

## FIRST STEPS IN BIBLE READING - Notes

### Introduction

The Bible is a huge book and takes a long time to read. It is not so easy to just pick it up and read it from beginning to end like any other book. There are places which will not make much sense to new readers, like Leviticus. There are places which a reader may find tedious, like the lists of people in Chronicles. There are places where the language is complex and symbolic like some of the prophets. Reading the difficult parts of the Bible is like trying to eat solid food when one is only used to milk. It is difficult to digest. We recommend gradually learning the way the Bible speaks and slowly getting familiar with the people and events in it. This is what this reading plan is for.

There is a bookmark that goes with this course, which can be left in the Bible.

This 6-monthly program of readings focuses on principles as well as the most important people and events. It does not primarily focus on facts, which you will learn as you read more. It does focus on the right way of living which it is important for the reader to become aware of. The program explains why the passages have been chosen, and what to look out for in them.

If the program is followed by reading one passage per day, then the program will take 6 months. However, if more passages are read in one day, then the program will take less. If 3 passages are read per day, then the program will take 2 months. It is up to the reader to choose what speed they wish to progress.

We wish you God's blessing on your reading. God will be pleased that you wish to read what He has written. After all, He wrote it to be read and He wants us to learn from it.

In order to find the passages in the Bible, you will have to look at the index at the front to find out where the different books of the Bible are. There are 66 books in the Bible. In the references below, the book of the Bible is given, followed by the chapter, and then (if necessary) the verses. The book, chapter and verses are a quick way of identifying any part of the Bible.

### MONTH 1

Day 1: Psalm 1

Psalm 1 is the introduction to many people's favourite book – the Psalms. It is a good introduction to the Psalms, but it is also a good introduction to the Bible. There are two ways in life. There is the way of God and there is the way of man. Only if we follow the way of God, we will please God and get His blessing. Psalm 1 likens man to a tree that either flourishes or dries up. The person who flourishes and grows is the one follows the right way and meditates on God's word. It teaches us that we must read and think about the Bible regularly. Ideally, we will do this daily. Therefore, the passages are given as daily readings. The man who does not read the Bible is like dried up plant matter that is no use and is blown away.

Day 2: Deuteronomy 30:11-20

This passage comes near the end of the five books of Moses known as the Pentateuch. It summarises what has been said in the first five books – there is a choice for everyone. The choice is a life-or-death choice. It is like Psalm 1 in the sense that it is saying that there are two ways – God’s way and man’s way. Anyone can follow the way of God and get life if that is what they choose. The choice of the alternative is a choice to live without God and it ends in lasting death.

#### Day 3: Proverbs 2

The book of Proverbs is concerned with God’s wisdom. It was written by the wisest man on earth at the time, a king called Solomon. He describes life as having two ways. There is firstly the way of wisdom which leads to good things. And secondly there is the way of the wicked, which leads to the opposite. The wicked will be cut off and the righteous will live on. The choice is the same choice as we have read in the previous two passages in Psalms and Deuteronomy. The Bible is consistent in its message no matter where one reads. It says the same thing in different ways. This is how we know we are learning the right message, because we hear it more than once.

#### Day 4: James 3

The previous three passages have come from the Old Testament. The Old Testament is the name given to all the books written before Christ. The next two passages come from the New Testament. The New Testament is the second and last part of the Bible which covers Jesus and his disciples. The New Testament says the same thing as the Old Testament. James is a practical and easy to understand book. The end of James 3 says there are two types of wisdom. There is the wisdom of God from above, and the wisdom from the world. It is the wisdom of God that is pleasant and loving. His message is built on the message of the Old Testament. James 3 also talks about the power of the tongue. The tongue is a dangerous thing and needs to be controlled. Sound advice!

