21H. What do we have to guide us that the earliest Christians did not have?

22

SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES (PART 1)

Reading: Genesis 2 and 3

What is Sin?

Sin is disobedience to God's laws:

“Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practises lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.” (1 John 3:4)

Scripture is clear that we are all sinners:

“None is righteous, no, not one.” (Romans 3:10)

The word that the Bible often uses for ‘sin’ means ‘miss the mark’. An archer shooting arrows at a target often misses the mark he is aiming for. We are like this when we sin – we miss the mark. The mark is the perfect example set by the Lord Jesus. He showed us God's standard in the way he lived. His example is the target we should aim for in our lives. We sin when we fail to live up to God's standard:

“... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23)

Most of us have not committed terrible crimes like murder, adultery or theft, and so we excuse ourselves and think that we are good people and acceptable to God. We deceive ourselves. Whenever we miss the mark, by a little or by a lot, it is sin: “*All wrongdoing is sin*” (1 John 5:17). Galatians 5 provides a list of sins that includes envy, anger, drunkenness and other wrong doings that often we do not even consider to be sins. We should note the warning – we cannot do these things and expect to be in God's kingdom!

“Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Galatians 5:19-21)

Telling lies and speaking foolishly are also sins:

“But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one

another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices.” (*Colossians 3:8, 9*)

When we do these things we sin. All sin is against God, for it is His laws that we disobey. God is totally sinless, and our sin separates us from Him (*Isaiah 59:2*).

Sin is not just doing wrong things. We also sin when we fail to do what is right:

“So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” (*James 4:17*)

Reading our Bible, being generous and other acts of kindness, like visiting the sick and helping others, please God. We should try to give God glory in our lives.

Human Desires (lust)

We are born with basic desires for the survival of the human race built into us. For example, we need to feel hungry; but our hunger should not turn to greed. Sex is a natural part of marriage, but if our desire for sex becomes distorted and we seek sex outside marriage, we sin. When we become selfish and ignore God’s ways we fail. We need to control our desires, or they will lead us astray:

“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (*James 4:1-4*).

We need to see ourselves in the way God sees us.

“Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart.” (*Proverbs 21:2*)

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick ...” (*Jeremiah 17:9*)

It is only when we see how sinful we are that we realise how much we need God’s salvation.

Where did Sin come from?

In the beginning God created the first man, Adam. He was formed of dust from the ground:

Sin and its Consequences – Part 1

“... the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” (*Genesis 2:7*)

God placed Adam in the beautiful Garden of Eden and provided a wife for him. God gave Adam one simple law:

“You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (*Genesis 2:16,17*)

Adam and Eve could choose for themselves whether to obey God’s law or not. They could choose to be faithful to God, or disobey Him and eat of the forbidden fruit. They were created with free will. God had not made ‘puppets’ with no choice of their own. God wanted them willingly to choose for themselves His way because of their love and respect for Him.

The serpent was just an animal that God allowed to speak. It lied to Eve. It said that Adam and Eve would not die if they ate the forbidden fruit, but that instead they would become like gods, knowing good and evil. The serpent did not force Eve to take the fruit – both Adam and Eve were created with free will. They chose for themselves to disobey God and eat of the fruit, and so they sinned.

Death is the Punishment for Sin

God had told Adam that he would be punished by death if he disobeyed. So Adam and Eve were condemned to death. Adam and Eve did not die immediately but became mortal (dying creatures). They would experience hard work, tiredness and suffer illness, before finally dying.

Adam’s death was no different from ours. We are all descended from Adam and inherit his nature, and we too die because of our sins:

“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man (*Adam*), and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned ...” (*Romans 5:12*)

What is Death?

After Adam sinned, God said, “you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (*Genesis 3:19*).

God had created Adam of the dust from the ground. When Adam and Eve died, their bodies decayed and returned to dust. No part of them continued to live. Death is God’s punishment for sin, and death is the end of life and consciousness. The following verses show what

happens when we die. They show that dead people cannot think or feel anything – they no longer exist.

| Reference | Passage |
|------------------|---|
| Psalm 146:4 | “When his (man’s) breath departs he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish.” |
| Ecclesiastes 9:5 | “For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten.” |
| Psalm 6:5 | “For in death there is no remembrance of you (God); in Sheol (the grave) who will give you praise?” |
| Psalm 39:13 | “Look away from me, that I may smile again, before I depart and am no more!” |
| Psalm 115:17 | “The dead do not praise the LORD, nor do any who go down into silence.” |

When God told King Hezekiah that he was going to die, Hezekiah was sad. He wanted to stay alive because he knew that there was nothing in death. He said:

“For Sheol (*the grave*) does not thank you; death does not praise you; those who go down to the pit do not hope for your faithfulness.” (*Isaiah 38:18*)

Hezekiah knew that when he died he would not be able to praise God. This is why he said in verse 19, “*The living, the living, he thanks you*”.

We are told that King David did not go to heaven when he died (Acts 2:34), even though he is described as a man after God’s own heart. None of us will go to heaven when we die. We will all go to the grave where our bodies will decay.

‘Soul’ means ‘Life’, ‘Person’, ‘Creature’

The word ‘soul’ often occurs in older versions of the Bible like the King James version. Many people wrongly think that part of them never dies – and they call this the soul. They believe that their soul will go to heaven when they die – they think that it is immortal (cannot die). But the Bible never talks about immortal souls – the phrase ‘immortal soul’ is not found in the Bible. There is no immortal

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or ‘divine spark’ in man. There is nothing that continues to live after a person dies.

The table below compares the King James Version with a modern version (English Standard Version) to show that ‘soul’ means ‘creature’, ‘person’ or ‘life’.

| Reference | King James Version | English Standard version |
|------------------|--|--|
| Genesis 2:7 | “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a <u>living soul</u> .” | “Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a <u>living creature</u> .” |
| Genesis 46:26 | “All the <u>souls</u> that came with Jacob into Egypt, which came out of his loins, besides Jacob's sons' wives, all the <u>souls</u> were threescore and six.” | “All the <u>persons</u> belonging to Jacob who came into Egypt, who were his own descendants, not including Jacob's sons' wives, were sixty-six <u>persons</u> in all.” |
| Leviticus 5:17 | “And if a <u>soul</u> sin, and commit any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the LORD; though he wist it not, yet is he guilty, and shall bear his iniquity.” | “If <u>anyone</u> sins, doing any of the things that by the LORD'S commandments ought not to be done, though he did not know it, then realises his guilt, he shall bear his iniquity.” |

| | | |
|--------------------|---|--|
| Leviticus 17:12 | “Therefore I said unto the children of Israel, No <u>soul</u> of you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger that sojourneth among you eat blood.” | “Therefore I have said to the people of Israel, No <u>person</u> among you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger who sojourns among you eat blood.” |
| Joshua 11:11 | “And they smote all the <u>souls</u> that were therein with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them: there was not any left to breathe: and he burnt Hazor with fire.” | “And they struck with the sword <u>all who were in it</u> , devoting them to destruction; there was none left that breathed. And he burned Hazor with fire.” |
| Psalms 70:2 | Let them be ashamed and confounded that seek after my <u>soul</u> | “Let them be put to shame and confusion who seek my <u>life!</u> ” |
| Acts 27:37 | “And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen <u>souls</u> .” | “We were in all 276 <u>persons</u> in the ship.” |

Notice in the table above that souls can eat, and be utterly destroyed. We are told:

“Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die.” (*Ezekiel 18:4*)

All souls (people) sin, so all souls (people) die. There are no immortal souls. In fact, the word translated ‘soul’ is also used of animals. In Genesis 1:21,24; 2:19; 9:10 the Hebrew word ‘soul’ is translated ‘creature’, referring to animals.

This all proves what Ecclesiastes 3:19, 20 says:

“For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the

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beasts, for all is vanity. All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return.”

There is no difference in death between a man and an animal. Death is the end of life for them both – they no longer exist after death.

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|---|
| ‘Soul’ means ‘life’, ‘person’, ‘creature’ |
|---|

We are all condemned to death because of sin. We do not live on after death. Some believe that their spirit will enter another person, or an animal, or some object after they die. This is not Bible teaching. If there is some form of existence after death, then there would have been no need for Jesus to die for us. But the Bible tells us we that have no hope of life apart from Christ. If we do not understand this, then we will never appreciate the way in which Jesus suffered and died to set us free from sin.

Summary

1. Sin is disobedience to God's laws and failing to live up to His standards.
2. God made Adam of the dust from the ground and caused him to live by breathing into his nostrils the breath of life.
3. God gave Adam a commandment. Adam and Eve were created with free will and could choose for themselves whether to obey God.
4. Adam and Eve disobeyed God and became dying creatures. Death is the punishment for sin.
5. We are all descended from Adam and so we inherit his nature. We all sin and so we all deserve to die.
6. Death is the end of all life processes. Dead people cannot think or feel anything. There is no part of a person which goes on living after death.
7. The word 'soul' means 'life', 'person', 'creature'. It is used of people and animals. The phrase 'immortal soul' is not found in the Bible.

A verse to learn:

“When his breath departs he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish.” (*Psalm 146:4*)

A chapter to read:

Isaiah 38

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Questions on Chapter 22 – Sin and its Consequences (Part 1)

22A. How was Adam made?

22B. Did the serpent make Eve eat the forbidden fruit?

22C. Like us, Adam and Jesus both had free will – they could either obey or disobey God’s commands.

a) Why did Adam disobey?

b) Why did Jesus obey?

22D. What was Adam’s punishment for disobeying God?

22E. What does the Bible mean by sin?

22F. Give examples of sins that believers might be tempted to commit.

22G. What does the word ‘soul’ mean?

23

SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES (PART 2)

Reading: Acts 2

What happens after Death?

There are many different ideas about what happens after death. Here are a few examples:

some believe in reincarnation (that people live on as another person, or even as an animal);

some believe that good people go to heaven, while the wicked suffer for ever in hell;

some believe that death is the end and there is no hope of any kind after death;

others believe that there will be a day of resurrection of the dead, followed by a judgement, and immortal life on earth for the faithful.

What does the Bible say?

Death is the punishment for sin. It is the end of life and consciousness. A dead person cannot feel anything and cannot think. At death, a person no longer exists. No part of a dead person continues to live:

“For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and for ever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.” (*Ecclesiastes 9:5,6*)

Notice that this passage says:

- the dead know nothing
- they have no more reward
- the memory of them is forgotten
- their love, hatred and envy have perished
- they do not take any further part in human activities.

The Bible is clear that death is the end of life. But does this mean that there is no hope beyond the grave?

The Promise of Resurrection and Immortal Life

There is hope, but only through the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus himself said,

“... for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.”
(John 8:24)

Through the sinless life and death of Jesus, we can have the hope of life after death:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”
(John 3:16, 17)

We die because we sin. But our sins can be forgiven through Jesus, who was described as “*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). And if our sins are completely forgiven, then like Jesus we will not stay dead but will be raised from the dead and given immortal life just as he was.

Read John 6:39-44. Three times in these verses Jesus speaks of raising the dead “*at the last day*” (that is, when he returns to the earth). Notice especially verse 40:

“For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Righteous people will be given immortal life in God’s kingdom on earth. To them, Christ Jesus will say,

“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” (Matthew 25:34)

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|--|
| The Christian hope is resurrection from the dead and immortal life in God’s kingdom on this earth when Christ returns. |
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What is Hell?

We know that life completely ceases when people die. Dead people cannot think or feel anything, so they cannot be punished by suffering in hell for ever. So what does the Bible mean by the word ‘hell’?

There are two Greek words in the New Testament which are translated ‘hell’. These are ‘Gehenna’ and ‘hades’. They have different

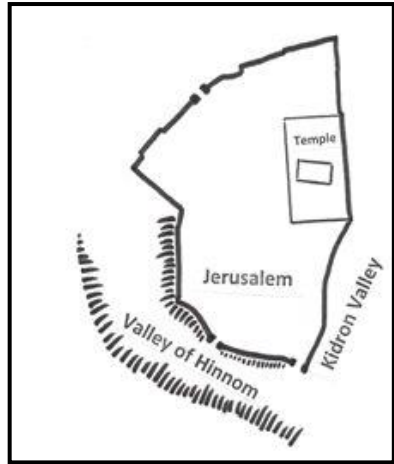
meanings, but neither of them refers to a place where wicked people are tormented after death.

1. Gehenna

‘Gehenna’ is used as a symbol for complete destruction of the wicked. It is not a place of torment for wicked people. People rejected at Christ’s judgement will not suffer for ever.

The word ‘Gehenna’ should not appear in the Bible as ‘hell’. It is the name of a place outside Jerusalem and means ‘Valley of (the son of) Hinnom’ (Joshua 15:8). This valley was well known to the Jews. It was a place of wickedness, where some of the kings of Judah had burned their children as sacrifices to idols (2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chronicles 28:3; Jeremiah 32:35).

It was also a place associated with God’s punishment of the people of Judah (Jeremiah 7:30-34). In the time of Jesus, the Valley of Hinnom was the place where the rubbish from Jerusalem was burnt, including the bodies of dead animals and criminals. Jesus brought these ideas together and used the word ‘Gehenna’ as a symbol to show that the wicked will be completely destroyed.



The word ‘hell’ in Mark 9:43-48 is the word ‘Gehenna’. The language used here has led people to wrongly believe that when the wicked die, they are punished by being burnt for ever. We know that this cannot be true because the dead do not know anything and cannot feel pain – they no longer exist.

“And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.

And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell.

And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.” (Mark 9:43-48)

The fires in the Valley of Hinnom were probably kept burning continually because there was so much rubbish. But a piece of paper put on a fire does not burn for ever. Within minutes it has stopped

Sin and its Consequences – Part 2

burning because it is completely destroyed. However, the fire continues to burn as more rubbish is added – it is “*unquenchable*”. In this way, Gehenna is a symbol of complete destruction of the wicked. Jesus is not saying that the wicked would burn for ever.

This passage in Mark 9 cannot be taken literally because Jesus would not expect a person to pull out an eye, even if it could cause a person to sin. Jesus is using picture language. But what did he mean?

A person who is tempted to steal is not literally expected to cut off his hand, but he should be prepared to take drastic action in his life to avoid the temptation to steal. If he continues to steal, he will not be in God’s kingdom. At the judgement when the Lord Jesus returns, the man will be rejected and die for ever. He will never live again – his destruction will be complete.

Similarly, a man who looks with lust (desire for sex) on someone else’s wife does not have to remove an eye, but he has to do something to remove the temptation from his life. This could mean that he has to live or work somewhere else so that he does not see the woman again. It may be as hard to do this as to remove his eye, but this is better than being rejected at the judgement. If rejected, he will be completely destroyed – as completely as the rubbish that was burnt in the Valley of Hinnom. Jesus used picture language to show how important it is to cut temptation out of our lives.

“Though the wicked sprout like grass and all evildoers flourish, they are doomed to destruction for ever.” (*Psalms 92:7*)

2. Hades

This Greek word refers to the grave, the place where the dead are buried. Older English versions of the Bible translate ‘hades’ as ‘hell’, which is an old English word meaning ‘a hidden or covered place’. So the word ‘hell’ (hades) is used in the Bible for the grave, which is where dead people are hidden and covered.

This is shown by comparing Acts 2:27 in three different Bible versions:

| English Standard Version | King James Version | New International Version |
|--|--|--|
| “For you will not abandon <u>my</u> soul to <u>Hades</u> , or let your Holy One see corruption.” | “Because thou wilt not leave <u>my</u> soul in <u>hell</u> , neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” | “Because you will not abandon <u>me</u> to the <u>grave</u> , nor will you let your Holy One see decay.” |

Sometimes the translators have chosen to leave the original Greek word ‘hades’ in the text, others have translated it as ‘hell’, while others have used ‘the grave’.

hades (a Greek word) = hell = the grave

Notice also that ‘my soul’ is translated above as ‘me’ in the New International Version, since ‘soul’ refers to a person, as we learnt in Chapter 22.

3. Sheol – Hell in the Old Testament

In some versions of the Bible, the word ‘hell’ also occurs in the Old Testament. The original Hebrew word is ‘sheol’, which means ‘the grave’ or ‘pit’.

Acts 2:27, used above to explain ‘hades’, is a quotation from Psalm 16:10 in the Old Testament. The English Standard Version of Psalm 16:10 contains the Hebrew word ‘sheol’:

“For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.”

sheol (a Hebrew word) = hades (a Greek word) = hell = the grave

In Psalm 49:15 the Psalmist shows his confidence that God will raise him from the dead:

| English Standard Version | King James Version |
|--|--|
| “But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol.” | “But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave.” |

Sin and its Consequences – Part 2

Comparing these two Bible versions again shows that the Hebrew word ‘sheol’ can be translated as ‘the grave’. Nowhere in the Old Testament is it associated with punishment in fire.

A Closer Look at Acts 2:27

“For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption.”

What does this verse mean? It was spoken by the apostle Peter after the Lord Jesus had ascended to heaven. Peter is using the words of King David from Psalm 16. Peter explains that David was prophesying that Jesus would rise from the dead:

“... he (*David*) foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.” (*Acts 2:31*)

David was inspired to write that Christ’s soul (that is, Jesus himself) would not be left in hades (hell – the grave). He would be raised from the dead and God would not allow his body to decay. Christ was in the grave for three days. How can hades (hell) be a place where sinners are punished, when we read that Christ went there after he died? We know that his body was placed in the tomb, so this again shows that the word ‘hades’ (hell) in this verse means ‘the grave’.

In Revelation 20:13 there is a picture of resurrection and judgement. It says:

“And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.”

We see that ‘hades’ contains the dead. Sometimes ‘hades’ is thought of as a shadowy place where the spirits of the dead exist. We know that this cannot be true, because the Bible tells us that “*the dead know nothing*” (Ecclesiastes 9:5). They have no conscious existence. ‘Hades’, as we have seen, is simply the Greek word for the grave.

| Hell | | |
|--|--|---|
| ‘Sheol’ Old Testament word refers to the grave | ‘Hades’ New Testament word means ‘the grave’ | ‘Gehenna’ New Testament word means ‘Valley of Hinnom’ – a place outside Jerusalem, a symbol for total destruction of the wicked |

Summary

1. The Bible teaches that death is the end of life and consciousness.
2. At Christ's return, there will be a resurrection from the dead and immortal life on earth for true believers.
3. 'Hell' (from 'sheol' or 'hades') refers to the grave – the place where the dead are buried.
4. 'Gehenna' should not appear in the Bible as 'hell'. It is the name of a valley outside Jerusalem. It was a place associated with wickedness and God's punishment of Judah. In the time of Jesus it was the place where the city's rubbish was burnt, including the bodies of dead animals and criminals.
5. Gehenna is used in the Bible as a symbol for complete destruction of the wicked.

Verses to learn:

“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.”

(1 Corinthians 15:22, 23)

Verses to read:

1 Corinthians 15, 2 Corinthians 5:10

Questions on Chapter 23 – Sin and its Consequences (Part 2)

- 23A. Why do all men and women die?
- 23B. What happens to a person when he dies?
- 23C. Is there any part of us that continues living after we have died?
- 23D. Is there life after death? If so, say:
- a) where it will be;
 - b) when it will be;
 - c) how we can share in it.
- 23E. The word 'hell' is sometimes used of Gehenna. What is its other meaning?
- 23F. The Bible says that Jesus was in hell (Acts 2:31). What does this mean?
- 23G. a) Why were fires burning continuously in the Valley of Hinnom (Gehenna) in the time of Jesus?
- b) What did Jesus use this to represent?
 - c) Are there fires for tormenting the wicked after they are dead?
- 23H. Why is Jesus' death important for us?
- 23I. What effect does the death of Jesus have on the way we should live?

24

BY GRACE ARE YOU SAVED

Reading: Romans 5

Grace

God's grace is His free gift of loving kindness towards mankind. No-one deserves God's grace. It is wonderfully shown by God's gift of the Lord Jesus Christ to bring forgiveness of sins and salvation:

“... God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (*Romans 5:8*)

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| God's grace is His favour that no one deserves |
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God showed grace towards the apostle Paul. Even though he had persecuted Christians, God forgave him (Acts 8:3). Paul later wrote:

“For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.” (*1 Corinthians 15:9,10*)

Wrong Thinking!

Many people think that they can earn salvation by the things they do. This is not true. Even though the apostle Paul says that he worked hard for the Lord, he knew that this would not save him in the end. Salvation is God's gift, and a gift cannot be earned. But wages are earned, and Paul tells us that we earn death:

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (*Romans 6:23*)

As we have already learned, we deserve death because we sin, but God offers us salvation from this through His grace. God does not give us salvation as a reward for doing more good than bad in our lives. Our good behaviour and good deeds do not earn God's blessings, because forgiveness of sins and immortal life are God's gifts. They cannot be earned or bought in any way. God has:

By Grace are you Saved

“... saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.” (2 Timothy 1:9)

The apostle Paul says:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:8,9)

Ephesians 1:7 explains: “In him (Jesus) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace”.

The apostle Paul thanks God for the gift of the Lord Jesus who can save us from sin:

“Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!” (2 Corinthians 9:15)

The Importance of Faith

Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:8 (above) that we are saved by God’s grace “*through faith*”. This means that we can only be saved if we have faith in Him. Hebrews 11:6 tells us that:

“... without faith it is impossible to please him (God), for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”

The words ‘faith’ and ‘belief’ in the New Testament come from the same Greek word and so have the same meaning, which includes the idea of trust. This helps us to understand what the Bible means by ‘faith’. To have faith in God means to believe and trust in Him and His promises, so that we place our lives into His care with complete confidence. Just as a small child depends on his father, so we must learn to rely on God in everything.

Faith is belief and trust in God that eventually results in a complete confidence in Him and His purpose

In Chapter 12 we looked at two examples of the remarkable faith of Abraham. In the first example, Abraham put his trust in God and left his county without knowing where God would lead him. In the second, Abraham was prepared to offer his son, Isaac, as God had instructed, because he believed that God would raise Isaac from the dead.

Abraham showed his faith by obeying – by doing what God had instructed. This is an important lesson for us: true faith shows itself

in action to obey God. If we truly have faith in God, we will do what He asks and follow His ways. Faith which does not make us try to overcome sin and follow the Christian way of living is not true faith:

“So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”
(James 2:17)

Faith in God and His promises comes from reading God’s Word and seeking to understand its teaching (Romans 10:13-17).

Faith and Righteousness

Because we sin, we die. We can do nothing to appear righteous in God’s sight and save ourselves. Righteousness can only come from God. By grace God will forgive our sins and so treat us as if we are righteous if we show faith in Him. Genesis 15:6 says, “*And he (Abraham) believed the LORD, and he (God) counted it to him as righteousness*”.

In the New Testament, Romans 4:2-5 talks about Abraham and gives the same message. The Bible word ‘justify’ means the same as ‘to be counted righteous’ (being made right with God). God forgave Abraham’s sins and counted him righteous because of his faith. Faith in God is essential for salvation.

Later in the same chapter, the apostle Paul says this about Abraham’s faith:

“No distrust made him (*Abraham*) waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was ‘counted to him as righteousness’.”
(Romans 4:20-22)

After speaking about Abraham, the apostle Paul then explains that righteousness “*will be counted to us who believe in him (God) who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification*” (Romans 4:24,25).

Romans 4:2-5

“For if Abraham was justified (*considered righteous*) by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.”

By Grace are you Saved

Notice that it is only possible for us to be considered righteous through the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have to believe that Jesus died for us and so accept his sacrifice. If we have faith in God and His offer of salvation through the Lord Jesus, then by His grace we can be justified (made right with God):

“... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” (*Romans 3:23,24*)

Our sins separate us from God. If we are made right with God, then we are at peace (brought into harmony) with Him. We have access to Him in prayer and enjoy fellowship (a special relationship) with Him. We have entered into His grace:

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” (*Romans 5:1,2*)

Disciples in Old Testament Times

If belief in the saving work of Jesus is essential for our salvation, how can those who lived before Christ be saved?

Some of those who lived in Old Testament times knew about Christ! They did not know him by name (Jesus), but they knew him as the promised Son of God – the Messiah and Lamb of God. They understood from God’s Word that everyone needs salvation, and that God would provide this through the death of a perfect man, who would be the ‘Lamb of God’. He would give his life for the salvation of mankind (Genesis 22:8, Isaiah 53).

The apostle Paul confirms this when he says in Acts 26:22,23:

“I stand here ... saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”

So Abraham and many other Old Testament characters believed in the saving work of Christ Jesus, although they did not have the privilege of being able to read the Gospel records about the Lord’s life and work.