#### Day 5: Matthew 6:25-7:14

Now we come across the words of Jesus for the first time. It comes from Jesus’ most famous speech, known as the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ in Matthew chapters 5-7. The section we have picked highlights how God knows that we need food and clothing, and we should trust Him to provide for us. This will allow us to live life without worrying. Chapter 7 advises us to not judge each other because how we judge others is how God will judge us. The section ends with the teaching that there are two ways in life. This is the message we have already learnt from the Old Testament. In fact, much of the teaching of Jesus was about explaining the message of the Old Testament. Jesus tells us that we must seek carefully to find the right way. It is not easy to find this way, but this way does lead to life. Reading the Bible will help you find this way.

In the next few days, we will take our first steps at learning about God.

#### Day 6: 1 Samuel 2:1-10

This is the prayer of Hannah. Hannah was a barren wife. Her husband had two wives. The second wife did have children and made Hannah’s life very difficult. Hannah made a vow to God that if God gave her a son, then she would give him to God. God did give Hannah a son. The prayer of Hannah

was a prayer of thanks for that son. In the prayer, she gives us important information about God and how God works. God can do everything - and we mean everything! He can give life and He can take life. He can give wealth and take wealth. There is no one like God. God looks after those who trust in Him, just as He looked after Hannah. It makes sense for people to trust in God and receive His care. The next few passages will also teach us important things about God.

#### Day 7: Psalm 103

This is a most beautiful Psalm teaching us about God. God gives life and heals. God is not easily angered nor is He harsh. In fact, God does not treat us as we deserve. The Psalm teaches us about the personality or character of God. God is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and loving. We are so blessed that God is like this. Imagine what life would be like if God was angry and harsh. God is particularly loving to those who obey His commands. God deserves our praise for all this, just as the angels also praise Him. This is our first encounter with angels. Angels are God's messengers, who carry God's messages and obey God's instructions. They are spirit beings who look like men.

#### Day 8: Psalm 139

Psalm 139 explains why it will be hard to understand everything about God. God's mind and abilities are beyond our understanding. God knew us personally even when we were developing in our mother's womb. God's powers are so great that He can read our minds. He knows where we are and what we are doing. We cannot hide from Him. This is good and bad news. It is good when we are in trouble and are praying for help. It is not so good when we are doing things wrong. The writer was David, a man really committed to doing what was right. David wrote many of the Psalms. David hated those who misused God's name and disobeyed God's laws. These are things that God also hates. We should be careful not to misuse God's name and we should be careful to do what God tells us. God will know if we do not.

#### Day 9: Ezekiel 18

This is our first reading from a large part of the Bible known as the 'prophets'. The prophets spoke the words of God and often spoke about what God would do in the future. They were usually sent by God when the nation of Israel was evil to get the people to become good. In Ezekiel 18 we learn what God wants from His people. God wants wicked people to repent. Repentance means change. God wants His people to change from doing bad things and to start doing good things. God tells us something important about Himself. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. God does not enjoy punishing wicked people! This is the opposite of human thinking, where man will often rejoice at the fall of an enemy. But God does not think in the way that man does. Even when God must remove the wicked, it gives Him no pleasure to do so. What does give Him pleasure is that those who are lost to Him turn and change. He is pleased when people repent and become righteous.

#### Day 10: Psalm 23

This is one of the most famous chapters in the Bible. It teaches us about God. God is like a shepherd. His people are like His sheep. God does not call Himself 'king' or 'ruler', even though He is. He behaves like a shepherd, and He presents Himself as a shepherd. The role of a shepherd is a serving and caring role. This is what God does. He cares for His people during their lives. He leads them through the dangers of life to a place where they will be in fellowship with God for ever. Notice the words 'for ever.' God uses these words as they are really meant. He is talking about eternal things. We will learn from reading the Bible that He really means is everlasting life. Many people have learnt the Psalm by heart. This is so that they can remember its beautiful words when their lives get difficult and take comfort.

In the last five of the readings, we have learnt about God and what He is like. We think you will agree that, although God is so great, He has a lovely personality and is worth knowing. These readings all come from the Old Testament, where many think God is harsh. This is an incorrect understanding. God is the same loving God in both the Old and New Testaments. In the next few days, we will look at passages to do with wisdom.

#### Day 11: Ecclesiastes 3

Ecclesiastes 3 is beautiful chapter teaching us about time. Everything has its time. There is a right time for everything. There are times when one must do one thing and there are other times when one must do the opposite. We need the wisdom to know when to do the right things. Whatever is done by man is seen by God and will be judged. God tests man to see if they are any better than the animals. Man must rise above his animal instincts and show that he is more than an animal. That is, he must follow God's ways. We should think careful about how we use our time. Our lives are short and need to be lived wisely.

#### Day 12: Ecclesiastes 12

Ecclesiastes continues its theme on time in its final chapter. Chapter 12 is a description of old age. The reader is invited to remember their Creator before age takes away their abilities. Here old age is described in an unusual way. For example, the stars going dark, and clouds are descriptions of poor eyesight (verse 2). The trembling and stooping are old muscles and bones (verse 3). Much of the language used is more appropriate for an old broken-down city. You will be able to interpret the other features with a bit of thought. This chapter is an example of the need to really think about what the message really is. In many places, the Bible requires us to think about what is being said rather than just read everything plainly. The book of Ecclesiastes ends with a plain statement that cannot be misunderstood; "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (verse 13). This summarises the discovery of what the wisest man Solomon found in His life. They are wise words for us to remember and make as a priority in our own lives.

#### Day 13: Psalm 49

Psalm 49 continues to teach about God's way of thinking. In this case, God tells us about what He thinks of rich people. The rich trust in themselves rather than God. We should not be jealous of rich people because they will not last for long. They may enjoy life while they are alive, but they will die like the animals (as we learnt in Ecclesiastes 3:18). That will be the end of them. In contrast, those

who do what God wants will have a future. They will have their life redeemed from the grave (verse 15). That is, they will be raised from the dead to live again. This is a theme throughout the Bible, which particularly is taught in the New Testament. The Bible teaches us about life and death, and God's solution to death.

#### Day 14: Ecclesiastes 5

We continue to think about God and riches in Ecclesiastes 5. Firstly, consider God. When we speak to God or about God, we should be careful with our words. This is not surprising since God is so great and knows what we say. It is best to control what we say and speak less when we are in the presence of God. Secondly, we learn more about riches. We learn that the rich man ends up with many problems from his riches. When he is rich, he needs servants who end up consuming his riches so that he needs even more riches. Rich men are never satisfied with having enough riches. Said simply, rich men are never satisfied. Riches do not buy happiness. It is better to work and be satisfied with our wages and the things we have in this life. Contentment is better than riches.

#### Day 15: Proverbs 3

Both Proverbs and Ecclesiastes were written by Solomon. Proverbs 3 teaches us the need to keep God's commands and follow God's teaching. This is like Solomon's other words at the end of Ecclesiastes. We are promised a blessing if we keep God's commands – the blessing of long life and prosperity. God should be the focus of our lives. We should trust God to direct our lives. We should honour God in our words and wealth. God's wisdom is better than anything money can buy. It can give us life, honour, and peace. There may be times of discipline. We should accept these and learn from them. If we are disciples, then God is treating us as His children. Children do need guiding in the right ways to behave. God's ways are always the best.

#### Day 16: Isaiah 40

In the next few days, we will go back to learning more about God. This time we will go to the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah 40 is an awesome chapter. It starts by telling us God's intention to help Jerusalem, which is also known as 'Zion'. We are told about the greatness of God. Compared to God, all the nations of the world are like just a drop in a bucket or like dust on scales! This gives us a sense of proportion of the greatness of God compared to man. We are also given a comparison between God and the idols people used to make and worship. Idols cannot move or do anything, whereas God made the heavens. God does not get tired like man. There is no limit to God's understanding. Man should not think that God does not know what is happening in their lives. God knows everything. Those who trust in Him will be blessed. They will run and not get tired. They will soar like eagles.