Galatians 3:8 tells us that the Gospel was preached to Abraham, and we read of Jesus saying to the Jews,

“Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” (*John 8:56*)

When Abraham was about to offer as a sacrifice his son, Isaac, as God instructed, God provided Abraham with a lamb that he could sacrifice instead (Genesis 22:13). This lamb represented Jesus. Through this symbol, Abraham was shown the sacrifice of Jesus.

Does it Matter how we Behave?

If salvation comes by God's grace and cannot be earned by what we do, does it matter how we behave? Can we please ourselves and do what we like with our lives? Can we expect God to continue to show His grace towards us if we enjoy sinning and do not try to change our lives to serve Him?

Of course it matters how we behave! We have already seen that to receive God's grace needs faith, and true faith shows itself in obedience to God. The apostle Paul asked: "*Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?*" (Romans 6:1). In other words, Paul is asking whether people should continue to sin so there is more opportunity for God to show His grace! He answered the question in the next verse: "*By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?*" Believers should 'die to sin' when they are baptized – they should try hard to stop sinning. Paul says to baptized believers:

"So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions." (Romans 6:11,12)

If we really have faith in God and His offer of salvation through the Lord Jesus, our actions will show it. Because we are thankful for God's grace we will want to serve God better. We will try our very best to follow the example of Jesus. Then we will truly be his followers. People who do not try to obey God and Jesus are not true disciples. If they really believed, they would obey. They have no real faith, and so do not have access to the grace of God.

We cannot claim to believe and do nothing about it. Following the Christian way of life involves fighting against sin in our lives. It also involves doing good deeds – things that will please God. This is how we show true faith in our lives. However as we have already seen, by themselves these deeds will never make us righteous, because salvation cannot be earned.

Discipleship

Baptism is a new start. All our past sins are forgiven when we are baptized. Yet however hard we try, we still do wrong and think wrong thoughts. But baptized believers can come to God through the Lord Jesus. In their prayers they can confess their failings. If they are truly sorry, God will forgive them.

By Grace are you Saved

So disciples should never give up. With the love of their Heavenly Father to help them, they will receive a place in God's kingdom in the end.

God's gifts to Believers

Here are some of the blessings of God's grace that baptized believers can enjoy in this life as disciples of the Lord Jesus:

- forgiveness of all sins (Ephesians 1:7)
- peace of mind (Philippians 4:7)
- access to God, through Christ, in prayer (Romans 8:34)
- fellowship with God, the Lord Jesus and other believers (1 John 1:3)
- being God's sons and daughters (1 John 3:1,2)

There are also the future blessings of immortal life in God's kingdom.

Summary

1. God's grace is His favour towards mankind that no one deserves. It is wonderfully shown in God's gift of the Lord Jesus to bring forgiveness of sins and salvation.
2. No-one can save himself. It is only by God's grace that we can be saved through faith.
3. To have faith in God means to believe and trust in Him and His promises. Faith comes by reading the Bible.
4. If we have true faith, it will show in the way we behave.

Verses to learn:

"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God." (*Romans 5:1,2*)

Passages to read:

Psalms 32; Romans 3:21-28; Romans 4; Titus 2:11,13 and read again Galatians 3.

Questions on Chapter 24 – By Grace are you Saved

- 24A. Explain how we can be saved from sin and everlasting death.
- 24B. Explain in your own words what the Bible means by the word 'grace'.
- 24C. Do you think that if you accept God's grace you are free to be unforgiving, to hate people, tell lies, steal, get drunk etc.?
- 24D. Can we earn salvation?
- 24E. What must we do to have faith?
- 24F. Read Romans 4:1-5. Did God consider Abraham righteous because of what he did or because of his faith?

25

THE RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD

Reading: 1 Corinthians 15

The word 'resurrection' means 'coming back to life again'.

Jesus raised the Dead and spoke of the Future Resurrection

During his ministry Jesus raised three people from the dead: a widow's son; a ruler's daughter; and his friend, Lazarus. Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha, lived in Bethany, a small village near Jerusalem. They were devoted followers of Jesus. When Lazarus became ill, his sisters sent for Jesus. Jesus delayed going to help so that Lazarus would be dead and buried before he arrived. Jesus knew that this would be his last opportunity to show God's great power before his own death. When Jesus finally arrived, Martha said to him,

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."
(John 11:21)

Jesus said to her, "*Your brother will rise again.*" Martha knew that Jesus would raise the dead at his second coming, so she said,

"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." (John 11:24)

To show that his work of salvation is the only way to resurrection and immortal life, Jesus said to Martha,

"I am the resurrection and the life." (John 11:25)

Then, to show all who were there that he had power to raise the dead, Jesus went to the tomb and cried with a loud voice, "*Lazarus, come out*". After being dead for four days, Lazarus came out of the tomb alive!

Lazarus was not given immortal life at this time. Later he died again and is still in the grave but, as Martha had said to Jesus, he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day. Jesus used this miracle to teach people about the hope of resurrection. Read about it yourself in John 11.

Jesus rose From the Dead

Soon after this, Jesus was cruelly put to death. When he came out of the grave on the third day, his disciples could not believe their eyes. They thought that they were seeing a spirit, but Jesus showed them that he had been raised with a body:

“See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have. And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marvelling, he said to them, Have you anything here to eat? They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them.” (*Luke 24:39-43*)

They were now convinced that Jesus really was alive again. They had witnessed one of the most amazing miracles of all time. God had brought Jesus back from the dead. However, unlike the resurrection of Lazarus, Jesus was both resurrected and given immortal life – he would never die again. He was the first person to ever receive this gift of immortality from God and so the Bible describes him as the “*firstborn from the dead*” (Colossians 1:18). We read of him saying, “*I am alive for evermore*” (Revelation 1:18).

Jesus will raise the Dead and give Immortal Life

When he returns to the earth, the Lord Jesus will raise the dead and give immortal life to the people of God from all ages. He continued in Revelation 1:18:

“... I have the keys of Death and Hades.”

‘Hades’ refers to the grave (see Chapter 23), so this verse is saying that Jesus Christ has the keys to unlock the grave. This means that Jesus has the power to open graves and set free those who are buried there by giving them endless life:

“For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.” (*John 5:21*)

But the Lord Jesus will not raise everyone who has ever lived. He is coming to judge people from all ages who have heard the call of the Gospel. Therefore, those who have heard the Gospel will be raised, both the righteous and the wicked. Daniel 12:2 explains:

“And many (*not all*) of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

The apostle Paul confirms that both righteous and wicked people will be raised:

The Resurrection from the Dead

“But this I confess to you ... I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, having a hope in God ... that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.” (*Acts 24:14,15*)

Jesus explained:

“... an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” (*John 5:28,29*)

Only true believers will be accepted into God’s kingdom and be made immortal. We will learn more about the day of judgement in the next chapter.

Resurrection and Immortal Life for the Faithful when Christ returns

The hope of the resurrection is the hope of the Gospel:

“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.” (*1 Corinthians 15:22,23*)

True believers throughout the ages have died looking forward to the day when they would be raised to life again. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews gives us a list of people who “*died in faith, not (yet) having received the things promised*” (*Hebrews 11:13*). Later in the same chapter he explains that they:

“... did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect” (*Hebrews 11:39,40*).

Not one of the faithful people listed in Hebrews 11 has yet been made immortal. All true worshippers of God will receive this blessing at the same time – when Christ returns.

Abraham was promised Resurrection

Chapter 12 explained the great promises that God made to Abraham. One promise was that Abraham would inherit forever the land he saw and in which he then lived. This was the land of Canaan, now known as Israel. In Genesis 13:15, God promised Abraham:

“... all the land you see I will give to you and to your offspring for ever.”

Abraham died without this promise being fulfilled – the New Testament confirms that this is true (*Acts 7:5*). Abraham must

therefore be raised from the dead so that God can keep His promise. Abraham must also be given immortality so that he can inherit the land for ever. Abraham understood this, which is why he is listed in Hebrews 11 with those who “*died in faith*”, looking forward to the day of resurrection.

Jesus told the Jews of his day that they would see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of God, but themselves cast out (Luke 13:28). Although these Jews read the Old Testament scriptures, their behaviour was not right with God. They will be among those resurrected to judgement “*who have done evil*” and so will not be accepted into God’s future kingdom. This is a warning to us.

A Hope shared by all Faithful People

All true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ share the hope of resurrection and immortal life. When early Christians died, their believing friends spoke of them as having “fallen asleep”, because just as people wake after sleeping, so true believers will be awakened from the sleep of death to be given immortal life. The apostle Paul wrote that some of the 500 disciples who had seen Jesus after his resurrection had since “*fallen asleep*” (1 Corinthians 15:6). Paul believed that he would be raised from the dead for he wrote:

“And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.” (1 Corinthians 6:14)

A Life far better than Today’s

We live in an imperfect world. Life is full of problems: war, illness, famine, the death of loved ones, old age, terrible diseases like AIDS, natural disasters, stress, financial worries, unemployment, violence, and many more. The thought of living for ever with these problems is not attractive, but that is not what God offers.

The life that the Lord Jesus promises his followers when he returns is very different from life today, with all its cares and worries. The beautiful words of Revelation 7:16,17 describe life for immortal believers in God’s kingdom:

“They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Jesus said this about those who will be given immortality:

“For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.” (Mark 12:25)

The Resurrection from the Dead

Their bodies will be changed and become immortal like the body of Jesus after his resurrection. They will never grow old, suffer pain or die and will enjoy perfect health and unlimited energy. The apostle Paul wrote:

“... we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform (*change*) our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.” (*Philippians 3:20,21*)

Immortal life will only be given to people whose sins have been forgiven. Jesus was free from sin in his life, but he shared our human nature. When he was raised, he was changed and given a nature like God Himself. This is the wonder of eternal life, that those who are given this great gift by God will be changed in two ways so that they share the nature of God Himself (2 Peter 1:4):

1. their mortal bodies will be made immortal – they will never die again;
2. their minds will be changed – they will never be able to sin again.

What will happen to true Believers who are alive when Christ returns?

Paul explains what will happen to true believers who are still alive when Christ returns.

| 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 | Notes |
|---|--|
| [14] “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.” | We know that Jesus rose from the dead. This is the guarantee that others can also be raised from the dead (notice the phrase ‘fallen asleep’). |
| [15] “For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.” | Those who are alive when Christ returns will not meet him until after the dead have been raised. |
| [16] “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven | Jesus Christ will come down from heaven with the |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.”</p> | <p>authority of God. He will first raise the dead.</p> |
| <p>[17] “Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.”</p> | <p>True believers who are alive when Christ returns, and those who were raised from the dead, will together be caught up into the air to meet him. Then they will always be with the Lord Jesus.</p> |

Verse 16 talks about people being raised from the dead. This chapter shows that resurrection is an important Bible teaching. Yet some people wrongly believe that the souls or spirits of righteous people go to heaven when they die. But resurrection would not be needed if people go to heaven when they die! Both ideas cannot be right. The Bible teaches that the Lord Jesus Christ will return to earth to raise the dead and give immortal life in God’s kingdom.

Notice also that in verse 17 Paul does not speak of living with the Lord Jesus in heaven, but meeting him in the air. He is telling us about the arrangements that will be made for true believers to meet up with Jesus, wherever they are living on the earth. But those who meet up with the Lord Jesus will not stay in the air! Verse 16 says that the Lord is descending from heaven. We know that the Lord Jesus will return to the earth (Acts 1:11), so if true believers are to remain with him forever, they must live on earth. The Greek word translated ‘caught up’ in verse 17 is used in Acts 8:39 to describe Philip being transported away from the Ethiopian he baptized, to continue his preaching elsewhere.

Preparing Ourselves for Christ’s Second Coming

Read again 1 Corinthians 15:51-58. Here the apostle speaks of the time when true believers from all ages will be given that great gift of immortality. All true believers very much look forward to the return of the Lord Jesus and pray that it will happen soon. As we look forward to that time, the apostle Paul tells us to be “*steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.*”

The Resurrection from the Dead

Summary

1. Jesus was the first person to be raised from the dead and given immortal life. The Bible describes him as the *“firstborn from the dead”*.
2. Jesus Christ has the power to raise the dead. When he returns to the earth, he will raise the dead who have heard the call of the Gospel – the righteous and the wicked.
3. At the judgement to follow, Christ will give immortal life to true believers from all ages, both those raised from the dead and those who are alive at his return.

Verses to learn:

“Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” (*John 5:28,29*)

Passages to read:

1 Thessalonians 4; Hebrews 11; John 11; Matthew 22:23-33

Questions on Chapter 25 – The Resurrection of the Dead

- 25A. Which is the correct way to describe a true believer who has just died?
- a) Has he has passed on?
 - b) Has he has gone to heaven?
 - c) Has he has fallen asleep?
- 25B. What does Ecclesiastes 9:5,6,10 tell us about the dead?
- 25C. What is meant by resurrection?
- 25D. a) Give reasons to show that Jesus was not a spirit (or 'ghost') when he rose from the dead.
- b) Will believers have bodies when they rise from the dead?
- 25E. a) In John 11 what did Mary say as soon as she saw Jesus?
- b) What did Martha say about the resurrection in verse 24?
 - c) What was the difference between Lazarus and Jesus after they were raised from the dead?
 - d) What does John 12:10,11 say about the chief priests?
- 25F. Which land will Abraham inherit when he is raised from the dead (Chapter 12 will help)?
- 25G. When will the resurrection take place?
- 25H. Which verses in John 5 say the following?
- a) God has entrusted all judgment to His Son.
 - b) The time is coming when all who are in the graves will hear the voice of Jesus.
 - c) If we hear Jesus' words and believe God, then we can pass from death to life.

26

THE DAY OF JUDGEMENT

Reading: Matthew 25

God must be Obeyed

When the people of Israel were in the wilderness after leaving Egypt, God instructed Moses to build a tabernacle and make its furniture. This tabernacle (tent of meeting) was a special tent where God met



with His people. The main item of furniture was the Ark of God, a gold-covered chest. The diagram shows what it might have looked like. Notice the poles for carrying it.

About 500 years later, King David decided to bring the Ark of God from a nearby place to his new capital city, Jerusalem, where it would be once again at the centre of Israel's worship. The Ark was placed on a new cart that was pulled by oxen and driven by a man called Uzzah. During the journey, the oxen

stumbled and Uzzah put out his hand and took hold of the Ark to steady it. Suddenly:

“God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God.” (*2 Samuel 6:7*)

Why was the punishment so severe, since it seems Uzzah was only trying to prevent the Ark of God from being damaged? God had said that the Ark must always be carried using the poles (Exodus 25:14). It was the symbol of God's presence and so should never be touched. The punishment for touching the Ark was death (Numbers 4:15). God is pure and holy and can only be approached in the way He has instructed. By touching the Ark, Uzzah disobeyed God's commands.

God is the Creator and Sustainer of all life and expects to be honoured and obeyed. We cannot be casual in the way we approach God. We must seek God in the way He has instructed, and not do what we think is right. Later, David said about Uzzah's death, “*the LORD our God broke out against us, because we did not seek him according to the rule*” (1 Chronicles 15:13).

God is holy and great, and rightly demands honour and obedience

The Day of Judgement

One important lesson from the death of Uzzah is that God will punish those who refuse to honour and obey Him. For this reason the day of judgement will follow the resurrection at Christ's return. The apostle Paul wrote to believers at Corinth:

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” (2 Corinthians 5:10)

God is loving and merciful, but He is also a God of justice and truth. In Exodus 34:6,7 the Lord God is described as:

“... a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty ...”

The first part of this passage describes God's forgiveness; the second part shows that He will not forgive sinners who do not repent. Similarly, the apostle Paul talks about “*the kindness and the severity of God*” (Romans 11:22). Deuteronomy 29:18-20 shows that there are people God cannot forgive. As a God of justice, He will not ignore sin and allow it to go unpunished: He will punish those who refuse to honour and obey Him. Also, the only way that sin and the problems it causes can be completely removed from the earth will be for God to destroy the wicked.

The Righteous Judge

God has given the work of judgement to Jesus Christ (John 5:25-30). 2 Timothy 4:8 describes the Lord Jesus as “*the righteous judge*” because he will judge with godly wisdom. People can only judge by what they see and hear, but the Lord Jesus knows people's thoughts (John 2:24,25) and will make no mistakes. Isaiah 11 was written before the birth of Jesus and is a prophecy of his future work:

“He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.” (Isaiah 11:3,4)

Who will be Judged?

The Lord Jesus Christ will not judge everyone who has ever lived. It is for God to decide who will be judged. The Bible tells us that people who have known and understood the Gospel, and therefore had the opportunity to do something about it, will appear before the judgement seat of Christ, to give account of their lives. From 2 Timothy 4:1 we realise that this will involve:

- the dead who have been raised, and
- people who are living when he returns.

So at his second coming the Lord Jesus Christ will summon for judgement people from all ages who have known and understood the Gospel. These will be people who have either:

- accepted God's offer of salvation and tried to honour and obey Him; or
- accepted God's offer of salvation but not followed His ways; or
- knowingly rejected God's offer of salvation.

These are all people who have heard the call of the Gospel – that is, they have understood God's offer of salvation and have had the opportunity to choose for themselves whether or not to accept it and follow the Lord Jesus. They will be judged on how they have responded in their lives. We are told in John 3:17,18:

“... God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

What will Happen?

We shall look now at what will happen to three classes of people: 1) those ignorant of God's purpose, 2) the righteous, 3) the wicked.

1. People who have not heard about God's offer of salvation

People who are ignorant of the Gospel will not be condemned for not accepting it. That would be unjust and unfair. So those that have died without hearing about God's offer of salvation will not be raised.

“And many (*not all*) of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” (*Daniel 12:2*)

The dead who are not raised will remain dead – they have perished and gone forever. The prophet Isaiah wrote about people who will not rise from the dead:

“O LORD our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us, but your name alone we bring to remembrance. They are dead, they will not live; they are shades, they will not arise; to that end you have visited them with destruction and wiped out all remembrance of them.” (*Isaiah 26:13,14*)

Psalm 49 describes these people as being “*without understanding*” because they are ignorant of the Gospel, and it shows that they will perish like the animals:

“Be not afraid when a man becomes rich ... For when he dies he will carry nothing away; his glory will not go down after him. For though, while he lives, he counts himself blessed ... his soul will go to the generation of his fathers, who will never again see light. Man in his pomp yet without understanding is like the beasts that perish.” (*Psalm 49:16-20*)

Of course, there will be many people who are living when Christ returns who do not understand the Gospel. They will not appear before the judgement seat of Christ. Those who survive the terrible time of trouble that will come upon the earth at the time of the end will be allowed to live as mortal people in God’s kingdom when Christ reigns as king. They will have an opportunity then to learn about the Gospel. However, those who do not survive will perish – they will die and remain in the grave for ever (see Chapters 7 and 11).

2. The people Christ accepts

Those who are accepted at the judgement seat of Christ will be given immortal life. They will be changed so that they share the nature of God Himself. Their minds will never again be tempted to think wrong thoughts – the battle against sin will be over. Their bodies will be immortal – they will never again feel pain or tiredness or any human weakness. It will be a time of great rejoicing for the faithful.

Because the apostle Paul had tried so hard to serve God faithfully he said,

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.” (*2 Timothy 4:7,8*)

3. The people Christ rejects

The Day of Judgement

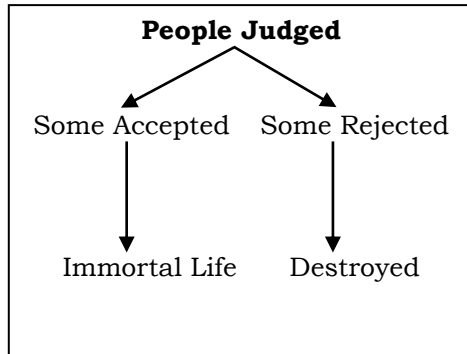
The Bible does not tell us the details of the punishment of those Christ rejects on the day of judgement. But we are told that they will realise how foolish they have been to throw away God's wonderful blessings, and this will cause them agony of mind:

“there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out.” (*Luke 13:28*)

This shows that part of their punishment will be to see the glory of God's kingdom and know that they will not be part of it. They will then die for ever.

In one parable Jesus compared the day of judgement to a harvest where the good corn (representing the righteous) is separated from useless weeds (the wicked). The corn is carefully preserved, but the weeds are destroyed in the farmer's bonfire (*Matthew 13:36-43*). Paul taught the same lesson very plainly in his second letter to the Thessalonians:

“... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might...”
(*2 Thessalonians 1:7-9*)



Hebrews 10:26, 27 warns us that:

“if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgement.”

Jesus also says,

“... but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.” (*Matthew 10:33*)

People rejected by Jesus Christ will include those who have been baptized and belonged to the Christian community but have not performed “*deeds in keeping with their repentance*” (*Acts 26:20*). This is a warning for all of us!

Believers are Servants of Christ

In New Testament times, if a man bought a slave, he would own that slave totally. The slave could no longer please himself. He had one task in life – to please his master. Baptized believers are to be like those slaves, with the Lord Jesus Christ as their Master. But we should obey because we love the Lord, not because we are afraid of him.

Jesus gave his life on the cross as a sacrifice to save us from sin. So Paul wrote to believers:

“You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” (*1 Corinthians 6:19,20*)

Because believers belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, they cannot please themselves. They are responsible to the Lord Jesus for the way they live. When he returns, Christ Jesus will reward the faithful, and punish those who have despised his ways.

Matthew 25:14-30 records a parable Jesus told about servants. The master said to his faithful servant:

“Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.”

But the man who had ignored his master received a severe punishment:

“And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Read also Matthew 24:45-51.

Love or Fear?

Some Bible verses warn believers not to be too confident about appearing before the judgement seat of Christ; other passages encourage them to be full of confidence. There is no real contradiction. No one can have confidence in their own righteousness, but true believers of the Lord Jesus can have total confidence in the saving power of God. Believers gradually learn to love God and place their trust in Him completely, for it is God's good pleasure to give them the kingdom if they continue to be faithful servants of Christ. 1 John 4:17, 18 says:

“By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgement ... There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.”

The Day of Judgement

God loves us so much that we should want to do all we can to serve Him and to follow the example set by Jesus. If we love God in response, we will have nothing to fear.

Summary

1. The day of judgement will follow the resurrection at Christ's return.
2. The Lord Jesus, the righteous judge, will judge with godly wisdom.
3. Christ will summon for judgement people from all ages who have known and understood the Gospel – the living and the dead, the righteous and the wicked.
4. Those who are accepted by Christ Jesus will be given immortal life.
5. Those who are rejected will suffer agonies of mind and then die for ever.

A verse to learn:

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” (2 Corinthians 5:10)

A chapter to read:

2 Corinthians 5

Questions on Chapter 26 – The Day of Judgement

26A. Place these events in the correct time order:

RESURRECTION / RETURN OF JESUS / JUDGEMENT

26B. Read Matthew 25:31-46.

a) Who is the ‘Son of Man’ in verse 31?

b) Where will his throne be (Chapter 9 will help)?

c) What does verse 32 tell us?

d) What is the reward for the righteous (verse 34)?

e) What had the righteous done that the unrighteous had not done?

f) This parable is about considering other people’s needs. What lessons must we learn from it?

26C. Which people will remain dead and never be judged?

26D. Do you expect the Lord Jesus to call you for judgement when he returns?

26E. Why is the Lord Jesus a better judge than any merely human judge could ever be?

26F. What is the punishment of those rejected by Christ?

26G. What lesson do we learn from the death of Uzzah?

IMMORTAL LIFE

Reading: John 3

Mortality and Immortality

God formed Adam from the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life, and so the first man became a living creature. But Adam sinned and so became a dying creature because the punishment for sin is death (Romans 6:23). We are all mortal (dying creatures) because we are descended from Adam and like him we too have sinned (Romans 5:12). God does not allow sinners to live for ever.

The life we now enjoy is soon over. It is likened to a vapour or mist:

“What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.” (*James 4:14*)

By contrast, God is immortal. Psalm 90 tells us that God is “*from everlasting to everlasting*”. This means that God has always existed and always will. We cannot understand this as we are bound by time. Psalm 90 contrasts God’s nature with man’s:

| God’s Endless Nature (Psalm 90:2) | Man’s Dying Nature (Psalm 90:10) |
|--|--|
| <p>“Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.”</p> | <p>“The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.”</p> |

1 Timothy 6:15, 16 says that God:

“is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honour and eternal dominion. Amen.”