#### Day 17: Isaiah 45

The last part of Isaiah is a bit like the Psalms. It is awesome and informative. We will pick out a couple of them. Isaiah 45 starts by talking about a future king called Cyrus, who God will send. God is in control of the earth, and He arranges things according to His plan. God has the ability to make these things happen. Cyrus would be the future king of Persia and would do the work God intended him to do at the right time. God arranges for people to do different work as part of His great plan. God can bring about good things and what we would call 'bad' things. That does not mean God is the source of evil, but it does mean He can punish man for his sin. Man is like clay in the hands of God the potter. Just as a clay pot cannot quarrel with its maker, neither should man quarrel with his maker. God made the earth as part of His purpose so that man could live on it. His plan is to save mankind and He calls on man to come and be saved. It is a great plan and God will make it happen.

#### Day 18: Isaiah 55

God's call to people to be saved takes the form of a request for people to come and drink. This is spiritual language indicating that the reader should ask to drink of the message of God and be saved. The message includes the promise of God to David which we will read about later. We learn again that God thinks differently from man. The difference between God and man is like the difference between heaven and earth. When man makes plans, most of what he says will not happen. In contrast, when God speaks His words, then the words will happen. The final purpose of God's words is to bring about joy and peace in this world. This is symbolised by even the mountains and trees rejoicing. Since God's words always achieve their objective, this will happen. It is another example of God's plan to bring about a better age.

#### Day 19: Deuteronomy 10:12-22

We have learnt about the greatness of God from many difficult angles. How does God want us to react to learning this? We should fear God, walk in His ways, love God, and keep His commands. This passage from Deuteronomy is what God originally told His people Israel. He tells us why He chose Israel as His special people. It was because of the original fathers of the nation. When they originally migrated to Egypt there were only seventy of them. Now they were as many as the stars in heaven. God gives us further information about Himself. He is not prejudiced against people. He particularly loves the widows, fatherless and aliens. God deserves the praise of His people.

#### Day 20: Genesis 1

So far, we have learnt about God and God's ways. God has given man the task of following His ways rather than following his own desires. We have learnt about how great God is. Now we understand this, we will go back to the beginning of the Bible and read how life started. The world started as a planet covered in water and darkness. Then God made different things on different days. It took Him six days. Man was made at the end of the sixth day, as if the great finale. He was the only thing made to look like God. He was special. He was made ruler of other living things.

#### Day 21: Genesis 2

After the 6 days of creating, God rested from His creating work. God rested on the seventh day. This set the pattern for our seven-day week. We are given more details about how God made man and woman. Adam was made from dust but had to be given the breath of God before he could live. He was placed in a garden with the job of looking after it. He was commanded not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Although the creation was very good, there was one thing that was not good. It was not good for man to be alone. None of the animals were able to meet his need. So God made a helper – woman, who came from his own body. In doing so, God created the first human couple as well as the marriage relationship.

#### Day 22: Psalm 104

The early chapters of Genesis are the foundation of the Bible. The events are referred to many times in different places. One of these is Psalm 104. Psalm 104 describes the features of creation, which God paid attention to when He set everything in order. We note the careful design of the water. This was prevented from covering the earth like it was before and provides for the needs of plant and animal life. God set the sun, moon, and stars in order, so that animals have a daily cycle. God provides life with what it needs to live and even enjoy life. But just as easily as God gave life, He can take it away. Man without the breath from God returns to the dust. These facts should cause us to thank God for the life we have and the blessing He gives us each day.