These verses seem to say that the Lord God is the only immortal being, but we know that Jesus conquered sin and is now immortal. Also, the angels do not die (Luke 20:35,36). The verses quoted above

are really saying that God is the only source of immortality. He is the only One who has always existed and who can give immortality to others. He raised Jesus from the dead and gave him immortality. The angels have their immortality from God. Apart from God, only the Lord Jesus Christ and the angels are now immortal.

The good news is that it is possible for us to become immortal, through the saving work of Jesus. We read that he “*abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*” (2 Timothy 1:10).

Immortal Life is not for every Person

The promise of life for evermore is made only to those who respond to God’s love. We all have a choice:

“He (*God*) will render (*give*) to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil ... but glory and honour and peace for everyone who does good ...” (*Romans 2:6-10*)

If we seek our own desires rather than immortality, then there is no hope of a future life.

Immortal life is God’s gift. None of us, however good we are, deserves it. As sinners, the best we can expect is to enjoy some of the benefits of life on this planet for about 70 or 80 years at the most. So unless we have the Bible hope of immortal life in Jesus Christ we will go to the grave, corrupt to dust and not share the blessings of God’s future kingdom on earth.

All the great Bible characters who believed God’s promises had this hope. Paul and John, like other apostles, looked forward to eternal life (Titus 1:1,2; 1 John 2:25). Hebrews 11 lists many Old Testament people of faith who looked forward to a better time to come in the future.

Immortal life will be given by Jesus Christ to the faithful at the judgement that follows the resurrection from the dead. Jesus said:

“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” (*John 6:39,40*)

Immortal Life

The “*last day*” will be when Christ Jesus returns:

“For the Son of Man (*Jesus*) is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.” (*Matthew 16:27*)

The apostle Paul wrote of his hope:

“Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.” (*2 Timothy 4:8*)

Eternal Life, Everlasting Life and Immortality

The phrases ‘eternal life’ and ‘everlasting life’ come from the same Greek word and so mean the same. The phrase ‘eternal life’ is slightly different from the idea of immortality.

- Immortality is God’s gift of endless life. It is the opposite of our present dying state of mortality (1 Corinthians 15:53).
- The phrase ‘eternal life’ refers to the quality of life that will be lived by true believers when they are made immortal. It contains the idea of ‘life of the age to come’.

When the Lord Jesus Christ returns, true believers will be given a place in God’s kingdom and be made immortal. Their minds will also be changed to become completely free from sin and temptation and filled only with the ways and principles of God. Then they will truly know God and live in perfect harmony with Him. This is what the Bible means by eternal life – it is a quality of life that shows God’s wonderful character, the type of life that the Lord Jesus showed us.

Although we do not have immortality now, there is a sense in which believers can have eternal life now. Just before he died, Jesus prayed:

“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” (*John 17:1-3*)

These verses show that those who choose to fill their thoughts and minds with the things of God in this life can be described as having eternal life now. So if we live in harmony with God and the Lord Jesus now, it can be said of us that:

“God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” (*1 John 5:11*)

If we continue to live in this truly godly way, God by His grace will reward us with immortality and we will live for ever in perfect harmony with Him. So the life we will then enjoy will be both eternal and immortal. But if we do not seek to know God and practise the qualities of eternal life now by following the example of the Lord Jesus, then God will not give us immortality when the Lord Jesus returns. This shows how important it is to make every effort to leave the ways and thinking of the world and set our minds on the things of God.

There is a difference between knowing about God and knowing God. Only by reading and prayerfully thinking about the message of the Bible can we come to know and truly love God. We must do this to have eternal life.

The Saints

Sin separates us from God. God is pure and righteous and so totally separate from the thinking, desires, ambitions and ways of all men and women. In this way God is holy ('separate' or 'set apart'). If we want to be God's children we must separate ourselves from the thinking and evil practices of the world around us – we must try to be holy like God Himself:

“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’.” (*1 Peter 1:14-16*)

On the first day of creation God separated light from darkness. The Bible uses light to represent God's ways and darkness to represent sin (1 John 1:5-7). We should try to be as far from sin as light is from darkness:

“The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarrelling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” (*Romans 13:12-14*)

The Bible word 'saint' means 'holy'. It is used to describe true believers because in their lives they separate themselves from the evil influences of the world around them and show the qualities of eternal life now. The apostle Paul often described believers in this way:

Immortal Life

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus.”
(*Ephesians 1:1*)

See also Acts 9:13, Acts 26:10 and Philippians 4:21. Saints are not people who are given this title by church leaders.

A saint is a true believer

‘Saint’ means ‘holy’, ‘separate’ or ‘set apart’. True believers are not like the people in the world. Instead they try to be godly and like the Lord Jesus.

True believers are also called saints because when Christ returns they will be made immortal and so be separate from the mortal population of God’s kingdom. The saints will teach the mortal people God’s ways. They will also rule the world with Christ as members of his government. They will rule with righteousness, wisdom and authority, and the world’s problems will be solved.

Human governments are not able to solve the world’s problems. There are many reasons for this. For example, world leaders and officials:

- are not always honest or righteous
- sometimes put their own interests before those of others
- are not wise enough to solve the evils of today’s world
- often do not have the resources or authority to carry out their plans
- sometimes manage to make useful progress, but then become old or ill, and eventually die.

The saints who are given immortal life will be unable to sin, and will not change or weaken. They will rule with Christ in God’s kingdom with wisdom and justice.

What will the Immortal Saints look like?

Many wonder what the saints (faithful believers) will look like when they have been made immortal. Will they be recognisable? Although we do not know all the details, the Bible does give us some information on the matter.

After his resurrection, the Lord Jesus had a body and the disciples were allowed to touch him. It is true that there were moments when they wondered if he were some sort of spirit, when he appeared miraculously in front of them. But he told them:

“See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” (*Luke 24:39*)

It is clear that the Lord Jesus, now possessing immortality, had a body of “*flesh and bones*”. The record does not say that he had flesh and blood, because in Bible terms, “*the life of the flesh is in the blood*” (*Leviticus 17:11*). In other words, ordinary life needs blood, but the Lord Jesus now lives by God’s power.

When Christ Jesus gives people immortal life, their human bodies will become “*spiritual bodies*” (*1 Corinthians 15:44-53*). Their new bodies will no longer need blood as they will be energised by the Spirit of God. They will never suffer illness or pain, and never grow old or die:

“He (*God*) will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.” (*Revelation 21:4*)

The Wonders of Immortal Life

What a wonderful way to live – to be able to fully enjoy all the good things which God gives us with blessings of health, strength, peace, security, and knowing more about the things of God. The saints will no longer have to struggle against sin. The mortal population who are taught about God and His gracious purpose will also be given the opportunity to live for ever, if they too are faithful.

You will remember that for a short while in the first century the apostles were given gifts of the Holy Spirit (*Chapter 21*). Some could preach the Gospel in foreign languages; some could heal the sick and cure mental illnesses. These gifts were just the ‘firstfruits’ – a pointer to the harvest of such gifts which the saints of the Kingdom of God will possess. What a marvellous glimpse we have of what the future will be like when the Lord Jesus returns!

Immortal life is never ending. Perhaps this is difficult for us to understand, because it is so different from life today. Some may think that immortal life would be boring. But God would never promise something disappointing.

We cannot understand the wonders of that time. When the great and rewarding activity of the Millennium is over, there will be an even better time! Then there will be a perfect relationship between the Creator and all His creation (*1 Corinthians 15:28*). This is what God planned in the beginning. This is the promise of eternal life.

Summary

Only God, the Lord Jesus Christ and the angels are immortal now.

1. At the judgement, the Lord Jesus will give true believers (saints) immortal life.
2. Those who are made immortal will have spiritual bodies. They will never suffer illness or pain, and will never grow old or die. They will be energised by the Spirit of God.
3. A saint is a true believer. Saints are not people who are given this title by church leaders.

A verse to learn:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” *(John 3:16)*

Verses to read:

Daniel 12:1-3; John 17; 1 Corinthians 15:50-57

Questions on Chapter 27 – Immortal Life

27A. Make a list of some of the good things that God has promised to those who are given a place in His kingdom.

27B. Decide whether the following are mortal (sinful and dying) or immortal (sinless and living for ever):

| Person / Being | Mortal or Immortal? |
|--|----------------------------|
| God | |
| Jesus Christ when he lived on earth (before his death) | |
| Jesus Christ now | |
| Angels | |
| Believers now | |
| People raised from the dead and awaiting the judgement | |
| Believers judged righteous when Christ returns | |
| People being taught the Gospel during the Millennium | |

27C. a) What will those who are accepted by Christ do during his 1,000 year reign?

b) Will they be able to sin then?

c) Will they suffer illness or pain?

27D. What is the meaning of the following Bible phrases?

a) saint

b) eternal life

c) a spiritual body

27E. Do you want to be in God's kingdom? If so, why?

28

ANGELS

Reading: Hebrews 1

Who are the Angels?

The Bible word ‘angel’ means ‘messenger’. The angels are God’s messengers. They were present at creation and are at work for God in the world. They are immortal beings and cannot sin. We are not told how many angels there are, but we know that there are many of them. Jesus once said that he could have called for “*more than twelve legions of angels*” to help him – that is, more than 72,000 angels (Matthew 26:53). The angels represent God and act with His authority and power to do His will.

The Work of Angels

The Bible tells us that angels:

- give God’s messages
- guide people
- protect and deliver God’s people
- punish people.

We will look at examples of each of these in turn.

1. Examples of Angels giving God’s messages

There are many examples of angels giving messages to people. Here are a few.

| Reference | Details |
|------------|--|
| Genesis 18 | God told Abraham that he and Sarah would have a son. The three angels who appeared and gave this message to Abraham looked like ordinary men. At other times angels can look very different, especially when they are displaying God’s glory. No man has seen or can see God (1 Timothy 6:16) and when His purpose requires a visible presence, He sends His angels. |

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Genesis 19:1-5 | Two of the angels who spoke to Abraham then went on to visit Lot, Abraham's nephew, to warn him that God was about to destroy Sodom. The men of Sodom thought that the angels were men. |
| Genesis 22:11,15 | An angel called out of heaven to stop Abraham from killing his son, Isaac, as a sacrifice. The angel then blessed Abraham for his faith and obedience. |
| Exodus 3 | God told Moses that he was to deliver the people of Israel from their slavery in Egypt and lead them to the land of Canaan. The angel who gave this message to Moses was in the fire of the burning bush. Later, an angel gave God's laws to Moses (Exodus 19, Acts 7:38). |
| Judges 6:11-24 | An angel told Gideon that God would help him fight Israel's enemies. The angel then disappeared in the fire of the sacrifice that Gideon had made. |
| Luke 1:11-19 | The angel Gabriel told Zechariah that he and his wife, Elizabeth, would have a son. This child was later known as John the Baptist. |
| Luke 1:26-33 | The angel Gabriel told Mary that she would be the mother of Jesus. |

2. Examples of Angels guiding people

Abraham did not want his son, Isaac, to have a wife from the ungodly people around, so he asked his servant to find a godly woman. God used an angel to guide the servant to Rebekah (Genesis 24:7).

When Moses led the people of Israel through the wilderness, a pillar of cloud went before them by day and a pillar of fire by night. An angel of God was in the pillar, to guide and protect them. Exodus 13:21 says that "*the LORD went before them*", because the angel was representing God Himself (see also Exodus 14:19; 23:20, 21). Even though God's angel was with the people of Israel all the time they were in the wilderness, they still rebelled against God. The angel did not stop them from sinning.

Angels

An angel guided Philip to meet an Ethiopian, so that the man could learn about the Lord Jesus from Philip (Acts 8:26-39).

3. Examples of Angels protecting and delivering God's people

Daniel's three friends refused to worship a statue that the King of Babylon had made and were thrown into a fiery furnace. An angel delivered them (Daniel 3:28).

Daniel was thrown into a den of lions for continuing to pray to God despite a law forbidding it. An angel shut the lions' mouths and Daniel came out unharmed (Daniel 6:19-22).

An angel released the apostles from prison (Acts 5:17-19). On another occasion an angel rescued Peter from prison (Acts 12:6-17).

4. Examples of Angels punishing people

King Hezekiah prayed to God for help when the Assyrian army surrounded Jerusalem. God sent an angel to kill all the Assyrian soldiers and rescue the city – the Assyrians had dared to belittle God (2 Kings 19:35).

God sent an angel to destroy King Herod because of his great pride (Acts 12:23).

What do Angels look like?

Angels usually do their work without being seen. Elisha's servant was frightened when the Syrian army was hunting them, but Elisha knew that God would help. When Elisha asked God to open his servant's eyes, the servant saw that there were a large number of God's angels all around to protect them (2 Kings 6:17). But the angels were not visible to anyone else.

We have already seen that the angels who appeared to Abraham and Lot looked like men, so they did not have wings. We have also seen that angels could be in fire and cloud, as in the burning bush and the pillar of cloud in the wilderness. This shows that angels do not have any particular form and can appear or disappear as they choose, like the one who visited Gideon.

The account of the resurrection of Jesus shows that angels can be terrifying in their appearance when they display God's glory:

“And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men.” (*Matthew 28:2-4*)

The angel who told Philip to meet the Ethiopian is described as “*a spirit*” (Acts 8:26, 29). Hebrews 1:14 also describes angels as spirits. The word ‘spirit’ shows that they are not mortal creatures like us. From Luke 20:34-36 we learn that the angels cannot sin or die and do not marry.

Jesus and the Angels

Angels appeared separately to Mary, Joseph and the shepherds, to tell them about the birth of Jesus. Herod wanted to kill baby Jesus and so an angel told Joseph to take Mary and the child to Egypt. Later, an angel told Joseph when it was safe for them to go home.

Psalm 91:11 prophesied that the angels would play a part in Jesus’ life. In Matthew 4:11 we read that after his temptation in the wilderness, angels “*came and were ministering to (serving) him*”. The angels may have brought him food after his long fast.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus knew that his crucifixion was near, he prayed that he might do God’s will, and God sent an angel to strengthen him (Luke 22:43). Jesus could have avoided being arrested by asking God to send thousands of angels to rescue him, but Jesus was willing to die for us. It was the only way that we could be helped out of our sinful state.

We might have expected God to make His Son like an angel, but instead he was made like us. As a human being Jesus could experience temptation, suffering and then death, but angels cannot sin and cannot die. The following passages are about Jesus before his death:

“Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation (*a covering*) for the sins of the people.” (*Hebrews 2:17*)

“... for a little while was made lower than the angels ... because of the suffering of death.” (*Hebrews 2:9*)

Angels were present when Jesus rose from the dead. Imagine their joy! Jesus had triumphed over sin and death. He was then exalted to glory and made higher than the angels. He no longer had human nature:

“After making purification for sins, he (*Jesus*) sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.” (*Hebrews 1:3,4*)

Angels

The honour of sitting at God's right hand is for the Lord Jesus Christ alone, and no angel has ever been privileged in this way (Hebrews 1:13). By contrast the angels are described as God's ministers, or servants:

"Of the angels he (*God*) says, 'He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire.'" (*Hebrews 1:7*)

Angels do not Sin – They do God's Will

There are no angels that sin. Psalm 103:20, 21 shows that all God's angels do His will:

"Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word! Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers, who do his will!"

The angels can enter God's holy presence, which shows that it is impossible for angels to sin, for no sinner can approach God and live.

God brought the people of Israel out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses. At first the Egyptians refused to release the people, and God punished the Egyptians by sending plagues. Describing what happened, the Psalmist says that God:

"... let loose on them his burning anger, wrath, indignation, and distress, a company of destroying angels." (*Psalm 78:49*)

The angels themselves were not evil and did not sin. They were doing God's work. God sent them to bring about the plagues, to punish the Egyptians and show that He was in control.

But what about 2 Peter 2:4, which says: "*For if God did not spare angels when they sinned*"? The Bible word 'angel' means 'messenger'. It can either refer to heavenly messengers (angels), or to earthly messengers (human beings who carried a message). The word itself does not make it clear whether a heavenly or an earthly messenger is being described, and the context of the passage is used to decide. The context of 2 Peter 2:4 does not provide any clear indication and this has caused confusion. We believe that this verse refers to the incident recorded in Numbers 16, when some leaders in Israel sinned and died as a result. So these 'angels' would be people who should have known and acted better.

malak (a Hebrew word) = angelos (a Greek word) = messenger

can refer to:

heavenly messenger (angel) OR earthly messenger (human being)

The Angels and true Believers

Even though we do not see them, the angels are at work looking after true believers:

"Are they (*the angels*) not all ministering spirits, sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?"
(*Hebrews 1:14*)

This verse clearly shows that the angels do not work on behalf of everyone – they care for those who fear God. Psalm 34:7 has this lovely message of comfort:

"The angel of the LORD encamps round those who fear him, and delivers them."

We are told that the angels rejoice when a sinner repents (Luke 15:10).

Although the angels play a part in the lives of true believers, this does not mean that believers will never have difficult times. For trials can teach us lessons and bring us closer to God. Nor will angels necessarily stop believers from sinning, just as the angel in the wilderness did not stop the people of Israel sinning. They often work to help believers in ways we do not understand.

The Future Work of the Angels

The Lord Jesus Christ will soon return to this earth, but no-one knows when, not even the angels in heaven (Mark 13:32). When he does return, the angels will come with him. 2 Thessalonians 1:7 talks of the time:

"... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels."

According to the parables of Jesus, angels will be involved in gathering people together to appear before the judgement seat of Christ. At that time, the saints (true believers) will be made like the angels. Angels are immortal and the followers of Christ can become like them, as Jesus once said:

"The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection."
(*Luke 20:34-36*)

Summary

1. The angels are God's messengers. They represent God and act with His authority and power to do His will. Angels guide, protect, deliver and punish.
2. The angels look after true believers, but do not necessarily stop them from sinning.
3. Angels usually do their work unseen. When they were seen, they appeared in many different forms.
4. The angels are immortal and cannot sin. They do not marry. In God's kingdom, believers will be like this.
5. As a human being Jesus was made lower than the angels. After his resurrection he was exalted to glory and made higher than them.
6. The angels will accompany Jesus when he returns to the earth.
7. The Bible word 'angel' can refer to human messengers.

A verse to learn:

“Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?” (*Hebrews 1:14*)

Verses to read:

There are many references in this chapter that will help you to learn about the angels and the work they do for God.

Questions on Chapter 28 – Angels

- 28A. What does the word ‘angel’ mean?
- 28B. Are these statements about God’s heavenly angels right or wrong?
- a) Angels can appear in God’s presence.
 - b) Some angels sin.
 - c) Angels sometimes look like men.
 - d) Angels cannot talk.
 - e) Angels are sometimes described as spirits.
 - f) Angels do not die.
 - g) We can rely on angels to prevent us from sinning.
 - h) Some angels marry._
- 28C. Is it true that the word ‘angel’ usually describes God’s heavenly messengers but can sometimes refer to human messengers?
- 28D. Give a reference to show where in the Bible we can find the following. The answers are all in the chapter!
- a) An angel looked like a person.
 - b) An angel gave a message.
 - c) There are a huge number of angels.
 - d) Angels can destroy people.
 - e) An angel protected and delivered someone.
- 28E. What are angels doing at the present time?
- 28F. Why did God make Jesus as a human being and not as an angel?
- 28G. When will believers be like the angels?

DEMONS AND SATAN

Reading: Matthew 8:14-34

Demons

The Bible words for ‘devil’ and ‘demon’ are quite different and this is clearly shown in modern versions. Unfortunately the King James Version can be confusing. We shall consider the devil in the next chapter.

God is all-powerful and created all things. There are no invisible living beings called demons that cause trouble. In some Bible passages the word ‘demon’ refers to idols; in others it refers to illnesses. We shall look at both of these and show how they are linked.

Demons as Idols

Psalm 106 talks about Israel’s sins and God’s mercy and care for them. The people of Israel had not kept themselves separate from the nations around but had instead copied their wicked practices and worshipped idols. They thought that false gods ruled over them and influenced their lives. In verses 36-38 we read that Israel sacrificed their children to idols. Notice that these verses talk about sacrificing “*to the demons*” and “*to the idols*”. This is because ‘demon’ is another way of talking about an idol. The demons mentioned here were the idols of the surrounding nations. Deuteronomy 32:17 also links demons and idols (false gods).

Psalm 106:36-38

“They served their idols, which became a snare to them. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons; they poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan.”

1 Corinthians 10:18-21 again shows that ‘demon’ is another word for ‘idol’. The Christians at Corinth worshipped the only living and true God. All other gods were idols, here called demons – lifeless objects which people worship in vain.

Demons as Illnesses

Jesus healed people with many different medical conditions. For example, he gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf and made the lame walk. He also cured many people suffering from mental illnesses, including complaints like epilepsy.

In those days people knew very little about medical science. They could see why a person with a swollen ankle could not walk properly, but there seemed to be no reason for illnesses like epilepsy, schizophrenia and other mental conditions. These illnesses also made the sufferers behave strangely. So people thought that these illnesses were caused by demons entering into the sufferers and controlling their lives to change them. When Jesus healed such people, he is described as casting out demons (Mark 1:34, 39).

The following passage is about the healing work of Jesus:

“That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: ‘He took our illnesses and bore our diseases’.”
(Matthew 8:16, 17)

This passage states that people with demons came to Jesus and he cast out the spirits. It also tells us that the prophet Isaiah prophesied that this would happen. But Isaiah talks about illnesses and diseases, not demons and evil spirits. Demons and evil spirits are a way of talking about illnesses and diseases.

Luke 9:42 shows that demons and evil spirits are the same, and that they can be healed:

“While he (*Jesus*) was coming, the demon threw him to the ground and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father.”

Matthew 17 describes the same miracle but does not mention a demon. Instead verse 15 describes the boy as an epileptic. The Greek word here means ‘moon struck’. The translators did not suggest that the boy had been struck by the moon but looked at the symptoms and realised that he was suffering from epilepsy. In the time of Jesus people did not know that epilepsy is a medical condition. If Jesus had told them this, they would not have understood and would probably have thought him very strange for suggesting it. Today, epilepsy is controlled with medical drugs. When Luke talks about a demon and unclean spirit he is using language that would be understood by the people of the time.

Demons and Satan

Matthew 9:32, 33 also uses the ideas of the time to describe Jesus healing a dumb man. The people thought he had a demon. It was not easy for them to understand how someone with a mouth and tongue was unable to talk.

When Jesus healed a blind and dumb person who was thought to have a demon (Matthew 12:22, 23), many people recognised his great power, but the Pharisees wickedly said that it came from Beelzebub, the prince of demons. Jesus showed how foolish this idea was.

Demons, Idols and Illnesses

1 Kings 18 gives a glimpse of the way people worshipped false gods. The idol (demon) worshippers lost control of their actions because they had worked themselves up into a state of excitement, having spent many hours leaping and shouting to their false god. 1 Kings 18:28, 29 says:

“they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. And as midday passed, they raved on.”

A person having an epileptic fit or a lunatic might look like these idol worshippers. This may be why people with illnesses that caused strange behaviour were thought to be possessed by a false god (demon).

Since idols, or demons, have no real existence (1 Corinthians 8:4), the evil spirits thought to be associated with them do not exist. There are no evil spirits that cause trouble and illness.

Jesus spoke to Lifeless Things

Because Jesus appears to speak to demons, some people think they must be living beings. But when Peter's relative was ill with a fever, Jesus spoke to the fever. He also spoke to the wind and sea (Mark 4:39-41) and to a fig tree (Matthew 21:19-22). We know that the dead cannot hear but Jesus spoke to Jairus' daughter and to Lazarus when they were dead. Jesus speaking to these lifeless things is similar to his talking to demons, which also have no life. By speaking to these things, Jesus showed that he had the power to perform the miracle. (See also Numbers 20:8, where Moses was instructed by God to speak to a rock.)

Luke 4:38-39

“Now Simon's mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and they appealed to him on her behalf. And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her, and immediately she rose and began to serve them.”

A person with a demon had a medical problem that was not understood at the time.

Satan

‘Satan’ is an ordinary Hebrew word that means ‘adversary’. In the Old Testament it appears 18 times as ‘satan’ while seven times it is translated ‘adversary’. An adversary is someone who opposes (tries to stop) a person from doing something. We will look at some occasions where the translators have used the word ‘adversary’. These will help us to understand the meaning of ‘satan’.

1. David stayed with the Philistines to escape from King Saul, the first king of Israel, who was trying to kill him. When the Philistine commanders were preparing to go to battle against Israel, they thought that David might become an adversary and fight against them. They said,

“He (*David*) shall not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become an adversary to us.” (*1 Samuel 29:4*)

The word ‘adversary’ in this verse is the Hebrew word ‘satan’. This shows that a human being can be a satan. It is not the name of a person.

2. Solomon was a righteous king who loved God. However he became involved in idol worship. God was angry with him and sent adversaries against him. This word ‘adversary’ in 1 Kings 11:14 is the word ‘satan’:

“And the LORD raised up an adversary against Solomon, Hadad the Edomite.”

1 Kings 11:23-25 records that God sent a second adversary, Rezon. Both Hadad and Rezon acted as enemies or ‘satans’ by bringing trouble for Solomon and Israel. This should have made Solomon realise his foolishness and turn back to God.

3. In Numbers 22 we are told of a prophet called Balaam, who was going on a journey which God did not want him to make. Verse 22 says:

“But God’s anger was kindled because he (*Balaam*) went, and the angel of the LORD took his stand in the way as his adversary.”

Again the word ‘adversary’ is ‘satan’. God sent an angel to block the path and oppose Balaam, to prevent him continuing his journey and doing wrong. The angel, who was doing God’s will, was a ‘satan’ or opposer to Balaam. The angel was a good satan!

Demons and Satan

4. Matthew 16:23 uses the Hebrew word ‘satan’. Because Peter did not want Jesus to go to Jerusalem to suffer and die, he tried to stop him. Jesus said to him, “*Get behind me, Satan*”, because Peter was opposing God’s will. Peter was trying to stop Jesus dying for us and was therefore a ‘satan’ to Jesus.

A satan is an adversary, one who is in opposition, who may be good or bad. If someone stops a person from doing evil, he is a good satan, just as the angel was to Balaam.

There is no powerful evil being called Satan. God would never have created such a wicked being to frustrate His purpose. Jesus showed us how to understand the word ‘satan’ by using it to describe his disciple Peter when he made a comment which was opposed to God’s will.

Satan means ‘adversary’ or ‘one who opposes’. Anyone can be a satan by opposing another person. They can stop them from doing good or evil.

We are our own worst Enemies

Our greatest adversary is our own sinful self. We give in to our own desires that stop us following the Lord Jesus. These desires oppose a godly way of life – they act as a satan to us. In this way the word ‘satan’ can be used for our own sinful desires. This can be seen by comparing Acts 5 verses 3 and 4:

| | |
|---|---|
| Verse 3: “But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit.’” | Verse 4: “Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.” |
|---|---|

‘Satan’ is used in verse 3 to represent Ananias’s sinful thoughts – his own sinful desires were opposing the things of God. Verse 4 clearly shows they were his own thoughts, and not put there by an evil being. God straight away punished Ananias with death because of his sin. If a wicked being called Satan really had filled Ananias’s heart then the punishment would have been unfair. We must overcome our wicked desires!

Who was Lucifer?

Isaiah 14:12-16 is often quoted by people who believe in a supernatural evil being. By comparing the ESV and the AV we see that Lucifer is just another name for the day star, or planet Venus.

| <p align="center">King James Version of Isaiah 14:12</p> | <p align="center">English Standard Version of Isaiah 14:12</p> |
|---|---|
| <p>“How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!”</p> | <p>“How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!”</p> |

If you read the whole chapter you will see that ‘Lucifer’ refers to the king of Babylon (see especially verses 4 and 16). This is a prophecy that the arrogant king of Babylon would fall from power. This would be as spectacular as if the planet Venus fell from the sky! Jesus uses similar picture language about the city of Capernaum (Matthew 11:23).

Similarly, Ezekiel 28:14-16 refers to the king of Tyre and not an all-powerful evil being.

Satan in the Book of Job

Job is described as *“blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil”* (Job 1:1). He was also very wealthy. Satan suggests to God that Job only worships God because of the blessings he receives from Him. So God agrees that Job will be tested to see if he will remain faithful when his blessings are taken away.

Who was this Satan? It is important to note that God, not this Satan, brought the trouble on Job (Job 42:11). Job and his wife knew this (Job 2:9, 10; 19:21). We know that God would not work directly with a supernatural evil being (Psalm 5:4; Habakkuk 1:13).

The term ‘satan’ only occurs in the first two chapters of Job and the first reference is:

“Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them.” (Job 1:6)

This verse has led some people to wrongly believe that ‘satan’ here refers to a wicked angel, but Chapter 28 shows that angels do not sin. The phrase *“sons of God”* (sometimes ‘children of God’) is used in Scripture of believers (e.g. 1 John 3:2) and *“present themselves before the LORD”* refers to people worshipping God (Deuteronomy 31:14; Joshua 24:1; 1 Samuel 10:19). We suggest that when one or more of Job’s three friends came to worship God, they could have had jealous, evil thoughts about Job. The term ‘Satan’ is used to represent these thoughts because they are opposed to Job. The three

Demons and Satan

friends bring no comfort to Job but instead wrongly tell him that his troubles must be the result of his wickedness. Significantly, there is no mention of Satan being condemned by God, but God is angry with the three friends at the end (Job 42:7). They were wicked, not Job.

Summary

1. In some Bible passages the word 'demon' refers to idols (false gods); in others it refers to illnesses.
2. In Bible times people with illnesses that could not be explained, particularly those which caused strange behaviour like mental illnesses, were thought to have a demon. Today, we know these people were suffering from medical conditions that can often be helped with medicines.
3. There are no invisible living beings called demons that cause trouble.
4. The word 'satan' means 'adversary' or 'one who opposes'. The adversary can be good or evil.
5. There is no supernatural evil being called satan.

Verses to learn:

“That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: ‘He took our illnesses and bore our diseases’.” (*Matthew 8:16,17*)

Passages to read:

Numbers 22; 1 Kings 18; Matthew 16:21-28

Questions on Chapter 29 – Demons and Satan

- 29A. Give a New Testament reference where ‘demons’ (‘devils’) were really idols.
- 29B. People in the passages below are described as having demons (devils). With our knowledge of modern medicine we would not describe their illness in this way. What would we say was wrong with them?
- a) Matthew 9:32-34
 - b) Matthew 12:22, 23
 - c) Matthew 17:14-21
- 29C. a) Do you believe that demons (or evil spirits) are invisible living beings?
- b) Do you believe that demons can cause illness?
- 29D. What does the word ‘satan’ mean?
- 29E. Why did Jesus call Peter ‘Satan’?
- 29F. Some people think that satan is a ‘fallen’ (sinful) angel. What do you think of this idea?
- 29G. Give a Bible example of a good satan.
- 29H. What does ‘satan’ represent in Acts 5:3, 4?
- 29I. Is satan a supernatural evil being?
- 29J. Who was Lucifer?

30

THE DEVIL AND SIN

Reading: Hebrews 2:9-18

Sin and Temptation

Sin comes from our minds. We are tempted to sin by our own natural desires. But the temptation itself is not sin – it is part of human nature. It is when we give in to our wrong desires and allow them to become evil thoughts or actions that we sin:

“But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”
(James.1:14,15)

Jesus himself spoke of sin and also showed that it comes from the mind:

“For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” *(Mark 7:21-23)*

Jesus also showed that the evil thought can be as wrong as the action itself:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” *(Matthew 5:27,28)*

Because sin is caused by failure to control our wrong desires, James shows the importance of keeping our desires under control:

“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.” *(James 4:1,2)*

Even the best of us fail to control our human desires. Paul found it hard to do good and easy to do wrong (Romans 7:18,19). Our minds are naturally self-centred rather than God-centred. We sin by seeking our own desires rather than God’s will.

Overcoming Sin

Jesus had human nature like us and was tempted as we are. He had desires that would have grown into sin if had he not kept them under control. He was sinless because he never gave in to those desires. His temptations in the wilderness show that Jesus immediately recognised that these desires were wrong. He chose to cut them from his thinking straight away, before they had time to grow into sinful thoughts or actions. His example shows us what the Bible means by overcoming sin – to overcome the desires of our own nature.

The verses quoted above clearly show that sin comes “*from within*” – from our minds. There is no supernatural being that makes people do evil. When we sin it is our fault, because we have failed to control our wrong desires. But none of us likes to be told, “You are wrong!” It is much easier to blame someone else! To do this is to deceive ourselves:

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick.”
(*Jeremiah 17:9*)

False teaching about the devil and satan come from wanting to blame someone else.

When God called Adam out of hiding (Genesis 3) and asked him if he had eaten of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Adam answered,

“The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.”

Adam was trying to blame God for giving him the woman, and blame the woman for giving him the fruit. But it was his own fault – he made the wrong choice. Eve blamed the serpent. Adam and Eve did not want to take the blame for disobeying God. The first step to overcoming sin is to accept that the problem lies within ourselves.

The Meaning of the Word ‘Devil’

It surprises many people to find that the first time the devil is mentioned in the Bible is in the New Testament, when we are told about the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. If the devil is an all-powerful wicked being, where was it in Old Testament times?

The words ‘devil’ and ‘satan’ are both used in the temptation of Jesus. In Chapter 17 we saw that the tempter of Jesus could not have been an all-powerful evil being. The world belongs to God and no one else was able to offer it to Jesus. Also, Jesus would not have followed such a being, knowing him to be evil, to Jerusalem or anywhere else!

The Devil and Sin

The word 'devil' is an ordinary Greek word (*diabolos*) which means 'slanderer' or 'false accuser'. It is occasionally used about people who say wrong things about others:

"Older women likewise are to be reverent in behaviour, not slanderers or slaves to much wine." (*Titus 2:3*)

See also 1 Timothy 3:11 and 2 Timothy 3:3. The word is used of Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus:

"Jesus answered them, 'Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.' He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him." (*John 6:70,71*)

But this same word 'devil' is used in the New Testament to represent human sinfulness.

'Devil' is Used in the Bible to Describe Sin

1 John 3:4-7 and 1 John 3:8-10 contain many very similar ideas. The following comparison helps us to understand the way the Bible uses the term 'devil':

| 1 John 3:5 | 1 John 3:8 |
|--|---|
| "You know that he (Jesus) appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin." | "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." |

We see that "to destroy the works of the devil" is the same as "to take away sins".

Hebrews 2:14 says that the devil "*has the power of death*". It is sin that leads to death:

"Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned." (*Romans 5:12*)

"For the wages of sin is death ..." (*Romans 6:23*)

Therefore, the devil represents sin. The following verses show that what the Bible says about the devil, it says about sin. This shows sin and the devil are the same.

| | |
|---|--|
| The devil is the enemy of God (James 4:7) | so is sin (Romans 6:13) |
| The devil is the tempter of man (Matthew 4:1) | so are sinful desires (James 1:13-15) |
| The devil is deceitful (Revelation 12:9) | so is sin (Romans 7:11) |
| The devil causes death (Hebrews 2:14) | so does sin (Romans 5:12) |
| The devil was destroyed by Christ's death (Hebrews 2:14) | so was sin (Romans 6:6) |

The devil is used in the New Testament to represent sin

A Closer Look at Hebrews 2:14

1 John 3 told us that Jesus came to destroy the *“works of the devil”*. Hebrews 2:14 tells us that Jesus came to destroy the devil, as well as his works:

| Hebrews 2:14 | Meaning |
|---|---|
| <p>“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.”</p> | <p>Believers share human nature, and so Jesus himself also had human nature so that through his death he would destroy sin.</p> |

This verse says that Jesus was born as a human being so that he could destroy the devil through his death. This means that Jesus overcame his natural desires and so conquered sin for himself.

The verse presents problems to those who believe that the devil is a powerful evil being.

The Devil and Sin

- It says Jesus has already destroyed the devil. So why do people wrongly believe that the devil exists today as a supernatural evil spirit?
- If the devil is an all-powerful evil being, then why does this verse emphasise that Jesus had to have human nature to destroy the devil?
- How could Jesus by his death destroy the devil if it was a supernatural evil being? Surely it would have been better for Jesus to be immortal like the angels. A dying person is very unlikely to win such a battle!

The devil which Jesus destroyed was really the desire to sin which was in him, as it is in all human beings. Jesus inherited human nature with this tendency from his mother. It was essential that he had our nature so that he could experience temptations to sin and overcome these temptations. This is why the verse emphasises the fact that Jesus had the same nature as we have. The final temptation Jesus needed to overcome was the temptation to avoid death on the cross. Having overcome this, he had completely conquered – or destroyed – sin. This is why the verse tells us that Jesus destroyed the devil by his death, and why 1 John 3:8 says he appeared “*to destroy the works of the devil*”. Jesus completely destroyed sin for himself because when he died he destroyed the very nature that could be tempted. He can no longer be tempted now!

“... he (*Jesus*) has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” (*Hebrews 9:26*)

Jesus destroyed the devil by his death

Jesus put away – or overcame – sin

Jesus lived a perfect life. He “*in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin*” (*Hebrews 4:15*). By conquering sin for himself Jesus has made it possible for our sins to be forgiven.

Why does the Bible use the Term ‘the Devil’?

The word ‘devil’ is used in the Bible to represent sin. It is an example of personification – speaking of something as if it were a person. But why is it that the Bible so often uses the word ‘devil’ instead of just saying ‘sin’? And why does it speak of this devil as if it were describing someone with tremendous power? It is surely so that we can understand just how powerful and deceitful sin is, to make us realise how much we need to fight against it each day. In the

temptation of Jesus, the devil is used as picture language to describe the battle that took place in Jesus' mind.

This battle against his own desires required all the strength he possessed. This is why the temptations to sin are described as a great power – the devil. It shows us how much we need to fight against sin each day and helps us to appreciate what the Lord did for us in overcoming sin.

One All-Powerful Creator

God is all-powerful and created all things. There is no supernatural being at work in the universe to oppose Him. God would not have created such a being. However, people throughout the ages have thought that there is a great power opposed to God. The ancient Persians believed in two great powers. The first was thought to be the creator of light and goodness, and the second the creator of darkness and evil. In answer to this wrong belief, God sent this message:

“I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things.” (*Isaiah 45:5,7*)

The great Creator is the only great power in the universe, and controls everything. The only opposition to God is from sin in the minds and lives of men and women. There is no all-powerful evil being which some call the devil and others call satan.

The idea of an evil being – a devil or satan – that has existed through the centuries does not fit with the teaching of Scripture that God alone has immortality (1 Timothy 6:16). God would not give immortality to a being that challenged His great purpose! Some wrongly believe that an angel sinned and became the devil or satan, but angels cannot sin or die (Chapter 28) – and we are told the devil was destroyed when Jesus died!

Symbols for Sin

The serpent was an animal (Genesis 3:1,14). God allowed it to speak, just as He allowed Balaam's donkey to speak (Numbers 22:28). God used the serpent to test Adam and Eve – and they failed. The serpent did not make them eat the fruit – it just provided the test. Adam and Eve decided for themselves.

The Devil and Sin

After this the serpent became a symbol for sin, just as the devil is a symbol for sin. In the last chapter we saw that 'satan' means 'adversary' or 'opposer', but it can also be used as a symbol – for anything that opposes God, including sin. This is why 'satan' is used (as well as 'devil') in the temptations of Jesus, because Jesus' desires were opposing God's will. Revelation is a book full of symbols, and the serpent, satan and the devil are all brought together in Revelation 12:9 to show, in picture language, the final removal of sin from the earth.

We cannot help Ourselves, so what are we to do?

It is very important to understand that sin is unacceptable to God. It comes from our minds and so the problem lies within us. We are responsible for our own sins and cannot blame anyone else. It is only when we accept this that we can begin to understand our need of forgiveness and God's grace and mercy to us. Then we will be ready to turn to God and repent (be truly sorry for our sins and seek forgiveness), and make a new start in life through baptism. It is only through repentance and baptism that our sins can be completely forgiven. This is discussed in the next chapter.

Summary

1. Sin comes from our minds. We are tempted to sin by our own natural desires.
2. The word 'devil' means 'slanderer' or 'false accuser'. It is used in the Bible as a symbol for sin. There is no supernatural evil being.
3. Jesus overcame sin in himself – he destroyed the devil through his death.
4. Our sins can be forgiven if we repent and are baptized.

Verses to learn:

“But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”
(James 1:14,15)

Passages to read:

Psalm 14:2,3; James 1:12-27; Romans 6; Romans 7:14-25; Galatians 5:16-24

The Devil and Sin

Questions on Chapter 30 – The Devil and Sin

- 30A. What is the devil?
- 30B. How did Jesus “destroy the works of the devil”?
- 30C. Read Matthew 15:10-20. Explain what verse 19 teaches us about ourselves.
- 30D. Which Bible passage in the chapter shows that sin comes from within us?
- 30E. What does James 1:14,15 teach us about temptation?
- 30F. What happened when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness – was there a supernatural being present or was he tempted by his own desires?
- 30G. Is there an all-powerful evil being that opposes God?
- 30H. Why does the Bible talk about the devil as if it were a being with great power?
- 30I. What does the word ‘repent’ mean?
- 30J. What do we need to realise for our repentance to be genuine?
- 30K. Why should believers fight against sin in their lives?

31

BAPTISM

Reading: John 3

Baptism – a New Start

Sin separates us from God and brings death. If we want to come back to God we must turn from our own ways to His way. Baptism is the way God has chosen for us to make a new start.

Baptism is essential for Salvation

1. The teaching of Jesus and his apostles – Just before he ascended into heaven, the Lord Jesus said to his apostles,

“Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” (*Mark 16:15,16*)

The apostle Peter taught the Jews on the day of Pentecost:



“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.” (*Acts 2:38*)

Baptism is the command of the Lord Jesus and his apostles. It is essential for the forgiveness of sins and salvation.

2. The example of Cornelius – Cornelius was a “*devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God*” (*Acts 10:2*). You might think that his service to God was complete and there was nothing more he could do. But the apostle Peter commanded him to be baptized. The lesson is clear – even good living, God-fearing people can only be saved through baptism.

3. Baptism was practised in New Testament times

| Reference | Notes |
|-----------------------|--|
| Matthew 3:13-17 | Jesus himself was baptized. He did not need to be baptized for his sins to be forgiven because he had never sinned. His cousin, John the Baptist, knew this and so was unwilling to baptize him, but Jesus said, <i>“Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness”</i> . Jesus set an example for others to follow. |
| John 3:22, 4:1-3 | Jesus was involved in baptizing others. |
| Acts 2:41 | As a result of the apostles’ preaching on the day of Pentecost 3,000 were baptized. |
| Acts 8:5-13 | Philip baptized people in Samaria. |
| Acts 8:26-40 | Philip also baptized an Ethiopian official. |
| Acts 9:1-19 | Saul (later known as the apostle Paul) was baptized. As he travelled to Damascus to persecute Christians there, the Lord Jesus spoke to him from heaven. Saul then realised that Jesus really was God’s Son, and that he had been wrong to persecute Christians. So he was baptized and became a completely changed person. |
| Acts 10 | The apostle Peter baptized Cornelius, the first Gentile believer. |
| Acts 16:25-33 | A jailor and family in Philippi were baptized. |
| 1 Corinthians 1:12-16 | The apostle Paul baptized Crispus, Gaius, and the household of Stephanas. |

How were People Baptized?

The Greeks used the word ‘baptizō’ to describe the dyeing of cloth. The cloth was ‘baptized’ or immersed completely in the dye. No part

of the cloth could be left out of the liquid otherwise the dyeing would be patchy. In the same way baptism is a complete immersion in water – the person being baptized goes completely under the water.

The practice of christening by sprinkling with water is not taught in the Bible. The examples of baptism we read about in the Bible involved a large amount of water because the person being baptized went right under the water:

- John the Baptist was baptizing at Aenon “*because water was plentiful there*” (John 3:23).
- Jesus was baptized in a river. Afterwards he “*came up out of the water*” (Mark 1:9,10).
- Philip helped an Ethiopian eunuch to understand the work of the Lord Jesus. We are told:

“And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?’ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away.” (Acts 8:36-39)

Baptism is essential for salvation. It is a complete immersion in water.

The Meaning of Baptism

Baptism is a symbol of the washing away of past sins, because at our baptism all these are forgiven, allowing us to make a fresh start:

“And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.” (Acts 22:16)

But baptism is more than a washing away of sins, as this passage from Romans 6 shows:

Baptism

| Romans 6:3,4 | Notes |
|--|--|
| <p>“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?</p> <p>We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death,</p> <p>in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”</p> | <p>Paul is talking to baptized believers. He says that they were baptized into Christ Jesus – into his death.</p> <p>Being put completely under water is like being buried. This associates us with the death of Jesus,</p> <p>so that as Christ was raised from the dead to start a new life, so we start a new life after baptism.</p> |

Baptism is a symbol of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. As the body of Jesus was buried in the tomb, so in baptism our body is buried in water. Going completely under the water is a symbol of dying with Christ. In this way we confess that we deserve to die because of our sins. It also represents the end of our old life in which we were slaves to sin. Then just as Jesus rose from the grave, so we rise from the water, set free from our past sins, to begin a new life in Christ. It is a life dedicated to following the example of the Lord Jesus.

Since baptism is a symbol of dying and rising with Christ, it is clear that a person needs to go right under the water to be baptized, and not have a few drops of water sprinkled on them.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God”* (John 3:5). Jesus was speaking about the birth of a new life that takes place at baptism, explaining that a person cannot have a place in God’s future kingdom unless that person is baptized. The words *“and the Spirit”* show that baptism is more than a physical immersion in water. It is a spiritual rebirth – being *“born again”* by the effect of the Word of God in our minds and hearts (1 Peter 1:23). Baptism is only effective when accompanied by a sincere attitude:

“Baptism ... now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 3:21)

Baptism is an outward sign of a response to God which comes from the heart. It is our declaration to God that we believe that our sins can be forgiven and wish to start a new life in Jesus Christ our Lord. It is not a ritual of washing done to become a member of a church.

“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.....So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” (*Romans 6:5-8,11*)

Steps to the New Life

Being baptized and starting a new life in Christ is the most important decision we can ever make. It is a decision for life and should not be taken lightly. The way to baptism and a new life in Christ can be summarised in the following steps.

1. Know and believe true Bible teaching – A person needs to understand and believe the one true Gospel message before being baptized (Mark 16:15). See also Acts 16:31 and 18:8. Before the Samaritans were baptized they were taught and believed the Gospel message:

“But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” (*Acts 8:12*)

Cornelius and the Ethiopian were both taught from Scripture before being baptized.

2. Repentance – John the Baptist taught, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2). Peter said, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38). See also Acts 3:19. Repentance is essential before baptism. The Bible word ‘repent’ means ‘to have a change of mind’. Once a person hears the Gospel and comes to understand how sinful he is in God’s eyes, he will be truly sorry for his sins and will seek God’s mercy and forgiveness. He will openly acknowledge his sins before God with a sincere and total desire not to sin like this again. This involves a complete change of heart and the desire to make a fresh start in life.

Baptism

3. Conversion is a turning around, or a change of direction. The apostle Peter said, “*Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out*” (Acts 3:19). A person who has truly repented (changed his mind) will then seek to turn his life around (be converted) and make a fresh start. The process of changing from being self-centred to being God-centred is not easy to do and will continue for the rest of his life.

4. Baptism is a washing away of past sins by association with the death of Jesus. In symbol we die with Christ and confess that we deserve to die because of our sins. In symbol we rise with Christ to start a new life dedicated to following his example.

5. The new life in Christ – Past sins are completely forgiven at baptism. It is the end of our old self. We have to change to be Christ-like. This will not happen overnight and is a lifetime’s work. The change will not be complete until God’s kingdom because we still have human nature. After baptism we should not be slaves to sin (Romans 6:6). However, we can pray for the sins we commit after baptism to be forgiven. The new life is discussed further in Chapter 36.

Baptism is not for Children

The Bible is clear that a person must believe the true Gospel message, recognise his sinfulness and need of salvation and so repent, and start to change his way of life before baptism. How can this be done by a baby? A baby cannot recognise sin in its life and want to change. Baptism is a mature decision. There are no examples anywhere in the Bible of the baptism of children.

Baptism is for adults – christening or baptism of children is not taught in the Bible.

Abraham’s Heirs by Baptism

Baptism brings us into a new relationship with God and His Son. We are baptized into Christ and become members of God’s family through him. Galatians 3 shows us that by being baptized we become Abraham’s descendants (spiritual Israel) and so become heirs to the promises that God made to him (see Chapter 12). This is why we can look forward to living in God’s kingdom on earth:

“... for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ ... you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.” (*Galatians 3:26-29*)

People in Old Testament Times

Those who lived before the time of Jesus could not be individually baptized into the death of Jesus, so people like Abraham were not baptized. But as we showed in Chapter 24, God considered Abraham to be righteous because of his great faith.