#### Day 23: Genesis 3

In the beginning God made everything very good. Genesis 3 tells us that man spoiled it. He disobeyed the one command that God gave him. Genesis 3 records the 'fall of man'. There was a beast that could talk and reason. It gave Eve the idea of eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which God had forbidden. Eve liked the idea and thought of 3 reasons why she should eat. She encouraged Adam to do the same, and he ate too. God was aware of what they had done. We then have the judgement of God on the three – man, woman, and the beast. All three were guilty and were punished. The beast became a dumb snake. The woman was to have the pain of childbirth and put up with her husband ruling over her. Adam was to suffer the pain of hard labour all his life until he returned to the ground. In other words, Adam was to die. Although we are not expressly told, we must infer that Eve and the snake also died. And man was banished from the garden of God. This follows a principle in the Bible that disobedience separates man from God.

#### Day 24: Ecclesiastes 9

Death is a reality; the knowledge of which man has had to live with. Man lives and then he dies. God tells us what about death and the state of the dead in Ecclesiastes 9. Everyone will die in the same way. Even the righteous and the wicked die in the same way. When they are dead, we are told the dead do not know anything. That is the end of them. Therefore, God advises man to make the most of life while he has it. No man knows when his end will come.

#### Day 25: Psalm 90

Psalm 90 contrasts man's length of life with God. God is eternal. Time is not a problem for God. With God a thousand years are just like one day. Compared to God, man is like grass which grows and then dries up and is gone. Man may live 70 or 80 years, but this is still nothing compared to God. Because of the shortness of our life, we should use our time wisely. Who knows when our life will come to an end? God may decide our time is completed sooner than we think. Each day when we get up, we can thank God for his gift of life.

Day 26: John 11:1-44

We have learnt about death. At times, rarely, God has brought back people from the dead. In John 11 we have the example of a Lazarus. Lazarus was a friend of Jesus who died but was raised from the dead by Jesus. The chapter teaches us that God can overcome death. The person who He has tasked with bringing this about is Jesus. Jesus is therefore 'the resurrection and the life.' This means that, through Jesus, disciples have the hope of the resurrection from being dead and can live again. It teaches us that there will be a resurrection of the dead in the future.

Day 27: John 5:1-30

We have learnt about the resurrection of the dead. Here is another passage which teaches this. John 5 tells us about a time when Jesus healed a lame man. In the discussion that follows, Jesus explains the work he has been given to do by God. Part of this work is bringing about the resurrection of the dead. This is a future time when the voice of the Son of God – Jesus - would raise the dead. Included in this time is a judgment of who are true disciples. Those who are true disciples will still die, but if they do, they will be raised from the dead. Because of this, they are described as if they have passed from death to life. This is spiritual language for the fact that true disciples are going to be raised to life even though they will first die.

Day 28: Joshua 24:1-27

The Bible is a description of God's relationship with His people and with individuals. From this chapter we learn what God expects from His people and how God interacts with them. Anyone who wants to understand the Bible will need to learn about some of these individuals and the major events in Israel's history. Joshua 24 is an overview of the early history of Israel. Joshua himself was about to die, and he was passing on the responsibility to the elders of the people of Israel. He tells them that their history started with Abraham, then Isaac, and then Jacob. Later Moses was sent to bring the people out of Egypt. Moses handed over the responsibility to Joshua who led the people in taking over the land of Canaan. As Joshua was about to hand over his responsibility to the people, Joshua councils the people to serve God. The people agree to do this. They made a covenant to follow God.

Day 29: Acts 7:1-53

We will now build on what we learnt from Joshua 24. Here in Acts 7, we are given the early history of Israel in more detail. Their history starts with Abraham when God chose Abraham and spoke to



him. The history goes through Isaac and Jacob. Then we are told about Joseph, who was a son of Jacob. We are told more about the life of Moses, who received God's law at Mount Sinai. Joshua is mentioned and then a brief mention of David. The history lesson ends with a complaint about the Israelites themselves. They had always resisted obeying God and His commands. The names we mentioned were some of the exceptions to this. We will learn more about Abraham and David in month 2.