The Law that God gave to Moses showed the people of Israel that they were sinful and displeasing to God. The sacrifices of perfectly formed animals pointed forward to the sacrifice of the sinless Lord Jesus. If people in Old Testament times really wanted to be forgiven and believed that God could help, He would. David said:

“Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.” (*Psalm 32:1,2*)

The sacrifices and the Law of Moses are no longer needed because Christ, the perfect sacrifice, has died for us. Believers can now associate themselves with his sacrifice by baptism.

Baptism

Summary

1. Baptism is essential for the forgiveness of sins and salvation.
2. It is a complete immersion in water, symbolising the washing away of past sins.
3. Baptism is also a symbol of dying and rising with Christ. It represents the end of our old life in which we were slaves to sin and the start of a new life in Christ.
4. Through baptism we enter into a new relationship with God and His Son. We become members of God's family.
5. Baptism is for adults who recognise their sinfulness and wish to repent

Verses to learn:

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” *(Romans 6:3,4)*

Passages to read:

Acts 8,9,10 and Romans 6

Questions on Chapter 31 – Baptism

- 31A. What does the passage concerning Cornelius teach us about baptism?
- 31B. Before being baptized a person should know and have a true understanding of the Gospel message. What else is required?
- 31C. Give reasons to show why sprinkling a baby is not what the Bible means by baptism.
- 31D. In what way is baptism a death?
- 31E. In what way is baptism a birth?
- 31F. What does Romans 6:6 mean?
- 31G. Colossians 3 explains what a believer's new life in Christ should be like.

Use verses 5-9 to make a list of things believers should not do after being baptized.

Use verses 10-17 to list the qualities of a Christian and how he/she should behave.
- 31H. What does Galatians 3:27-29 teach us?

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Reading: 1 Corinthians 7

The First Marriage

Marriage is a relationship that God has provided. It is the joining together of one man and one woman for as long as they are both alive. Marriage is the closest of all human relationships. In it the husband and his wife can learn together the true meaning of Christian love and forgiveness, as they care for each other in a self-sacrificing way.

God created Eve as a marriage partner for Adam, so Adam and Eve were the first married couple. Therefore, the principles of marriage are set out from the very beginning in Genesis 1 and 2.

The Principles of Marriage

From Genesis 2:18,21-24 we learn that marriage was a solemn and serious commitment. After creating the woman, God brought her to the man (Genesis 2:22). Jesus makes clear in Matthew 19:5 that God actually spoke the words of Genesis 2:24 to Adam and Eve. In a very real sense, God was the one who officiated at this first marriage service.

Genesis 2:18, 21-2:

“Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him”. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

The order of God's words to Adam and Eve in verse 24 is important. He said:

1. that a man should leave his father and mother
2. and hold fast to his wife
3. and that the man and wife should become one flesh.

We will consider these three points in more detail.

1. God said that when a man and a woman decide to marry, the man should leave his parents to live with his wife. This does not mean that he should ignore his parents, but shows that his new wife now becomes the most important person in his family and he must put the care of her first. Of course, this applies equally to the woman. Because this could not apply to Adam and Eve, who had no parents, it is clear that Genesis 1 and 2 set out God's principles for marriage for all time.

2. The man was to "*hold fast*" to his wife. This does not refer to a sexual relationship but to the man and his wife being so close in thought, purpose and all they do, that they are inseparable, as if they are glued together. God created the woman to be a suitable helper for Adam. They were to be partners in life, caring for each other and working together for the Lord. A man and his future partner should understand what is really important to each other before they commit themselves to marriage.

3. The man and woman were to be "*one flesh*". This refers to sexual union (1 Corinthians 6:16) and comes last. Only after they were committed to each other for life, holding fast to each other, were they to have sexual relations. Eve was created from Adam's side – originally they had literally been "*one flesh*". Now in sexual union that closeness would be renewed. It would be a special way in which a man and his wife would feel absolutely together and united in a loving bond. It would show that their relationship should be so close that they would feel part of each other. This direct teaching from God is totally opposite to the casual way men and women have sex today, without really knowing their partners or without any commitment to a lifelong relationship.

In Genesis 1:28 God blessed Adam and Eve and told them to be "*fruitful and multiply*". A loving and secure marriage between two believers provides the best environment in which a child can grow up and learn to serve God (Malachi 2:15).

So right from the beginning, God set out His purpose for marriage. He wants a husband and his wife to live together, helping each other through life. He wants them to work together as spiritual partners in

Christian Marriage

His service and, if blessed with children, to bring them up to love and serve Him. Marriage is not a convenient way of getting a housekeeper free of charge, or for finding a man to look after you! There is much more to marriage than a man and his wife living together.

Marriage is the joining together of one man and one woman, for life (Matthew 19:4-6)

Christian Marriage

Just as God presided over the marriage service of Adam and Eve, so a Christian couple should be joined together in marriage in the presence of God. Their marriage vows (promises) should be made before God, as well as in front of human witnesses (family and friends). The vows should reflect God's ideals. God forbids anyone to break the marriage union that he has blessed: "*What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate*" (Matthew 19:6). 1 Corinthians 7:39 says, "*A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives*". Of course, when one member of the marriage dies, the remaining partner can remarry (Roman 7:2,3).

Finding a Husband or Wife

The Bible gives a clear command that should be obeyed when a follower of Christ chooses a marriage partner.

Baptized believers should marry baptized believers

The true purpose of marriage can only be achieved when both partners belong to the Lord. In order to live together as spiritual partners as "*heirs (together) ... of the grace of life*" (1 Peter 3:7), the husband and wife must share the same faith and love of God. Paul makes it very clear that a believer should not marry an unbeliever:

"Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? ... Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?" (2 Corinthians 6:14,15)

"A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 7:39)

An unbelieving partner can take us away from God, which is what happened to Solomon (1 Kings 11:1-11).

Sometimes it is difficult to find a partner who shares the same faith. Some people in this situation are able to stay single (Matthew 19:10-12) and there is nothing wrong with this (Jesus remained single). Others will want to find someone who is willing to learn the true Gospel, but should only marry them if they accept God's salvation and are baptized. The choice of marriage partner should be made a matter of earnest prayer.

The Marriage of Believers should represent Christ and the true Church

Just as baptism is a symbol of something greater (dying and rising with Christ), so marriage is also a symbol. The relationship between a husband and his wife should represent the relationship between the Lord Jesus and his church:

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.” (*Ephesians 5:25-33*)

The husband should love and care for his wife in the same way as the Lord Jesus loves and cares for true believers. Similarly, the wife should love, respect and obey her husband just as true believers should honour their Lord and Saviour. Verse 23 adds:

“For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour.”

This symbol helps us to understand the different roles of the husband and wife.

The Husband's role in Married Life

A caring Christian husband and a faithful Christian wife are a great blessing to each other and their family, as well as to those with whom they worship. The husband should show selfless love for his wife after Christ's example of love and care for his church (true believers).

Christian Marriage

The husband should be the head of his wife as the Lord Jesus is the head of the church. This does not mean that the husband is allowed to order his wife around – expecting everything to be done in answer to his commands and having his own way – that was not how Jesus behaved with his disciples. Although he was their Lord, the head of the body of disciples, at times he behaved as a servant to them to teach them the need for humility (Luke 22:27), and he considered the needs of others more important than his own. Peter gave this advice:

“Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honour to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.” (1 Peter 3:7)

Being head of the family means that the husband should give a positive lead, but he should discuss important decisions with his wife. Most of all, the husband should lead the family in worship and instruction, as Abraham did (Genesis 18:19). In this way a baptized husband should regard himself as the head over the family, responsible for their lives before God, and he should think of his home as if it were a little Christian church, where God is honoured.

In some countries the women in the family do most of the heavy work. Christian marriage is a partnership and the husband will be keen to share the work with his wife and family. He should show “honour to the woman as the weaker vessel” (1 Peter 3:7) and love her as much as he loves himself (Ephesians 5:28). This spiritual and practical partnership will be a joyful experience for the whole family. Working together and sharing tasks will provide an excellent example of true Christianity, encouraging others.

A Christian Wife

We have looked at the duties and responsibilities of the Christian husband, but the wife must also play her proper part. She should love and respect her husband in the same way as the church should love and respect the Lord Jesus. There is a delightful word picture of an “*excellent wife*” in Proverbs 31:10-31. She is someone her husband can trust absolutely, who “*does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life*” (verse 12). She works hard for herself and her family; she is kind and understanding, and “*fears the LORD*” (verse 30). The Bible has a number of examples of faithful wives who helped and supported their husbands, whilst letting them take the lead. Sarah respected Abraham and thought of him as her lord (1 Peter 3:1-6) and obeyed him.

The apostle Paul shows that because the husband represents Christ, and his wife represents Christ's true church, she should not take the leading role in marriage:

“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.”
(*Ephesians 5:22*)

Titus 2:4,5 contains Paul's instructions concerning young wives:

“train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive (*obedient*) to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.”

Since Christian family life is to be shared with God, mothers have a special part to play both in caring for the family, and in guiding and teaching the children the things of God. Of course, both parents have their part to play in bringing up their children in a godly way. Scripture says that parents should “train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

No Sex outside Marriage

Sexual union is an intimate act that allows husband and wife to express their love for one another in a very special way (1 Corinthians 7:3-5). It is also a blessing designed to bring children into a loving, caring family. God created this gift as a part of marriage and it should be kept pure and not spoiled by unfaithfulness (Hebrews 13:4). The proper and only place for sex is within marriage – sex should only take place between a husband and wife. When two people have sex together they become “*one flesh*”, so loose sex is wrong:

“Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, ‘The two will become one flesh.’” (*1 Corinthians 6:16*)

The Bible condemns all wrong use of sex. 1 Corinthians 6: 9,10,18 says:

“Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality... will inherit the kingdom of God Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.”

The Old Testament also warns about sexual immorality – for example, Proverbs 6:23-35, 7:4-27 and Deuteronomy 22. Believers are forgiven their past sins when they are baptized and begin a new

Christian Marriage

life. If we have been sexually immoral in the past, we too can be forgiven. Some of the believers in Corinth had sinned in these ways as Paul explained to them:

“And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified (*separated*), you were justified (*made right with God*) in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Corinthians 6:11)

Summary

1. Marriage is a relationship that God has provided. It is the joining together of one man and one woman for as long as they are both alive.
2. Sex is a blessing from God and should only take place between a man and his wife. Sex outside or before marriage is wrong.
3. A baptized believer should only marry another baptized believer.
4. The husband should love and care for his wife in the same way that the Lord Jesus loves and cares for true believers.
5. The wife should love, respect and obey her husband just as true believers should honour their Lord and Saviour.
6. The husband and wife should bring up their children to love and serve God. The husband must lead the family, especially in worshipping God.

Verse to learn:

“So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” (Matthew 19:6)

Passages to read:

Ephesians 5; Proverbs 31:10-31; 1 Timothy 3; Colossians 3:12-25

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FACING PROBLEMS IN MARRIAGE

Reading: Matthew 19

God's Purpose for Marriage

In the previous chapter we saw that God wants a believing husband and his believing wife to be spiritual partners, helping each other through to His kingdom, working together in His Name, and caring for each other in every part of life. This is the Divine ideal for marriage. It should reflect Christ's love for true believers and their desire to love and honour him. Their life together in Christ will show others what a blessing they enjoy, and so God will be glorified in all their ways.

The Divine ideal in Christian marriage is for two believers to live together to the glory of God

However, it is not always easy to reach this ideal. Due to circumstances in life difficulties do occur, and this chapter looks at some common ones. Your tutor may be able to give you individual guidance on marriage problems.

One Partner is converted after Marriage

Baptized believers should marry baptized believers (2 Corinthians 6:14, 1 Corinthians 7:39). But what about those who are already married when they learn the Gospel? Should they separate, or should they stay with their unbelieving partner? This was a common problem in the days of the apostles, when the Gospel spread quickly and many people believed and were baptized but often their partners remained unbelievers. What were they advised to do: break up and go their separate ways, or stay together and work out their problems?

Paul encouraged believers in this situation to remain married:

“To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him.” (1 Corinthians 7:12,13)

A married person has a responsibility to his (or her) partner and any children and, as a disciple of the Lord Jesus, should be more caring

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and considerate than ever. Every effort should be made to make the marriage work. However, if the unbelieving partner chooses to separate, the baptized partner must accept this:

“If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so.”
(1 Corinthians 7:13-15)

The apostle Peter wrote:

“Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives— when they see your respectful and pure conduct.” *(1 Peter 3:1,2)*

Peter was thinking about a believing wife married to an unbelieving husband, but his advice is equally important for a believing husband married to an unbelieving wife. By remaining together the baptized believer’s Christian living may eventually encourage the unbelieving partner to accept the Gospel.

Similarly, believers should not cut off other unbelieving members of their family, like parents or brothers and sisters. Believers have a real opportunity and responsibility to teach other family members and so spread the Christian truth.

| |
|--|
| The Bible teaches that everything possible should be done to keep a marriage together |
|--|

Infertility in one of the Partners

Sadly, some married couples cannot have children. This may be due to some medical problem. The situation can be very distressing, but believers must accept that God is in control of their lives and knows what is best as He prepares them for His kingdom (Romans 8:28). In some countries a man is expected to divorce a wife who cannot bear him children, but the true believer must not do this as the Bible teaches that marriage is for life. The marriage has not failed if a couple cannot have children. God considers them to be man and wife and they should work together in His Name.

On the other hand, people are sometimes encouraged to have many children even though they cannot afford to feed and clothe them. It is a great responsibility to have children and bring them up properly. So, as in everything else in family life, the husband and wife should

agree together on a planned family, taking into consideration their family circumstances.

Difficulties Between Husband and Wife

Abigail is an Old Testament example of a faithful wife who had a difficult marriage. One of her servants described her husband, Nabal, in this way:

“... he is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him.”
(1 Samuel 25:17)

Despite this Abigail was a lovely woman of great faith who tried to do good and stayed with her husband. Read 1 Samuel 25 to see how God blessed her.

Even when two Christians are married there can be great unhappiness. This is because we all have human nature and find it easy to sin, and so we can say and do unhelpful things, even to our husband or wife. We can be selfish and only see things our way. We can be critical of our partner, expecting a lot from them when we ourselves contribute very little to the marriage. It is always much easier to see another person's faults rather than our own (Matthew 7:1-5).

If a Christian marriage becomes less and less like the ideal of Christ and his church, the couple need to discuss their problems together and pray about them. A marriage can fail because one or both of the partners fail to put God in the centre of their lives. They therefore need to be honest with themselves and open with each other in their discussions, and forgive any wrongs. A baptized believer cannot expect God to forgive his own sins if he is not prepared to forgive his partner's failings. Disciples of Christ must put every effort into making their marriage work, as this is what God wants. Divorce is not an easy way out – it is hated by God. Paul wrote:

“... the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.” (1 Corinthians 7:10,11)

Unfaithfulness in Marriage

The only exception to the rule that marriage between believers must always be for life may occur when one of the partners is sexually unfaithful. Jesus was once asked what he thought of the Jewish practice that had developed of granting easy divorce (the authorities simply issued a certificate and the marriage was ended). Jesus said,

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“Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh.” (*Matthew 19:4-6*)

Jesus was quoting from Genesis chapters 1 and 2, referring to the first ever marriage. He showed that God regards marriage as binding, for he added, “*What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate*”. Jesus said that divorce is forbidden: the only possible exception is when the marriage is broken by a sexual act outside marriage:

“And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” (*Matthew 19: 9*)

See also Matthew 5:32. The marriage of Christian believers is therefore for life.

The marriage is put under great strain if one partner has sex with someone else, but the couple should work together to save it. We should be prepared to forgive the wrong our marriage partner has done against us if we want God to forgive us when we sin against Him. However, if an unfaithful partner cannot be won back, or the couple separate or there is a divorce, every care should be taken to limit the harm done to other members of the family.

Polygamy

Polygamy was sometimes practised in Bible times. King David had several wives. King Solomon had hundreds of wives and concubines. But the Divine ideal was always clear: God meant one man and one woman to live together as man and wife.

Polygamy caused difficulties and unhappiness in the families of several Old Testament people. The jealousy between Jacob’s two wives created problems in the family. Jesus made quite clear God’s intention from beginning:

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” (*Matthew 19:5*)

Nobody should therefore take more than one wife. However, some husbands may already have more than one wife when they learn the Gospel. What should they do – keep one wife and separate from the others, or continue as they are?

We have already learned that a baptized believer has a greater responsibility than ever to his (or her) family. Therefore, our advice is that anyone with several wives should still regard himself as responsible for them all. He should continue to be a good husband and a caring father to all his children. The Christadelphian Bible Mission advises that a baptized believer with more than one wife should not become an 'elder' of a Christadelphian ecclesia, because his situation does not follow the advice of the Lord Jesus. Paul says:

“Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach.” (*1 Timothy 3:2*)

Finding a Husband or Wife

We have learned that marriage is a very special and solemn gift from God; we have also considered some of the difficulties that arise in marriage. It is clear that the choice of a marriage partner should be a matter of earnest prayer. Abraham went to a great deal of effort to find a suitable wife for his son, Isaac, and we need to take the same care and preparation, keeping in mind God's purpose for marriage and the symbol of Christ and his church.

True believers should only marry someone who shares the same faith. However, sometimes it is very difficult to find a suitable husband or wife. It is very natural to want a beautiful wife or a handsome husband, but what really matters is the spiritual quality of the person (Proverbs 31:30). God looks upon the heart, not on the outward appearance (1 Samuel 16:7), and so should we. True marriage is a joining together of minds, and the couple should get to know each other thoroughly and form a clear understanding of what is really important to them before deciding to marry. This is the purpose of courtship. Some people who have rushed into marriage have spent many years regretting the decision they made, especially if they have married an unbeliever. The Bible very bluntly warns of the consequences of making the wrong choice (Proverbs 21:9,19).

The Wedding Ceremony

In Chapter 32 we learned that a believing couple should be joined together in the presence of God. Their marriage vows (promises) should be made before God as well as in front of human witnesses (family and friends). A simple wedding service is all that is necessary – the building used and the food provided need not be expensive. What is important is that the couple seek God's blessing on their marriage and promise to live together before God for the rest of their lives. Marriage vows are serious and must not be taken lightly. Where the laws of the country provide for this, it is a good idea to register

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the marriage with the State and obtain a certificate, so that the marriage is properly recognised by all. This also emphasises the fact that marriage is for life.

Many people want to be married in a church but do not care about the beliefs of the person taking the service. Baptized believers will not want to go to another church to be married by someone who does not understand true Bible teaching.

Some couples believe that their wedding needs to be very expensive but cannot afford it and so they live together, intending to marry later. But often their marriage does not happen. Their children are then born outside marriage, with all the insecurity this involves.

Sometimes there is a high 'bride price' and it may take some time for a young man to save enough money to pay for the woman he loves. If the price is high, the man must wait until he has enough money. Until they marry, the partners should not have sexual intercourse. Of course, Christian parents will encourage the young couple to start their lives together in the Lord without too many difficulties like these.

Disciples of Christ should marry before living together. Sex before marriage is a sin. The Bible says: "Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous" (Hebrews 13:4).

A Blessing from God

Christian marriage is a great blessing from God – one to be enjoyed together throughout a happy life. However, just because a husband and wife are both disciples of the Lord Jesus does not mean that their life together will be trouble free. Working through problems together in marriage will strengthen the bond and bring great happiness and contentment. Family life, when it is properly understood and lived, is a great joy, so much so that the return of Christ Jesus, when he comes to give immortality to true believers, is compared in Scripture to the start of Christian married life:

"Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb (*Christ*) has come, and his Bride (*his church of true believers*) has made herself ready." (*Revelation 19:7*)

Summary

1. Believers who are already married when they learn the Gospel must try to remain with their unbelieving partners and show them the way of God.
2. For those who marry, the ideal is one man for one woman. If a man already has more than one wife when he is baptized, then he should continue to be a good husband to his wives and a caring father to all his children. He should not take any more wives.
3. Marriage should be legal and the vows (promises) made in God's presence. Marriage vows are serious and must not be taken lightly.

Verses to learn:

“Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.” (*Hebrews 13:4*)

Passages to read:

Genesis 24; Nehemiah 13:23-27; Psalm 128; 1 Timothy 2

Questions on Chapters 32&33 - Christian Marriage and Facing Problems in Marriage

32/33A.

- a) Do all Christians have to marry?
- b) Should a believer marry an unbeliever?
- c) If we have committed adultery, can we be forgiven and be baptized?
- d) If we have decided to marry someone, can we have sex with them before the marriage takes place?
- e) Should marriage last for life?
- f) Must married couples have children?
- g) Does God hate divorce?
- h) If a believer is married to an unbeliever, is it better to stay married (rather than leave the unbeliever)?
- i) Does a partner who has committed adultery have to be divorced?
- j) Should a believer take a second wife while the first is still alive?
- k) Should marriage between partners be broken because they have stopped loving each other?
- l) Is a person free to marry someone else if his or her partner has died?

32/33B.

Marriage is a relationship God has provided.

- a) Why did God make Eve?
- b) How did God form Eve?
- c) What does Genesis 2:24 teach us about marriage?

32/33C.

Read 2 Corinthians 6:14, 15.

Why is it not sensible for a believer to marry (or be yoked to) an unbeliever?

32/33D.

What does 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 teach?

32/33E.

In what ways should a husband lead a family?

32/33F.

Read Ephesians 5:22-33. Christian marriage should be a symbol of the relationship between Christ and his church (ecclesia).

a) What does this teach about the responsibility of a husband towards his wife?

b) What does it teach about the way a wife should behave towards her husband?

32/33G.

What advice is given to wives with unbelieving husbands in 1 Peter 3:1, 2?

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OUR DUTY TO THE STATE

Reading: 1 Peter 2

Note: The State is the country in which we live, with its rulers or government, and its laws. Today true disciples of Christ live in many countries which have different laws, some of them opposed to God's ways. This chapter considers the Christian's duty to the State, and particularly whether Christians should take part in politics or fight for their country. Chapters 9 and 13 will help with parts of this lesson.

God's People in Old Testament Times

About 3,500 years ago, just after they had left Egypt, God gathered together the people of Israel at Mount Sinai to make a covenant (or agreement) with them. He was to be their God and they were to be His nation. The Law that God gave them contained rules for worship and for daily living. There was no conflict (disagreement) between their laws and their beliefs since God had provided both.

Later, God chose kings to reign over the people of Israel for Him. This was God's kingdom on earth, and the king's army was God's army. The king was there to do what God commanded. But the people of Israel ignored God's law and followed the wicked ways of other nations and so God brought His kingdom on earth to an end. First the nation of Assyria came against the northern kingdom of Israel and took the people captive and then scattered them, then the Babylonians took captive the southern kingdom of Judah. So God's people were then living in countries where false gods were worshipped and where some of the laws were opposed to God's ways.

The behaviour of God-fearing Jews in these difficult circumstances shows us how we should live in countries with laws and practices that conflict with God's ways.

Should they obey God or the Foreign Ruler?

Daniel and his friends were some of those taken captive to Babylon by king Nebuchadnezzar when the southern kingdom of Judah was coming to an end. Sometimes they had to choose between obeying God's laws or those of the Babylonians. The following examples are useful:

| Reference | The Problem | What Daniel and/or his friends did | What Happened in the End |
|------------------|---|--|---|
| Daniel 1:8-16 | Daniel and his friends were given meat that had probably been sacrificed to idols. They did not want to eat it, but knew that this would not please the king. | They did not eat the meat and asked for vegetables instead. | God looked after them and they looked healthier than the others. |
| Daniel 3 | Nebuchadnezzar commanded the people to fall down and worship a golden statue he had set up. | Daniel's three friends refused to worship anything other than God. | They were thrown into a fiery furnace, but God delivered them and they were unharmed. |
| Daniel 6 | Daniel's enemies wanted to kill Daniel, so they persuaded the new king, Darius, to only allow prayers to himself. | Daniel continued to pray to God with his windows wide open. | He was thrown into a den of lions, but God's angel protected him. |

These examples teach us:

- to put God first in our lives
- that God alone is to be worshipped
- to keep to our principles and always try to do what God wants
- to trust God.

Daniel and his friends were among the best of the king's servants and became important government officials. They were not trouble makers, looking for the opportunity to break the king's laws. It was

Our Duty to the State

only when the law of the land conflicted (did not agree) with God's law that they refused to obey the king.

This is an important principle for all who follow the Lord Jesus. They must keep the laws of the State that agree with the laws of God (as many do). Daniel's enemies could find nothing wrong with his behaviour (Daniel 6:4, 5). This should also be true of us.

Christians must obey the laws of the State (their country),
unless these laws disagree with the laws of God.

God's People Today

God counts all true believers as His people and today they consist of Jewish and Gentile believers. Just as Israel in Old Testament times were God's special people and were called "*a holy nation*", so baptized believers are now described in the same way. This can be seen by comparing the Old and New Testament passages below. Even though disciples of Christ live in many different countries, the Bible describes them as a special nation, God's people.

| The People of Israel (‘Natural Israel’) | God's people today (‘Spiritual Israel’) |
|--|---|
| Exodus 19:5,6: “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” | 1 Peter 2:9,10: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” |

Believers today who are now part of God's holy nation are also part of God's future kingdom and are waiting for their King to return to Jerusalem. So while they wait they must do nothing which will damage their relationship with God: God must be first in all that they do. Then at his coming Christ Jesus will call them together to serve and work with him.

The Christian's Attitude towards the Authorities of his Country

Jesus lived in Israel at a time when the nation was under Roman rule, and by their law he suffered and died. But Jesus was never a political trouble-maker, even though many of the Jews hoped he would free them from the Romans. When Jesus was asked whether the Jews should pay taxes to the Romans, whom they hated, he laid down important principles using a coin with the image of the Roman Emperor, Caesar:

“Render (*give*) to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.” (*Matthew 22:21*)

This means that we should pay our taxes as the law requires (which Paul makes equally clear in *Romans 13:7*). It also shows that we should respect and obey our rulers as well as God.

Not only did Jesus accept Roman rule but he also did not try to replace the Jewish religious leaders, who were misusing their position in the temple and leading the people astray. The religious leaders tried to stop Jesus teaching and healing, but even when he was obviously annoying them and his life was in danger, Jesus carried on with his work of salvation. He knew that this was God's work, and was most important.

This faithful example of Jesus was followed by the apostles. They too were honest, law-abiding people who did not become involved in the politics of the country in which they lived. They did not try to change the world through politics. When conflict occasionally came, from the Jewish or Roman authorities, they put God first and obeyed His laws. So when the apostles were told to stop preaching the good news of salvation, they replied, “*We must obey God rather than men*” (*Acts 5:29*). See also *Acts 4:17-20*.

Paul tells us that we should be obedient to our rulers because all authorities are put in place by God (although most do not realise it). Note that Paul wrote these words to believers who lived in a harsh society, where many were slaves and treated unjustly:

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement.” (*Romans 13:1, 2*)

So if we disobey the laws of our country, we are really disobeying God. In *1 Timothy 2:1, 2* Paul encouraged believers to pray for those in authority in their country:

Our Duty to the State

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.”

The laws of a country often ensure that it is a safe place in which to live. There is usually no conflict between a Christian’s duties to the State and to God, and so when he obeys the State, he is also obeying God. For example, murder is wrong in both the laws of the State and God’s laws. However, the State sometimes expects its citizens to do things which conflict with Bible teaching, such as going to war. Disciples of Christ must then decide whether to obey God or the State. We have the apostle Peter’s example to follow: “*We must obey God rather than men*” (Acts 5:29).

There are some occupations and interests that disciples should avoid. These include making destructive weapons or explosives, and work which may require the use of force (e.g. armed forces or police). Also, believers should avoid taking an oath of allegiance. This is because the Lord Jesus is the leader of all true believers and our allegiance (loyalty) should only be to him. People who realise that their occupation is not suitable for a Christian should pray for help and guidance. God is able to help.

The Christian and Politics

Although God is working out His purpose on this earth (Daniel 4:32), it is not clear how He will do this, nor which people and nations He will use.

Since Christians do not know which political party God wants in control of their country, they leave elections in God’s hands and do not vote. They will not become involved in politics as this could involve them in making decisions against God’s will. It is therefore wrong to be involved in human government, in either local or national politics, because God’s people belong to His order of things and already have a King, the Lord Jesus Christ. Since true Christians have chosen to follow Christ, how can they vote for a political party that is not dedicated to serving Christ? Believers should not become involved in politics to make the world a better place because human leaders are unable to do this. Believers know that the Lord Jesus will do this when he returns. So the true Christian will stay outside politics, either actively or as a voter, using his time to tell others about God’s coming kingdom.

The need to keep separate from politics and from unsuitable occupations is nothing to do with the politics and practices of any particular State. The same principles apply to God’s servants

everywhere. They must now live under *“the law of Christ”* (1 Corinthians 9:21) and separate themselves from human government and politics:

“Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you.” (2 Corinthians 6:17)

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” (Romans 12:2)

The Christian and War

In Old Testament times God expected the people of Israel to destroy their enemies living in the land of Canaan so they would not be tempted to follow their evil ways (Exodus 23:31-33). God had instructed them to fight, so it was their duty to obey.

But Jesus, who lived when God’s kingdom no longer existed on earth, said,

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” (Matthew 5:43, 44)

The New Testament contains other similar messages:

“Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also ... Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them If possible ... live peaceably with all ... Never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God ... If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” (Matthew 5:39, Romans 12:14,18-20)

When Jesus was being arrested he told Peter to put his sword away and added, *“all who take the sword will perish by the sword”* (Matthew 26:52). Jesus explained to Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, that although he was a king, his kingdom had not yet come:

“My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” (John 18:36)

Jesus said that because his kingdom did not exist on the earth at that time, his servants did not fight. His kingdom still has not come, so true believers cannot be involved in fighting for their country. If

Our Duty to the State

they did, Christians from one country might find themselves fighting against and even killing their brothers in Christ from another country. By refusing to fight Jesus was not being a pacifist or a coward – he showed enormous courage in facing death on the cross to make it possible for our sins to be forgiven. Whilst God’s people in Old Testament times clearly knew which battles God wanted them to fight, Christians today do not know how God is working out His purpose with the nations of the world. If they fight for their country they may be fighting against God’s purpose. True believers therefore ask to be excused from military service as it is against their conscience.

Summary

Believers should:

1. obey the laws of the country except when they conflict with God’s laws
2. avoid any job, activity or involvement that might lead them into conflict between God's laws and man's laws.

Verses to learn:

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.” (1 Peter 2:9-11)

Passages to read:

Daniel chapters 3 & 6; Matthew 22:15-22; Romans 13; 1 Peter 2:13-17

Questions on Chapter 34 – Our Duty to the State

- 34A. Suggest some occupations (jobs) which believers should avoid.
- 34B. Why do true believers not vote nor become involved in politics?
- 34C. What did Jesus mean in John 18:36?
- 34D. Christians should always obey the laws of their country. What is the only possible reason for disobeying?
- 34E. Make a list of some of the lessons 1 Peter 2:11-17 teaches us.
- 34F. What do we learn from the example of Daniel and friends in Daniel 1, 3 and 6?
- 34G. What did Jesus teach in Matthew 22:21?

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PRAYER

Reading: Psalm 107

The Privilege of Prayer

The Almighty God of heaven and earth speaks to us through the Bible. Prayer is the way in which we can speak to Him. It is an important part of a believer's personal relationship with Him. To be able to pray to God in heaven is a great privilege that He has given to those who are humble and recognise His greatness:

“Thus says the LORD: ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool... But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.’”
(Isaiah 66:1, 2)

We must speak to God with the greatest respect at all times.

Why do we need to Pray?

God knows everything about us. He sees all that we do and knows all that we think (Psalm 139:1-4). We do not need to tell Him anything about ourselves. Jesus said to his disciples, “... *your Father knows what you need before you ask him*” (Matthew 6:8). But God does want us to pray to Him, for Jesus continues by teaching his disciples how to pray.

Prayer helps us to see outside our own lives and consider our Maker. It raises our thoughts to a more spiritual level and helps us to see ourselves as God sees us. Prayer is part of our worship, and it gives us the opportunity to think things through in the presence of a God who loves us and wants what is best for us. Thinking and praying about the needs of other people helps us to appreciate our own blessings. So prayer is for our benefit, as well as to praise and thank the Creator for His love. One of the main reasons for prayer is that God wants people to trust and rely on Him and not on themselves, or on other people.

What should we Pray about?

Matthew 6 records the model prayer that Jesus gave his disciples. He did not intend people to use these exact words every time they prayed, but provided them as a guide. Prayer should be sincere but can become meaningless with repetition (Matthew 6:7).

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.” (*Matthew 6:9-13, including footnote*)

The prayer starts by giving honour and praise to God. We need to remember God’s greatness.

Jesus showed that we should pray for God’s kingdom to be restored on this earth and for His will to be done. We should eagerly look forward to the coming kingdom when people will do God’s will. But we know that we will only be part of the future kingdom if we try to accept God’s will in our lives now.

Our needs should come after we have praised God and reminded ourselves of His purpose. We should be aware that “*our daily bread*” refers to our spiritual food from the Bible, as well as what we eat. We need to ask for help in understanding God’s Word, the Bible, as the Psalmist did (Psalm 119:125).

This prayer reminds us that those who want forgiveness must show forgiveness to others. (But God will only forgive sins in the way He has appointed, that is, through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, and this requires the believer to be baptized first. After baptism, God will only forgive believers if they are prepared to forgive others.) The prayer Jesus gave his disciples also warns about the dangers of temptation.

There are other things we can include in our prayers. The apostle Paul says:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” (*Philippians 4:6*)

For example, before setting out on a journey, we should pray for God’s angels to keep us safe. Before he chose his twelve disciples, Jesus spent all night in prayer (Luke 6:12, 13). So we should take the important decisions of our life to God in prayer. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed intensely to God for strength and he was comforted by an angel. We should place our worries, our joys and our sadness before God in prayer. Every part of our life will benefit from prayer.

How should we Pray?

It is important to realise that we cannot expect God to hear our prayers if we do not try and follow Him. James 5:16 tells us that *“The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working”*. We have to be right with God if we want Him to hear our prayers. Proverbs 28:9 explains that God will not hear the prayers of those who ignore His Word:

“If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.”

There was an occasion when God would not hear the prayers of Israel because of their wickedness:

“When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.” (*Isaiah 1:15*)

We need to learn to pray in the right way.

1. We should pray in accordance with God’s will – We must not pray in a demanding way, expecting God to provide whatever we ask. In Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, *“not my will, but yours, be done”* (Luke 22:42). This was the principle of his life, and we should pray in the same way. We learn about God’s will by studying His Word. This will help us to stop praying for things that God will not want us to have. The apostle John wrote: *“And this is the confidence that we have towards him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us”* (1 John 5:14).

2. We should ask in faith – We must believe that God hears our prayers and that He has the power to answer them. James 1:5,6 says:

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.”

However, this does not mean that God will give us everything we ask for. God does not take away all our problems in this life but He offers us a place in His kingdom. If we pray in the right way then God will hear us and He will answer in ways that help us to grow spiritually and develop more Christ-like characters, which will prepare us for that kingdom. God knows what is best for us and may not always give us what we ask for. Sometimes He grants our request after making us wait. Isaac prayed but had to wait a long time for his sons to be born (Genesis 25:20-26). Sometimes God disciplines us by the

circumstances of life. But we can still ask Him to help us accept these problems and learn from them.

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” (*Romans 8:28*)

God loves and cares for those who sincerely seek Him and we must believe that whatever happens to us now is because God is working in our lives for our good. We should therefore ask in faith, praying for God’s will to be done and not ours, knowing that only God can truly help us in our lives. Always, “*the eyes of the LORD are towards the righteous, and his ears towards their cry*” (Psalm 34:15).

God can direct believers through circumstances He has controlled. Sometimes it is only by looking back at our lives that we see how God has answered our prayers.

3. The right attitude – We need to be humble when we approach God in prayer, recognising His greatness and how small we are before Him. We need to be totally honest with ourselves, with a deep awareness of our sins and our need to be forgiven by Him. Jesus told the parable about the prayers of a tax collector and a Pharisee. The despised tax collector bowed his head and prayed, “*God, be merciful to me, a sinner!*” (Luke 18:13). Jesus said that such a man would be heard by God because he humbled himself, unlike the Pharisee who was very proud of his own efforts at living a good life. His prayer was not acceptable. Psalm 138:6 shows that God is not interested in us when we are proud:

“For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar.”

Some people think that they will enjoy their lives without God, but turn to Him just before they die. But God knows their thoughts and motives, and knows that they are not truly repenting. Anyway their plan will be ruined if they die suddenly or remain alive until Christ returns. God cannot be fooled!

The Bible is full of prayers, like the book of Psalms where there are 150 to learn from, or the prayers of Jesus and his followers. If we read the Scriptures daily we will develop a mind pleasing to God. It will shape the way we think and therefore the way we talk to God. We will gradually realise that we need to trust Him completely and not rely on our own ideas and actions.

When should we Pray?

We can pray at any time and in any situation, as often as we wish, whether we are at home or travelling or at work. Jesus liked to go

Prayer

somewhere quiet on his own. But we can also pray in the middle of an emergency, as Nehemiah did (Nehemiah 2:4). Many people find it helpful to have regular times for personal prayer, often to start and end the day (Psalm 92:2). The writer of Psalm 55:17 and Daniel both prayed three times a day (Daniel 6:10). Paul said, “*pray without ceasing*” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). This does not mean that we have to speak to God every minute of the day, but means that every part of our life should be lived prayerfully, talking everything through with God.

Jesus as High Priest and Mediator

When the tabernacle was built in the wilderness as a place of worship, the glory of God shone over the Ark of the Covenant. No one was allowed to enter into the presence of God except the High Priest on one day each year, on the Day of Atonement. On that day he confessed before God all the sins of the nation of Israel. He was the mediator (‘go-between’) for the nation in their approach to God and this continued for many generations. This principle of someone who was a go-between for God and His people pointed forward to the work of the Lord Jesus as mediator for his followers. By his death he has opened up a “*new and living way*” to God (Hebrews 10:20).

God is holy and righteous, so sinful man cannot directly approach Him. But now that the Lord Jesus Christ has opened up the way for those who have been baptized to come to God, they can seek forgiveness knowing that “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (1 John 1:9). Baptized believers must therefore pray to God through the Lord Jesus because he presents our prayers to God. This is why we start (or end) our prayers with a phrase such as “through Jesus Christ our Lord”, or “in Jesus’ name”. The Lord Jesus had human nature like us and so he understands us and can “*sympathize with our weaknesses*” (Hebrews 4:15).

The risen Lord is at the right hand of the Father, and is now a mediator – or intercessor – for those who pray to God through him:

“... Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding (*mediating*) for us.” (*Romans 8:34*)

The Lord Jesus Christ does more than simply pass on our prayers to God. Because of his love for us, and because of the authority which he has been given (Matthew 28:18), he is concerned to bring our needs and desires to the Father: “*He (Jesus) is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession (plead) for them*” (Hebrews 7:25).

Remember what he promised to his disciples before he died, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you”* (John 16:23). The Lord Jesus Christ is active on behalf of his followers, to help them bring their prayers to God; and works in the lives of believers in answer to their prayers.

“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”
(Romans 8:32)

Jesus Christ is the High Priest for baptized believers.

He is the mediator or intercessor who presents the prayers of believers to God and pleads with Him for the forgiveness of their sins.

This special relationship with God through His Son is something for you to look forward to with joy if, in the mercy of God, you are baptized. At baptism, your sins will be forgiven – God will blot them out for ever. After that He will forgive your daily sins, if you are truly sorry for them and seek forgiveness.

Does God hear the Prayers of Unbaptized People today?

Although without baptism into Christ there is no forgiveness of sins, it is important to understand that God does hear the prayer of those seeking to know Him and understand His ways. For example, God heard the prayers of Cornelius and Lydia before they were baptized (Acts 10:1-6; 16:13,14). He will also be pleased when people remember to thank Him for all His blessings and want Him to guide them.

But people who refuse to accept God’s offer of salvation cannot expect God to hear them. Their sins can only be forgiven by associating themselves with the death of Jesus by baptism. This is the way God has set up and no-one can argue with God about the way He has chosen to be gracious. God is concerned for all His creatures and will hear every sincere prayer, though He may not answer it straight away, or He may respond in a way that is not expected.

Summary

1. God will hear the prayers of all who are humble and sincere.
2. We must learn to pray for the right things in the right way.
3. After we are baptized we may pray through Jesus Christ to have our sins forgiven.
4. Our prayers should include:
 - praise and honour to God and the Lord Jesus Christ
 - pleading for the Lord Jesus to return soon to restore God's kingdom
 - asking for help in reading the Bible, serving God and preaching His Word
 - confessing our sins before God
 - thanks to God for the blessings we receive each day
 - asking for God's help for those we know that are in need
 - asking God to look after our natural families and help them to come to Him.

Verse to learn:

“do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” (*Philippians 4:6*)

Passages to read:

Acts 10; Psalms 51,102; Luke 18:1-14; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 4:14, 9:24

Questions on Chapter 35 – Prayer

- 35A. What should be our attitude if we want God to hear our prayers?
- 35B. What future event should we pray for?
- 35C. Make a list of other things we should include in our prayers.
- 35D. God does not always answer our prayers immediately, nor does He always give us what we ask for.
- a) Why?
 - b) What does this teach us about our prayers?
- 35E. What is a mediator?
- 35F. Hebrews 4:14-16 explains why the Lord Jesus is a good High Priest. What does it say?
- 35G. Hebrews 10:1-4 discusses the regular animal sacrifices made under the Law of Moses. Why is Christ's sacrifice better?
- 35H. a) Read 2 Samuel 11:1-17. Explain briefly how David sinned.
- b) Psalm 51 was written by David after his sin. What does it show us?
 - c) How can you have your sins forgiven?
 - d) Do believers sin after being baptized? If so, how can their sins be forgiven?

36

LIVING A NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

Reading: Ephesians 4

A New Beginning

At baptism a new spiritual life begins. Our old way of life ends when we are buried “*with him (Christ) by baptism into death*”. Then, as “*Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father*”, we too rise from the water to begin a new life in Christ (Romans 6:4). At our baptism we promise God that we will change our way of life to serve Him. It is a decision to commit ourselves to Him for the rest of our lives. This huge change to our way of life requires effort and determination and is only possible with God’s help. But the change does not take place all at once and we will often fail. When we ask for forgiveness, God will hear us for Jesus’ sake:

“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (*Hebrews 4:16*)

A New Way of Thinking

In Chapter 27 we learned that God is pure and righteous and so He is totally separate from the thinking, desires, ambitions and ways of all men and women. Therefore, when we commit ourselves to God, He asks us to separate ourselves from the ways of the world and commit ourselves to His ways and principles. Thus the new way of life needs a new way of thinking:

“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” (*Colossians 3:1-5*)

In Galatians 5:16-24 Paul again shows how our thinking has to change. ‘Flesh’ stands for our sinful thoughts and ‘Spirit’ for Godly thoughts. He shows how they are opposites:

“... the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.”

| Galatians 5:19-21: | Galatians 5:22,23 |
|---|--|
| <p>The works of the flesh are “... sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”</p> | <p>The fruit of the spirit is: “... love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”</p> |

This shows clearly that there will be a continual struggle in our spiritual lives because “*the fruit of the Spirit*” (godliness) is very different from “*the works of the flesh*” (the ways of the world).

The apostle Paul also likens the change to taking off old clothes and putting on new ones. He tells us in Ephesians 4:22,24 to “put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires ... and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness”.

The following table shows the old self we should take off and the new self we should put on.

| Ephesians 4:25 – 5:21 | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Things we should ‘put off’ | Things we should ‘put on’ |
| Put away falsehood (lying). | Speak the truth. |
| Let the thief no longer steal. | Do honest work and so have something to share with anyone in need. |

Living a New Life in Christ

| | |
|---|--|
| Let no corrupt talk come out of your mouths. | Speak what is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. |
| Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. | Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. |
| Sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. | Be imitators of God and walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself for us. |
| Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking ... | ... instead let there be thanksgiving. |
| Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness. | Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true) and try to do what is pleasing to the Lord. |
| Do not be foolish and live unwisely. | Make the best use of time, understanding what the will of the Lord is. |
| Do not get drunk with wine. | Be filled with the things of the Spirit, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart. |

God's Will or our Will?

It is easy to worship God on Sunday but then ignore Him on other days. This is unacceptable. Our worship will only be sincere if we try to serve God all the time. Those in Christ will behave very differently from people in the world around them. Understanding the Bible is of no value unless we practise what it teaches us.

In Matthew 7:15-23 Jesus says that a diseased tree cannot produce good fruit nor can a thorn bush produce grapes. By this he meant

that people who are inwardly full of evil cannot show true Christian qualities. They will be rejected by the Lord:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” (*Matthew 7:21*)

Jesus chose to do his Father’s will. It was hard. Those who choose to do God’s will are promised a place in His heavenly kingdom when it is established on earth.

There may be times when we do not know whether it is right to do something. We may pray about it, but still not be sure because the Bible does not seem to tell us. To help us decide we should ask ourselves if Jesus would do it, if he were on earth today. If Jesus would not do it, then neither should his followers.

Belonging to a Worldwide Family

By God’s grace we become His sons and daughters at our baptism (2 Corinthians 6:18). It is an amazing thing that the Almighty God wants such a close relationship with us. But we will only continue to have this fellowship with God and the Lord Jesus if we “*walk in the light*”, avoiding the darkness of sin (1 John 1:6,7).

Christadelphians have a worldwide fellowship. They all accept Jesus Christ as their Head and the Bible as their guide and only authority. This is why it is important to read it regularly, as we will discuss further in the next chapter. Prayer, collectively and individually, is also essential.

Jesus knew that his followers would easily forget how much he did by dying for them. At the last meal he shared with his disciples (the Last Supper), he told them how to remember his death (Luke 22:14-20). The bread and the wine are symbols to remind baptized followers of how Jesus gave his life for them, the bread representing his body, and the wine his blood. Disciples of Christ are commanded to remember his death regularly through these symbols. Christadelphians meet once a week to do this.

Loving and Serving one Another

At the Last Supper, Jesus “laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him” (John 13:4,5).

The washing of feet was a servant’s work yet that is what Jesus did. Afterwards he said,

Living a New Life in Christ

“I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.” (*John 13:15*)

He served his disciples with love and humility, and we must serve each other. Then we shall be the type of people that God wants in His kingdom:

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” (*Matthew 5:5*)

Jesus said to his disciples before his death – and he still says it to true believers today,

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” (*John 15:12*)

He loved us so much that he suffered a very painful and shameful death for us. He laid down his life for us, and the apostle John says, “*we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers*” (1 John 3:16). It is a huge challenge to love others as Jesus has loved us!

Often we know how we should behave towards each other, but we find it very hard to do so. Our old self takes a long time to die! Some of us are proud, some quick-tempered; others are moody and easily irritated; all of us have our faults. These are things we have to fight against, as we try to show to others the love that Jesus has shown to us. There is a picture of that Christian love in 1 Corinthians 13. Read it for yourself. Here are verses 4-7 of the chapter:

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

Loving our Neighbour and our Enemies

Today many people demand their rights, and those who stand up for themselves are admired. Most people want to get the best for themselves, even if it means others have to suffer. But Christians should try to help others, even if they suffer in doing so.

A lawyer once came to Jesus, and asked him which was the greatest commandment. Jesus said to him,

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” (*Matthew 22:37-39*)

Read the story Jesus told about a good neighbour in Luke 10:30-37. If anyone is in need, we should help him, even if he is our enemy. We are not to stop and think whether we like him or not, or whether he really deserves our help. Jesus also said,

“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” (*Matthew 7:12*)

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” (*Matthew 5:43,44*)

The greatest thing we can do for others is to tell them the good news of the Kingdom of God. As God has invited us to keep His ways and to share the joys of His kingdom, so we will want to invite others to share these things.

Christian Behaviour and our Money, Health and Time

Jesus warned:

“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” (*Matthew 6:24*)

Paul showed that we should be content with what we have (1 Timothy 6:6-10). True followers of the Lord Jesus will not therefore gamble (1 Timothy 6:17) or take bribes (Exodus 23:8). Money and possessions are given to us by God (1 Chronicles 29:14-16) and we should not abuse them. We should use them to live sensibly and to serve God.

Similarly our health and strength are God-given, so those in Christ should not be involved in activities which will damage their health, or affect the lives of their loved ones. So, for example, they will avoid smoking, drinking alcohol to excess, and drug abuse. Those already involved with any of these will know how hard it can be to give them up, but with great determination and help from the Lord Jesus it can be achieved.

Our time is also God-given and so should be used sensibly (Ephesians 5:16). Paul says:

“He (*Christ*) died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.” (*2 Corinthians 5:15*)

See also Romans 14:7,8 and 1 Peter 4:1-9.

Help from the Lord Jesus

The new life is a challenge but the Lord Jesus is our guide through life as well as being our Saviour through whom our sins are forgiven. He will help us on the way and we will never be left to struggle alone. He will present the prayers of true disciples to God. In this way the Lord Jesus will share our life, with all its joys and sorrows, and help to prepare us to live with him in God's kingdom.

Summary

Living the new life in Christ means:

1. reading God's Word every day
2. praying to God and praising Him and His Son
3. remembering the death of Jesus through bread and wine
4. following the example of Jesus so that we:-
 - love our brothers and sisters in Christ
 - are considerate to other people and help them whenever we can, particularly by preaching the Gospel
 - do not take part in the ungodly activities of the world
 - above all else, love God with all our being.

A verse to learn:

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

(2 Corinthians 5:17)

Passages to read:

Luke 10:30-37; Luke 22:14-20; Romans 6; 1 Corinthians 13; 1 Corinthians 11:23-28

Questions on Chapter 36 – Living the New Life in Christ

- 36A. Use 1 Corinthians 13 to give examples of how we can show Christian love in everyday living.
- 36B. a) What did Jesus do for his disciples (recorded in John 13)?
b) What sort of person normally did this job?
c) State two lessons we can learn from this incident.
- 36C. What are the lessons for us today from the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)?
- 36D. Why is preaching to unbelievers the most important way they can be helped?
- 36E. Read Luke 9:23-26.
a) What is meant by taking up the cross daily?
b) What does verse 26 teach?
- 36F. Read Matthew 18:21-35.
a).Jesus taught this parable because of Peter's question in verse 21. What is the question?
b).The man (in verse 24) could not repay his enormous debt. The king graciously removed the man's debt. The king represents God who removes all of our sins at baptism. What did this man then do?
c).In what way can we behave like this?
d).What is the main lesson of this parable?

37

DAILY BIBLE READING

Reading: Psalm 119:89-112

The Bible – Different from all other Books

The Bible is like a deep well of clear water – a well so deep that you can never reach the bottom of it. The more you read, the more you find. You will never come to the time when you feel you know it all, and do not need to read it any more. Look how people received the Word of God:

| Acts 17:11, 12 | 1 Thessalonians 2:13 |
|--|--|
| “... they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.” | “... when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.” |

Why should we read the Bible?

1. How can we know about God unless we read His inspired Word?
2. God’s ways are so different from ours. How can we find out what is right and wrong in life and what God wants us to do unless we read the guide book He has given us?
3. How can we follow the example of the Lord Jesus unless we read about his life?
4. God does not hear the prayer of the person who despises His Word (Proverbs 28:9), so we should make sure we respect and read it.
5. Faith is essential for salvation. Daily Bible reading increases faith and builds us up spiritually. We need to *“grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”* (2 Peter 3:18).

6. Bible reading helps us to recognise how sinful we are and that we need to fight against our wrong desires.
7. Our reading will remind us of all that God and the Lord Jesus have done for us. This should help us to show love to others.
8. It brings us a hope of life through the Gospel.
9. It helps us to fill our minds with things that are good and spiritually profitable and will bring us closer to God (Philippians 4:8, 9).

Deuteronomy 6:1-9 shows that Scripture should be part of our lives every day. You will see from the section quoted opposite that God's words were to be with His people at all times. They were to talk about them throughout the day and make sure that their children were taught them. These verses show us that wherever we are, whatever we do, we need godly wisdom to guide us. It will help us to be separate from the evil world around us. If we trust in our own judgement we will fail:

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.” (*Proverbs 3:5-7*)

Paul tells us how vital the reading of God's Word is to our lives:

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” (*2 Timothy 3:16,17*)

So Scripture teaches us, tells us off, corrects us and trains us in righteousness.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

“The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

Daily Bible Reading

Even Jesus needed a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures (of course, he only had the Old Testament). But how well he knew it! The Word of God provided answers to all his problems. Jesus read the Old Testament; we must read it too.

Reading the whole of Scripture

From the first verse of Genesis to the last verse of Revelation, the Bible is the inspired Word of God. Parts of the Bible, like the Psalms and the Gospels, are a joy to read. Some people find that they cannot put their Bibles down until they have finished reading books like Ruth and Esther. The life of David is full of adventure. But other parts describe wickedness and warfare, and we do not enjoy reading them so much. Other chapters have long lists of people and places. If we were to choose for ourselves, we would only read the pleasant chapters. Some of us would only read the New Testament. We might never come to understand some of the most important teachings of the Bible – such as the wickedness that is in all of us, God’s great holiness and the respect and obedience He demands from us.

2 Timothy 3:16 says that all Scripture is profitable. People have many different needs, moods, circumstances and experiences, and the Scriptures satisfy them all.

We cannot understand much of the New Testament without the Old. The very first verse of the New Testament speaks about “*Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham*”. It is the Old Testament that gives details of the promises made to Abraham and David, and the New Testament often refers to these promises and shows how they relate to the Lord Jesus and to us.

We need to read the Bible every Day

God provides us with the food that our bodies need day by day. But our minds also need food – spiritual food, the Word of God – every day because otherwise they will readily feed on the things of the world. If we prayerfully read and meditate (think about) the Bible message, it will build up our understanding of God’s ways, and we will grow more pleasing to God. The Psalmist said,

“Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.” (*Psalms 119:97*)

To make sure we read the whole of Scripture, we need to plan our reading. The Christadelphian Bible Companion is a reading plan which will take you through the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice each year. Christadelphians all over the world use this plan and read the Bible every day. But if you have not yet started

to read regularly, then the Christadelphian Bible Planner will introduce you to daily Bible reading.

The Wonders of the Word of God

There are some amazing discoveries to be made when you read the Scriptures. Here are a few examples:

1. When Abraham was asked to offer his son Isaac (Genesis 22), it pointed forward to the Lord God offering his only Son. Just as Isaac carried the wood for the sacrifice, so Jesus carried his own cross. Jesus was the Lamb of God that was sacrificed for us, and in the end it was a ram that Abraham sacrificed. There are other links if you look for them! We can understand how difficult it was for Abraham to offer his son and this helps us to understand how hard it was for the Lord God to see His Son die.
2. Isaac was offered on Mount Moriah which later became part of Jerusalem, where the great temple was built in King Solomon's time (2 Chronicles 3:1).
3. There are many similarities between the life of Joseph and the life of the Lord Jesus, so we say that Joseph is a type of Christ. For example, both were righteous sons and both forgave their brothers who rejected them. Joseph was placed in prison, Jesus in the tomb. Afterwards Joseph was a great saviour for his brothers as well as for peoples from other lands who came to Egypt for food. Without him they would have died. The Lord Jesus is the Saviour of both Jews and Gentiles.
4. Just as Elijah was followed by the great prophet Elisha, so John the Baptist was followed by Jesus Christ. Elijah and John were very similar in appearance and way of life, and both prepared the way for the greater prophet who followed them (Matthew 11:14). Elisha was a type of Christ because he performed great miracles including feeding many people and raising a dead boy.
5. It took thousands of years for people to realise the need for simple hygiene, but the Law that God gave to Moses for His people contained many important hygiene rules. It kept them healthier than other nations (Deuteronomy 7:15).
6. Lists of names can provide information to help us in our understanding. For example, the long lists of names in Matthew 1 shows us how the Lord Jesus is descended from various women, including Rahab (a Gentile who was a prostitute), Ruth (another Gentile) and Bathsheba with whom David committed adultery. Would we have chosen such people to be in the line of our precious son? God, in His wisdom, is showing us that the

Daily Bible Reading

faith of the Gentile women was more important than their background. The list in Luke 3 traces the family of Jesus all the way back to Adam, showing that Adam was a real person.

7. 2 Samuel 12:13 records David's adultery with Bathsheba and how he arranged the death of her husband. It is difficult to understand why David seems to have been so easily forgiven, but Psalms 32 and 51 show how sorry David was.

Lessons for Living

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul refers back to the time of Moses when the people of Israel were in the Wilderness. God's presence was with them and He wanted to lead them to the Promised Land. But concerning the people he says,

“Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.”
(1 Corinthians 10:5, 6)

So we are meant to learn from these examples. We must not:

- desire evil (verse 6)
- be idolaters (verse 7)
- indulge in sexual immorality (verse 8)
- put Christ to the test – question God's wisdom (verse 9)
- grumble (verse 10).

It is easy to think that we will never worship gods of wood and stone but the New Testament describes covetousness as idolatry – anything which fills our lives rather than God can be an idol to us.

The apostle repeats the point:

“Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.” *(1 Corinthians 10:11, 12)*

There are plenty of other lessons we can learn from the poor behaviour of Israel in the time of Moses. But the record of how God wanted them to worship Him at this time contains fascinating details which point forward to the life of Jesus which was still 1,500 years away. There are many more lessons like this in the Bible.

Some Practical Points to help Bible Reading

1. Punctuation and capital letters – When the Scriptures were first written they did not contain any punctuation or capital letters. Occasionally the translators have been unhelpful. Luke 23:43 is an

example. It contains the words that Jesus spoke to the thief crucified with him. Because the man showed such an understanding of the Gospel, Jesus told him that he would be in paradise with him, meaning that he would be in God's kingdom on earth. This verse has caused much misunderstanding because the translators thought the thief would go to heaven. For this reason it reads:

“And he (*Jesus*) said to him (*the thief*) ‘Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise’.”

But by putting the comma after the word ‘today’ the sense is completely changed. Jesus could not have been promising that he would go to heaven that day with this man because he knew he was going to the grave for three days. The translators have also misled people by putting a capital letter for ‘paradise’. The word simply means ‘garden’. We know that Jesus promises a future life on this earth which will be like the Garden of Eden before Adam sinned.

2. Look at the context – It is always a good idea to look at the context (or surrounding verses) of the passage you are reading. This can provide clues to help you understand, for example, why Jesus told a particular parable.

3. Margin references - Some Bibles have margin references. They have a small letter or number by a word: and that letter or number can be found in the margin or the bottom of the page. Here it will give a chapter and verse which is connected with what you have just read.

4. Use your maps - Some Bibles have maps. If you find places on your map as you read, then you will come to know the land of Israel better and it may help you to understand the story better, too.

How to read your Bible

- Read your Bible prayerfully
- We need God's help in understanding His Word, and He is always ready to give it – so do not forget to ask!
- Hearing and doing. God will teach us through His Word. But reading it is not enough. James tells us we must be “*doers of the word, and not hearers only*” (James 1:22). Jesus speaks of some who called him ‘Lord’, but they did not do what he said. Read Matthew 25:31-46.
- Read the Bible with a humble mind
- God will teach the man who comes to Him with a lowly mind, ready to learn: He will have nothing to do with the person who thinks he knows it all!

Daily Bible Reading

- “But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word” (*Isaiah 66:2*).

God has written to us. How dare we ignore Him?

Summary

Read the Bible

1. Prayerfully, asking God to help you to understand what you read and put its lessons into practice.
2. Every day, making sure your reading covers all the books of the Bible.
3. With an open mind, letting it teach you.
4. Carefully, thinking over each verse and making sure you understand it.
5. With a humble mind, trying to find out how God wants you to live.

Verse to learn:

“Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.” (*Psalms 119:18*)

Passages to read: Psalm 19:

Psalm 119:1-40; Mark 8:34-38

Questions on Chapter 37 – Daily Bible Reading

- 37A. What does 2 Peter 1:20, 21 tell us?
- 37B. Why is it important to read the whole of the Bible (including all the Old Testament)?
- 37C. Look at Isaiah 66:1, 2. What should be our attitude if we want God to be with us in our lives?
- 37D. What is the message for us in James 1:22-25?
- 37E. a) What does the Bible tell us about ourselves – are we naturally good or sinners?
b) What message of hope does it give us?
c) Name three Bible characters whose lives are good examples for us to follow.
d) Why is it so important to read the Bible every day?
- 37F. Read Isaiah 55.
a) According to the first few verses, what does it cost us to learn about God and His salvation?
b) When should we seek the Lord (verse 6)?
c) What will happen if we turn to God (verse 7)?
d) What do verses 8 and 9 teach us?

38

FELLOWSHIP WITH THOSE OF THE SAME FAITH

Reading: 1 Corinthians 3

What is Fellowship?

Because the Lord Jesus filled his life with the Word of God and never sinned, he enjoyed true fellowship with His Father. They were of one mind and purpose, which is why Jesus could say that he and his Father were one (John 17:11). They were one because they shared the same way of thinking, not because they were part of a Trinity (Chapter 16). They were one because Jesus did God's will completely.

Jesus prayed that his followers *"may be one, even as we are one"* (John 17:11). He wanted believers to be one with him and His Father. When we are baptized we become sons and daughters of God. He wants a close relationship with us in this life. Baptized believers can have fellowship with God and His Son now, because they are trying to do God's will. But they still sin. Complete fellowship will only be achieved when they are made immortal and therefore no longer able to sin. Only then will they be completely at one with God.

Members of God's family have something very special in common with each other. They have fellowship with each other because of their fellowship with God and the Lord Jesus. We can understand this by thinking about everyday life, where we see people becoming friends because of a common interest or shared experience. In the same way, true believers have fellowship together because of their common faith, their shared hope and their way of life which is so different from people in the world. Christian fellowship is based on a belief in God's Word, and since this is so important to true believers it affects them all greatly and so they have a strong fellowship with other true believers.

Bible fellowship is therefore a special close relationship with God and the Lord Jesus, through belief and baptism. It results in a strong bond with others who also share the same privileged position of being God's sons and daughters, and therefore share a common purpose and way of life. All over the world, men and women share fellowship together when they belong to the family of God. Christian fellowship is not the same as just getting on well with someone – it is a spiritual relationship which depends upon sharing the same faith in God.

Fellowship means sharing. Bible fellowship means sharing beliefs, hopes and worship together with fellow-believers.

“Be Separate”

The apostle John writes about fellowship in his first letter. He explains that true believers are people who believe the truth about the Lord Jesus and who try to practise it. Christian fellowship only exists between people if they have a close relationship with God themselves.

| 1 John 1:3,5-7 | Notes |
|--|--|
| “That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; | John’s readers could have fellowship with him and other believers because of what they had learnt about Jesus. |
| and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. | Fellowship with God and the Lord Jesus is the basis of fellowship between believers |
| God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practise the truth. | Because God is totally righteous, we cannot be in fellowship with God and please ourselves. We have to try to live according to the true doctrine. |
| But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” | By seeking God’s ways we can have fellowship with others who walk in the light, and we will enjoy forgiveness of sins. |

To enjoy fellowship with God and His Son we need to be separate from the world. The New Testament commands followers of Christ to live apart from the world. This does not mean leaving the world – that would be impossible – but, rather, to live differently from the world and its godless ways as Abraham did (Hebrews 11:8-13). Jesus

Fellowship with those of the same Faith

prayed for his followers that they would be kept by God from the evil in the world, adding:

“They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify (*separate*) them in the truth; your word is truth.” (*John 17:16, 17*)

The world was regarded by Jesus and his apostles as an evil and wicked place (1 John 2:15-17). It is full of people who have no desire for the things of God, and who make life hard for true Christians to do as God commands. James 4:4 tells us that “*whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God*”. People of the world have different standards as well as a different way of life. What is most important to us is of little or no interest to them. We dare not share our lives with people of the world, so having brothers and sisters in Christ who share a love of God’s Word helps us in our discipleship. People who have wrong religious beliefs, as well as people who do not respect God, can lead true believers astray from God.

Adam and Eve

Adam and Eve were made for each other and were meant to help and support each other (see Genesis 2:18). Their marriage showed fellowship – sharing all that God had given, enjoying one another’s company, working together and appreciating together all God’s blessings. This fellowship existed because both were at one with God. Man, woman and God were in harmony.

When Adam and Eve broke God’s law (Genesis 3) this fellowship with God was broken. God is holy and cannot accept sin, nor can sinners exist in His presence. Adam and Eve had to leave the Garden of Eden. As well as ending their close contact with God, their sin affected their human relationship – Adam blamed Eve for what had happened. This is a lesson for us. Only when we “*walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another*”. Our sins prevent us having fellowship with God (Isaiah 59:2) and can affect our fellowship with our brothers and sisters.

Fellowship at Pentecost

There was a wonderful response to the teaching of the apostles at Pentecost. Many believed in the death, resurrection and teaching about Jesus and were baptized. They enjoyed fellowship together because they all accepted the apostles’ teaching and now had a different purpose and way of life. They showed their fellowship by sharing their possessions and breaking bread together in homes:

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts.”
(Acts 2:42, 44-46)

This example of the first century believers, in meeting for fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers, is one Christadelphians today still follow. They have different standards from the people in the world and so seek the fellowship of others with the same way of life. Every week members living in the same area meet to worship God and to remember Jesus in the way he appointed in the ‘Breaking of Bread’ service.

The Breaking of Bread

Disciples of Christ need regular contact if they are to grow together in love, and in truth (Hebrews 10:24, 25). The breaking of bread to remember the Lord Jesus and his great salvation is the centre of true Christian fellowship. By eating a small piece of bread and drinking a sip of wine we remind ourselves of the huge cost for our salvation when Jesus died on the cross (1 Peter 1:18, 19). It encourages us to remember the promise we made at our baptism – to serve God and not to please ourselves. It is a time to ask ourselves whether we really are walking in the light. It is important to share this simple feast with the right attitude as 1 Corinthians 11:26-29 shows.

“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.” *(1 Corinthians 11:26-29)*

This becomes a wonderful time of fellowship as we come closer to God and His Son by asking forgiveness and meditating on the sacrifice of our Lord.

The bread and wine are symbols of the body and the blood of Jesus. There is nothing magical or mystical about them; for example, the bread does not change into the actual body of the Lord Jesus, as some people wrongly believe.

Fellowship with those of the same Faith

Jesus said to his close followers, “*Do this in remembrance of me*” (Luke 22:19), which allows only baptized believers to share this service of remembrance. Christadelphians therefore only break bread with other baptized members of the community (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). They recognise that it is important to have fellowship only with others who believe the same basic Bible truths, to keep the doctrine pure (see 1 Timothy 1:3, 4; 2 Timothy 1:13, 14; Titus 2:1). If you become a Christadelphian by being baptized into Christ, all other Christadelphians are your brothers and sisters. (Remember the name ‘Christadelphian’ means ‘brothers in Christ’.) It is a great joy to belong to such a family. Christadelphians are one in Christ (Galatians 3:27, 28).

We read of the first century Christians breaking bread on a Sunday, the first day of the week (Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2) so Christadelphians usually break bread on a Sunday. This is different from the Sabbath (Saturday).

Spirit and Truth

A Samaritan woman asked Jesus whether people should worship on Mount Gerizim near where they were talking, or at Jerusalem. Jesus gave an answer which she must have found surprising. He said that neither place mattered, and then added:

“But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.” (*John 4:23*)

In AD 70, about 40 years after that conversation, both Jerusalem and Mount Gerizim could not be used as places of worship because the Roman armies had swept through the land of Israel and destroyed its religious places. Those Jews who survived the wars, and who did not escape, were taken into captivity and sold as slaves. So if their religion was to depend upon temples and holy sites, they would have had to give it up. Jesus was showing that true worship has nothing to do with buildings and shrines; instead it has to do with belief, sincerity, and truth.

“*Spirit and truth*” in the quotation above is a very important combination. Some people today claim to have, or be led by, the spirit. But when you talk to them, you soon realise that they do not know what the Bible teaches. Perhaps they believe in going to heaven at death, whereas the Bible clearly teaches that God’s kingdom will be set up on earth. Or they might believe that Jesus Christ is part of a Trinity, when the Bible teaches that Jesus’ life started when he born, having been conceived by the action of God’s power, the Holy

Spirit, on Mary. People who claim to have the Spirit, but who lack Bible truth, must be wrong.

True worshippers today are not impressed by large churches or places of worship. The true church is not about buildings but people; and it does not matter how many people there are. What really matters is what they believe, and how they worship God. It is good to have the right spirit in worship, but this comes from believing Bible truth and doing what is right with God.

God's Dwelling Place

True believers are God's dwelling place – He wants to live in them and with them every day of their lives. Paul said to the Corinthian church:

“Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?” (*1 Corinthians 3; 16. See also Ephesians 2:19-22*)

Church buildings are not important. Jesus never built one and he described the magnificent temple in Jerusalem as a den of thieves and robbers. He wanted his disciples to follow him and not the temple priests. His Last Supper was held with his disciples in an upper room in Jerusalem, and there the apostles met to worship afterwards (Acts 1:13). The services of the apostles in the early church took place in homes (Colossians 4:15) or hired rooms (Acts 28:23-31).

Worshipping Together or Apart

Instead of using the word 'church', Christadelphians often use 'ecclesia' (the Greek word for 'church' in the Bible, which means 'those called out'). The Bible word 'church' does not refer to a building but to a group of people called out from the world. They meet to break bread; to study God's Word together, and also have meetings to preach the Gospel to non-members. Some ecclesias also have activities for children.

Like the first century believers, there are no priests, because the Lord Jesus is our High Priest. The believing men (brothers in Christ) share the duties of the service. At the breaking of bread meeting one brother presides – he arranges the hymns and readings and prayers, and calls upon others to help with these duties. Another will have prepared a short talk to encourage the congregation – the exhortation. When those present have been suitably prepared to remember Jesus, the emblems of bread and wine are shared together – just as Jesus did at the Last Supper long ago (read Luke 22:14-30).

Fellowship with those of the same Faith

There is usually a collection during these breaking of bread meetings, and this is an opportunity for giving however much people want to give (1 Corinthians 16:1-3). No-one else knows how much an individual gives. The principle of giving is important as it is an act of fellowship, or sharing, as well as a small way of thanking God for His great love in giving Jesus. The money collected is used in many ways, including supporting preaching work and our members who are isolated or sick.

Christadelphians break bread on their own if no other believers live nearby, but they are still in fellowship with Christadelphians worldwide, who will also be breaking bread on the same day. In time, it may please God to call other believers in that area and thus allow the development of a new ecclesia of worshippers.

Summary

1. Fellowship is a special relationship that a believer enjoys with God and the Lord Jesus through belief and baptism. It results in a bond of fellowship between those who share the same beliefs and way of life.
2. True believers cannot have fellowship with those who do not accept true Bible teaching.
3. We must seek fellowship with God and the Lord Jesus through prayer, meditation and Bible reading.
4. The closest fellowship with God, the Lord Jesus and our fellow-believers is when we share the bread and wine at the Breaking of Bread service.
5. There will be perfect fellowship with God in His kingdom on earth.

A verse to learn:

“What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.’” (*2 Corinthians 6:16*)

Passages to read:

1 John 1; 1 Corinthians 10

Fellowship with those of the same Faith

Questions on Chapter 38: - Fellowship with those of the Same Faith

38A. Are the following right or wrong?

- a) The word 'fellowship' means friendship.
- b) Sin destroys fellowship with God.
- c) True Christians can only have fellowship with others who believe the same essential Bible teachings and follow God's ways.
- d) Christadelphians break bread with unbaptized people.
- e) Believers must worship in a church building.
- f) True Christians show they have God's spirit in them by the way they behave.
- g) Believers should break bread on their own if they cannot meet with other fellow believers.
- h) The breaking of bread is the centre of Bible fellowship.

38B. In what ways can Christians have fellowship:

- a) with God and the Lord Jesus?
- b) with each other?

38C. How can we worship God in spirit and in truth?

38D. 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 explains how true believers (particularly in an ecclesia) are like the parts of a body working together. Give at least two of the lessons.

38E. Ephesians 4:17-32 advises believers how they should behave towards each other. In your own words say what advice is given in the following:

- a) verse 25
- b) verse 28
- c) verse 29
- d) verse 31
- e) verse 32

38F. Use Ephesians 5:3-5 to make a list of types of behaviour we should avoid.

38G. Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

- a) What does the bread represent in this simple feast?
- b) What does the wine represent?
- c) What is the purpose of breaking bread and drinking wine?
- d) How often should baptized believers do this?

A SUMMARY OF BIBLE DOCTRINES

| Doctrine | Bible Reference | Chap . |
|---|--|--------------|
| <p>1. The Bible is the Word of God</p> <p>The Bible is the only way to learn about God. It tells us all we need to know about Him and what He requires of us. The writers of the 66 books were inspired by God, so He is the true author of the Bible. We need to read it every day.</p> | <p>Psalm 119:89-112 Acts 17:11,12 2 Timothy 3:16,17 2 Peter 1:21</p> | 3, 20, 37 |
| <p>2. The Gospel</p> <p>This is the good news of the Kingdom of God, which will be set up on the earth, and the forgiveness of sins through Jesus. This message is found in both Old and New Testaments.</p> | <p>Genesis 22:17,18 Daniel 2:44 Matthew 4:23; 6:12-15; 24:14</p> | 4 |
| <p>3. God is the Creator of the world</p> <p>Everything in heaven and on the earth was made by the only true God who has always existed and always will exist. He is pure, righteous and knows all things.</p> | <p>Genesis 1 Acts 17:24-29 Psalm 104</p> | 5, 16 |
| <p>4. Jesus will return to the earth</p> <p>Jesus' life began when he was born about 2,000 years ago. He willingly offered himself as a sacrifice for sin. Because he was sinless, God raised him from the dead and he is now in heaven with his Father. He will return from there as King of the world.</p> | <p>Matthew 25:31-34 Acts 1:10,11 Acts 3:20,21 Revelation 22:20</p> | 4, 8, 9 |

A Summary of Bible Doctrines

| | | |
|--|---|---------------------------|
| <p>5. The return of Jesus is very near</p> <p>Bible prophecy is being fulfilled and there are many signs today to show that the coming of Jesus is near. These include the return of the Jews to their land and the establishment of the State of Israel, falling moral standards, people not interested in God, and many problems in the world.</p> | <p>Daniel 12:1,2 Ezekiel 37:1-4,11 Luke 21:24-33 2 Timothy 3:1-5</p> | <p>7, 8</p> |
| <p>6. The Kingdom of God will be on the earth</p> <p>The Old Testament Kingdom of Israel was God's kingdom on earth in the past. It will be restored when the Lord Jesus returns. He will reign until all God's enemies are destroyed. Then the world will be perfect and Jesus Christ will deliver the kingdom to God.</p> | <p>1 Chronicles 29:23 Jeremiah 3:17 Micah 4:1-8 Revelation 11:15</p> | <p>9, 11</p> |
| <p>7. God made promises to Abraham</p> <p>Abraham (the father of the Jewish nation) trusted God and so he was promised that he would possess the land of Israel for ever and that his descendants would be a great nation. He was also promised a descendant (Jesus Christ) who would bring the blessing of forgiveness of sins. By baptism we can share in the promises.</p> | <p>Genesis 13:14,15 Genesis 15:5,6 Genesis 22:15-18 Galatians 3:8,16,29</p> | <p>12</p> |
| <p>8. The Jews are God's people</p> <p>The Jews are God's special people and witnesses to His existence and power. Because they disobeyed God they were scattered among the nations of the world. God is now regathering them to Israel as He promised.</p> | <p>Isaiah 11:11,12 Isaiah 44:8 Ezekiel 36:16-24 Ezekiel 37:21,22 Romans 9:3-5</p> | <p>10, 13, 14</p> |

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| <p>9. Jerusalem will be the centre of the earth</p> <p>God's kingdom will be centred in Israel but will cover the whole earth. Jerusalem will be the capital of the world. Jews who accept Jesus as their Messiah when he returns will live as mortal people in his kingdom and become the head of the nations. Mortal people from the other nations will visit Jerusalem to worship and learn God's ways.</p> | <p>Jeremiah 3:17 Micah 4:1,2 Zechariah 12:10 Zechariah 14:16 Matthew 5:34,35</p> | <p>9, 11</p> |
| <p>10. God made promises to David</p> <p>King David was promised a descendant who would sit on his throne forever. This prophecy concerns Jesus who will reign from Jerusalem when he returns to restore God's kingdom on earth.</p> | <p>2 Samuel 7:12-16 1 Chronicles 17:10-14 Psalm 89:35,36 Luke 1:30-33</p> | <p>9, 10, 13, 15</p> |
| <p>11. Jesus is the Son of God</p> <p>Jesus did not exist before his birth. He is the Son of God because he was conceived by the action of the Holy Spirit on his mother, Mary. No man was involved. God has always been greater than the Lord Jesus and always will be.</p> | <p>Matthew 1:20-25 John 14:28 Romans 1:3,4 Galatians 4:4 1 Peter 1:20</p> | <p>16, 17</p> |
| <p>12. Jesus lived a sinless life</p> <p>Before his death Jesus had human nature like us, but because God was his Father he was more than an ordinary man. Jesus overcame all temptations and lived a perfect life in obedience to his Father's will. He showed us the character of God and set an example for us to follow.</p> | <p>Isaiah 53:5,12 2 Corinthians 5:21 Hebrews 4:15 1 Peter 2:22</p> | <p>6, 16, 17, 18</p> |

A Summary of Bible Doctrines

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| <p>13. Jesus died on the cross for us</p> <p>Jesus Christ is at the centre of God's purpose. He was descended from Adam and so he was mortal like us. Because he was sinless and willing to die on the cross as a sacrifice, he is able to take away the sins of those who die with him in baptism.</p> | <p>John 1:29 John 3:16 1 Corinthians 5:7 Galatians 1:4</p> | <p>6, 17, 18, 31</p> |
| <p>14. Jesus was raised from the grave</p> <p>Because Jesus did not sin, God raised him from the dead and gave him immortal life. He now has a nature like God's and is exalted above the angels. Those who died in Christ will also rise from the dead at his return and will be given immortal life at the judgement.</p> | <p>Luke 24:36-43 Acts 2:24 Acts 17:31 1 Corinthians 15:22,23</p> | <p>16, 18, 19, 25</p> |
| <p>15. The Holy Spirit is the power of God</p> <p>The Holy Spirit is the power of God and is not a separate person. It has no separate existence. By His Spirit, God made and supports all creation, is present everywhere and knows all things.</p> | <p>Luke 1:35 Acts 10:38 2 Peter 1:21</p> | <p>20</p> |
| <p>16. Holy Spirit Gifts were for specific purposes</p> <p>On a few occasions God gave special abilities to certain people. The apostles received the Holy Spirit to help them preach. Spirit gifts were no longer needed when the writing of the Bible was complete and the early church established. No-one possesses Holy Spirit Gifts today.</p> | <p>Mark 16:15-18 Acts 2 Acts 8:9-24 1 Corinthians 13:8</p> | <p>21</p> |

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| <p>17. The wages of sin is death</p> <p>Adam was made from dust. Death is the punishment for sin, so Adam returned to dust. All (except Jesus) sin and so all die. No part of a person lives on after death. Unless people know and respond to the Gospel they will perish.</p> | <p>Genesis 3:17-19 Ecclesiastes 9:5-10 Romans 5:12 Romans 6:23</p> | <p>6, 18, 22, 23, 30</p> |
| <p>18. 'Hell' in the Bible usually refers to the grave</p> <p>'Hell' (from 'sheol' or 'hades') refers to the grave. 'Gehenna' was the place near Jerusalem where rubbish was burnt, and is used as a symbol for the total destruction of the wicked. The wages of sin is death – not eternal torment after death.</p> | <p>Psalm 6:5 Acts 2:27 Mark 9:43-48</p> | <p>3</p> |
| <p>19. The gift of God is eternal life</p> <p>We cannot save ourselves. But by God's grace we can have eternal life, if we have faith and try hard to do God's will.</p> | <p>John 17:1-3 Romans 2:6-8 Romans 6:23</p> | <p>24</p> |
| <p>20. There will be a resurrection of the dead</p> <p>When he returns, the Lord Jesus will bring out of the graves those who have had an opportunity to respond to the Gospel message of salvation, both faithful and unfaithful. But those who have not known the Gospel will not be raised.</p> | <p>Psalm 49:20 John 5:28,29 1 Corinthians 15:12-21 2 Timothy 4:1</p> | <p>19, 25</p> |
| <p>21. There will be a time of judgement</p> <p>People who have known and understood the Gospel will appear before the Lord Jesus Christ, the righteous judge, at his return to the earth. They will either be punished by final death or given immortal life. The nations who oppose Christ Jesus at his return will be punished.</p> | <p>Daniel 12:1,2 John 5:28,29 2 Corinthians 5:10 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9</p> | <p>7, 26</p> |

A Summary of Bible Doctrines

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| <p>22. Immortal life for true believers</p> <p>Believers who are made immortal will serve the Lord Jesus on the earth and, under him, will rule the mortal people. These saints will enjoy perfect health and happiness while they teach the mortal people about God and make the earth a wonderful place, preparing it for God Himself to live with people.</p> | <p>Psalm 37:9-11,22 Isaiah 35 Daniel 7:27 Revelation 20:4</p> | <p>6, 25, 26, 27</p> |
| <p>23. Angels are God’s messengers</p> <p>God made the angels to be His servants forever. They never sin, die nor marry. They always carry out God’s will and watch over true believers (saints).</p> | <p>Exodus 23:20-21 Psalm 34:7 Psalm 103:20 Luke 20:34-36 Hebrews 1:13,14</p> | <p>28</p> |
| <p>24. The Devil and Satan</p> <p>We are tempted to sin by our own desires. The term ‘devil’ describes human sinfulness. The word ‘satan’ means adversary and can refer to a good or bad opponent. ‘Satan’ can be used to describe anything opposed to God, including anything sinful. There is no evil angel or all-powerful being that makes people do evil.</p> | <p>Matthew 16:23 John 8:44 Acts 10:38 James 1:14</p> | <p>29, 30</p> |
| <p>25. Demons, unclean spirits</p> <p>‘Demon’ is a word used to describe false gods or idols. People with strange behaviour problems were said to have a demon. Today these medical conditions can be helped with medicines. There are no evil spirit powers that cause problems in the world.</p> | <p>Psalm 106:36-38 1 Corinthians 10:18-21 Matthew 8:16,17</p> | <p>29</p> |
| <p>26. We must all repent</p> <p>We need to realise how sinful we are and be truly sorry for all our wrong thoughts and actions. Repentance involves a complete change of heart.</p> | <p>Psalm 51:1-10 Matthew 4:17 Luke 13:1-5 Acts 3:19; 17:30</p> | <p>30, 31</p> |

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| <p>27. Adult baptism in water</p> <p>It is essential to believe the teachings of the Bible, repent of our sins and then be baptized. Baptism is a complete burial in water. It is a symbol of dying with Christ and rising again to a new life.</p> | <p>Matthew 28:19,20 Mark 16:16 Acts 2:38 Romans 6:1-11</p> | <p>6, 18, 31</p> |
| <p>28. Christians do not fight</p> <p>A follower of Christ should not use force or join in military service or the police force. He must love his enemies as well as his friends.</p> | <p>Matthew 5:39-48 Matthew 26:52 Luke 6:27-29</p> | <p>34</p> |
| <p>29. Christian marriage</p> <p>God intended a man to have only one wife. A baptized believer should not marry an unbeliever. There should be no sex outside marriage and Christians should not seek divorce. Marriage is a symbol of Christ and the true church.</p> | <p>Genesis 2:21-24 Matthew 19:3-6 Hebrews 13:4 Ephesians 5:25-32</p> | <p>32, 33</p> |
| <p>30. Our duty to the State</p> <p>Christians must obey all the laws of their country, unless they conflict with the laws of God. Because they are citizens of the Kingdom of God they cannot give their time and energy to the politics of any worldly government. They might be opposing rulers chosen by God for His purpose.</p> | <p>Matthew 22:21 Romans 13:1-7 1 Peter 2:17</p> | <p>34</p> |
| <p>31. Christians can pray for forgiveness of sins</p> <p>Prayer is an opportunity to praise and thank God. Through prayer we can ask for God's guidance in our lives. The Lord Jesus is in heaven, acting as a priest for his followers and asking God to forgive their sins. This is one of the privileges of being in Christ. There is no need for other priests.</p> | <p>Philippians 4:6 1 Timothy 2:5 Hebrews 7:24-26 1 John 1:9</p> | <p>35</p> |

A Summary of Bible Doctrines

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| <p>32. Communion with the death of Jesus</p> <p>True Christians meet once a week to remember the death of Jesus. At this service they share bread and wine, which Jesus said were symbols of him, to remind us of his sacrifice.</p> | <p>Mark 14:22-25 Luke 22:14-20 1 Corinthians 11:23-28</p> | <p>36, 38</p> |
| <p>33. True fellowship</p> <p>Fellowship with God and the Lord Jesus can only be shared by those who believe and practise the Bible doctrines taught by the Lord and his followers in the first century. Christadelphians enjoy a wonderful fellowship with thousands of brothers and sisters in many countries.</p> | <p>Acts 2:41,42 Hebrews 10:24,25 1 John 1:3-7</p> | <p>38</p> |
| <p>34. Christian living</p> <p>Baptized believers should follow the example of the Lord Jesus in their lives. In all they do they should give honour and glory to God.</p> | <p>Matthew 5 Romans 12 Colossians 3:1-17</p> | <p>36</p> |
| <p>35. The call of the Gospel</p> <p>God is calling people from all nations to follow the Lord Jesus and to prepare for his coming kingdom. Will you respond to this?</p> | <p>Matthew 16:24-26 Acts 15:14 1 Corinthians 1:26,27</p> | <p>36, 40</p> |

Final verses to learn:

“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

(Acts 17:30-31)

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THE NEXT STEP

Reading: Acts 2

God's Message

We have now reached the end of this book and we hope that you have enjoyed using it to learn more about the Bible. We have shared with you the wonderful teaching of the Bible, because it contains the message of salvation. However, even in 40 chapters we cannot cover God's entire message to mankind, so it is important that you continue to read the Bible regularly and to pray for a greater understanding of it.

It is also important that you do not see this book in the same way that people might learn about subjects at school or college. The Bible is a book that can really change your life, if you want it to. The apostle Paul wrote that:

“with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” (*Romans 10:10*)

If we accept the Bible as the Word of God, it will affect our hearts. There will be a deeply held belief within us that being a disciple of the Lord Jesus is something we really want in our lives. This is essential because only through the Lord Jesus can we be saved from our sins, as the apostle Peter explained:

“... there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (*Acts 4:12*)

The Importance of Believing God's Truth

We are told that God “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).

This means that God wants you to be saved. It also shows that you can only be saved when you believe the things that are right: the message that God has revealed in the Bible. Believing wrong things – things the Bible does not teach – will not help you. It will confuse you, as well as the people you talk to about your beliefs. True believers must have a correct understanding of Bible truth. This is essential if our lives are to be right with God. So we need to make

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sure that we have a true understanding by checking whether our beliefs match Bible teaching.

The apostle Paul told Timothy:

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

“Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.” (1 Timothy 4:16)

These verses show the importance of true Bible teaching. Timothy was to make sure that he believed and passed on the true Gospel message. Paul also warned Timothy:

“For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.” (2 Timothy 4:3,4)

We should have nothing to do with people who preach and teach a false gospel.

The Teaching of Jesus

Jesus ascended to heaven nearly six weeks after his resurrection from the dead. During those 40 days he spent time teaching his disciples, so you can see how important it is to have a right understanding about the purpose of God. Jesus taught them what the Scriptures said about his coming and his saving work, saying to his disciples:

“These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.’” (Luke 24:44-48)

“To them (*the apostles*) he presented himself alive after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God ... and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:3,8)

Notice what we learn from this.

1. Before the disciples were ready to preach the Gospel – to be witnesses for Jesus – they had to understand what the Bible taught about Jesus Christ, both about the forgiveness of sins through his name, and about the Kingdom of God.
2. The Lord Jesus taught them from the Old Testament as well as new things that would later be written down in the New Testament – so the whole Bible is essential.
3. The disciples had been learning from their Master for three years. Yet they still needed further instruction. Understanding God’s message takes time.

What Jesus taught became the basis of belief for all members of the church in the first century.

The Teaching of the First Century Church

Acts 2 tells us what the apostle Peter taught the Jews on the day of Pentecost. He spoke about God’s plan of salvation: Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension, as well as other important doctrines. Many of the hearers believed and were baptized:

“So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” (Acts 2:41, 42)

Notice the importance of the apostles’ teaching.

1. The teaching came before baptism – only those who received the teaching of Peter were baptized.
2. After baptism they continued with the same beliefs – they “*devoted themselves*” to this teaching.
3. This was the basis of their fellowship.

This was the start of the true Christian church. Notice that those who accepted the teaching that Jesus had given his apostles were admitted into the church. Their fellowship was based on a common belief of this teaching. They also broke bread and worshipped together.

In Acts 8 we read of Philip who preached in Samaria. He did many great miracles which attracted the attention of the people and showed that he was a man of God. But it was only when they understood and believed his message that they were baptized:

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“But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” (*Acts 8:12*)

Notice that Philip taught the people the “*good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ*”. This is what Jesus had taught the apostles after his resurrection. This is why when a person is baptized by a Christadelphian, he or she will be asked the following question just before going down into the water:

**Do you believe the things concerning the
Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ?**

In this way the person being baptized confirms that he (or she) believes the true Gospel message as taught by Jesus and the apostles.

From the beginning of the true Christian church, only those who had accepted true Bible teaching and had been properly baptized into Christ were accepted into the church. This is why Christadelphians keep separate from other churches. It is not because we feel superior to them, or condemn them. We do this because we believe and teach the Gospel message exactly as Jesus and his disciples taught it and we accept that we must keep separate from those who have wrong teachings and beliefs. This does not mean that we should not talk to members of other churches about the Bible – this is a great delight in the lives of Christadelphians who are ready to talk to anyone about the Bible. It means that we should not worship with them and should not break bread with them.

What Next?

When you have finished this book there are four options open to you.

1. You could decide that this teaching is not what you want in your life and end your contact with the CBM.
2. You could decide that you are interested in Bible teaching and want to learn more, but you do not yet feel ready to be baptized.
3. If you have been baptized already, by full immersion, you may decide that you do not need to be baptized again.
4. You could decide that you want to follow the teaching of Jesus and ask to be baptized.

We need to look at each of these possibilities in turn.

1. If you decide that you do not want further contact with Christadelphians we will respect that decision. However, we will always be willing to re-open contact with you in the future if you so wish. We do ask though that you consider the seriousness of your decision. When Jesus Christ returns to judge the world, all those who have learned the Gospel will be called to give account, and you would not want to have made the wrong decision (see Hebrews 10:30,31).

It may be that you decide not to continue because you are satisfied with what your church teaches. If this is the case, then you must decide for yourself what is true. Remember that the Bible is the only authority. Do not be influenced by what other people say but ask them to prove their beliefs from the Bible and make your own judgement. You should examine your beliefs against what you have learned from this book and especially against what the Bible teaches. Chapter 39 will help you.

2. If you are interested in the Bible message but do not feel ready for baptism just yet, do not worry. We will not put pressure on you to make a hasty decision. It is essential that you are fully convinced before you make this decision. Here are some suggestions to help you.
 - Go back through Chapters 1-39 and re-read them. Make a note of any doubts or difficulties you have and contact your tutor about them.
 - Write to your tutor explaining your situation. He or she will be willing to continue writing to you. They will send you another Bible course if you wish, or can supply literature about Bible passages you may find difficult.
 - Continue to read your Bible daily (the Bible Reading Planner and Bible Companion will help you with this).
 - If you wish we may be able to put you in contact with Christadelphians in your own country. They may be able to meet you and talk to you about the Bible.
 - Above all, please pray carefully to God about your situation.
3. If you have already been baptized in another church you may feel that you do not need to be baptized again. It is important to understand that this book does not ask you to be baptized into the Christadelphians, but into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have seen what this means earlier in this chapter – people in the first century were only baptized after they understood and believed the one true Gospel message.

The Next Step

In Acts 19 we read of some people who were baptized after being taught by the followers of John the Baptist. Their understanding of the Gospel was incomplete, so the apostle Paul re-baptized them into the name of Jesus Christ and they were accepted by God. In the same way some people have to be re-baptized today because their original baptism was not effective. Paul says in Ephesians 4:5 that there is only “*one baptism*”. Some people take this to mean that you only need to be baptized once, but this is not what it means. Paul is teaching that there is only one true baptism. It is essential for salvation that disciples believe the one true Gospel message before they enter the water. Please think carefully about this and talk to your tutor.

4. If you want to be baptized that is wonderful news – there will be rejoicing in heaven as well on earth at your news. The first thing to do is to pray and share your decision with God. Then contact your tutor who will advise you further.

If you are really ready for this step, you will be sure that you believe with all your heart the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, as taught in the Bible and explained in this book. Before we baptize you, we will arrange a friendly discussion so that you can talk through with someone what you have come to understand and believe. Baptism is the most important decision you will ever make and we want to make sure that you have thought about it carefully.

When you are baptized you will become a member of a Christadelphian ecclesia in your area and will be able to meet with other brothers and sisters in Christ for worship and Breaking of Bread. It is important to remember that whether you belong to a large ecclesia or are on your own, you will belong to a worldwide family of brothers and sisters in the Lord who will care for you and want to keep in touch.

Finally

Thank you for reading this book. We hope that you have enjoyed it and found it helpful. We sincerely hope that you will find a place in God's kingdom when the Lord Jesus returns. It is because of this that we pray that you will accept the true Gospel teaching, be baptized into the saving name of Jesus and enjoy fellowship with God and His Son, as well as with a worldwide family of believers.

Please continue to read your Bible, to pray to Almighty God and ask for His guidance on these things in your life.

Final Questions – These cover all the chapters in the Book

SECTION A One Word Answers: WHO?

1. Who created the world?
2. Who was made from dust?
3. Who was promised that he would inherit the land of Canaan (Israel)?
4. Who received instructions for building the tabernacle?
5. Who was promised that he would have a son to reign on his throne forever?
6. Who is the son in the previous question?
7. Whom did Jesus call ‘Satan’?
8. Whom did Jesus raise from the dead?
9. Who will judge the world?
10. Who inspired people to write the Bible?

SECTION B One Word Answers: WHERE?

1. Where did Abraham live at first?
2. Where was Joseph made a ruler?
3. Where did Moses receive the Law that God gave for His people?
4. Where was David’s throne?
5. Where was Daniel in captivity?
6. Where is Mount Zion?
7. Where was Jesus born?
8. Where was Jesus baptized?
9. Where is hell?
10. Where will the centre of God’s future kingdom be?

SECTION C Short Answer Questions: WHAT?

1. What nation did God choose to be His special people?
2. What does the word ‘gospel’ mean?
3. What is grace?
4. What does the return of the Jews to their land show?

5. What does 'soul' mean?
6. What promise did the angels make as the Lord Jesus went into heaven?
7. What is baptism?
8. What is the devil?
9. What are demons?
10. What is the Holy Spirit?

SECTION D Short Answer Questions: WHY?

1. Why did God create the world?
2. Why did God flood the earth in the time of Noah?
3. Why was Abraham blessed by God?
4. Why did God allow Jesus to die on the cross?
5. Why was Jesus raised from the dead?
6. Why do we sin?
7. Why is it important to be truthful and honest?
8. Why is it important to say when we are wrong and apologise?
9. Why were the Holy Spirit gifts given?
10. Why should Christians marry Christians?

SECTION E Short Answer Questions: HOW?

1. How has God shown His love to us?
2. How can we show our appreciation for what God and Christ have done for us?
3. How should we start and end each day?
4. How can we develop spiritually (grow closer to God)?
5. How did Abraham show faith in his life?
6. How should we be separate from the world?
7. How are we tempted?
8. How are the prayers of believers presented (taken) to God?
9. How should we treat people who have done us wrong?
10. How should following Christ influence marriage?

SECTION F Yes or No?

1. Did Jesus live in Old Testament times?
2. Should Christians be involved in politics?
3. Should Christians fight for their country?
4. Can 'satan' be used to refer to good people?
5. Did God's kingdom exist in Old Testament times?
6. Do Holy Spirit gifts (like speaking in tongues) exist today?
7. Are God and the Lord Jesus equal?
8. Do Christians have to keep the seventh day (Sabbath) for their worship?
9. Does 'holy' mean separate?
10. Should Christians have sex before marriage?

SECTION G Longer Answer Questions

1. Why is baptism essential for salvation?
2. What happens to us when we die?
3. Who will be raised from the dead when Christ returns?
4. What will happen at the judgement?
5. Why did Jesus have to die?
6. Why does the Bible use the idea of a devil?
7. What will the future kingdom of God be like?
8. Why is it important for baptized believers to regularly hold a service to break bread and drink wine?
9. Why should true Christians only share bread and wine with other true Christians?
10. How can sins be forgiven after baptism?