Day 30: 1 Corinthians 13

We end month one of Bible reading with a lovely passage that everyone should know. It is a chapter about love and what true love is. Love is demonstrated by behaviour. Love is better than anything else. God acts out of love. It is how God behaves. The verse before chapter 13 calls love a 'most excellent way.' The verse after chapter 13 appeals to us to follow the way of love.

We have started our Bible reading that there are two ways in which we can live. The way of man or the way of God. We end month one with learning about the way of love, which is the way of God. Man's natural way is not a way of love. God wants us to follow the way of love.

### **What we learnt in Month One and what we can expect in Month Two**

We started reading the Bible and we have looked at a number of parts from many different places. We have learnt that the Bible describes life as two ways. There is the way of God, which is the way of wisdom and leads to life. And there is the way of man, which is the way of foolishness and leads to death. God has given us a choice.

We have looked at what the Bible says about God and man. The two are quite different. We learnt about the greatness of God and God's personality. We have learnt about God's view of time and how He created life. Our life is a blessing which we should be thankful for. And we have learnt about man. Man is limited in his time and will die. However, the Bible also teaches us about the resurrection from the dead. Man has hope of a better life.

We learnt that the Bible contains a lot of history. It is a book about God's relationship with man. If man obeys what is right, it will go well with Him. The opposite is also true. The Bible offers a right relationship with God. We will learn more about what God wants in month two of Bible reading.

During the next month, we will also learn more about important characters – Cain, Noah, Abraham, David, and Jesus. We will also add more wisdom and introduce the teaching around the future kingdom of God.

Day 31: Psalm 8

Psalm 8 helps us get everything in perspective. When we look at the heavens, we feel so small. Since God made the heavens, looking up makes us feel small compared to God. It makes us appreciate the greatness of God, who is greater than the things he has made. God made man to rule over His creation. Man rules because God wanted Him to. But how does man rule? We are left to think about man in comparison with God and whether man fulfils the purpose that God intended him for.

#### Day 32: Psalm 19

Psalm 19 continues the theme of looking at the heavens. When one looks upwards at the stars, we are looking at the glory of God – the greatness of God. It does not matter what language we speak. When we look up, we are caused to think about what it tells us. It is like someone talking to us in a universal language and saying that God made them and He is great. The sun is likened to a bridegroom coming from his chamber or a champion running a race.

The Psalm then switches half-way through to talk about God's law. We are left wondering what is the connection between God's laws and the heavens. Do the heavens operate according to God's commands? They must be. Like the heavens, God's laws are amazing in their own way. It can revive us, give us wisdom, give us joy, give us light and understanding. It is more valuable than gold and sweeter than honey. It is all this because it keeps us on the right way. It points us in the right direction in life. Given that God's laws are in the Bible and can help us so much, why would we not read the Bible daily?

#### Day 33: Psalm 119:1-24

Psalm 119 puts many people off because it is the longest chapter in the Bible. But it is full of detail about the law of God and how it can be used to direct our lives. Verse 1 is a good introduction, because it tells us how we can walk in the right direction and be without fault before God. The word of God can be our guide in life to help us on the right path. It can keep us from sin. When we think about the law itself, we can see that it is wonderful. It deserves our attention.

#### Day 34: Psalm 119:89-112

In this section from the longest chapter of the Bible, we continue to read about the value of God's law. It is eternal and has no limit to its perfection. We can love the law and get its wisdom. We will then become wiser than the people around us. God's law is sweeter than honey. It is like a light which shines ahead of us and makes the right path clear to us. It can guide us through our lives so that we reach the journey end with joy.

#### Day 35: Deuteronomy 5

The 10 Commandments are best examples in the Bible of the law of God. They are the basis of western civilisation and law making. Deuteronomy 5 is a repeat of Exodus 20 where the 10 commandments were first given. However, the Deuteronomy reading gives a bit more of the context to allow you to understand more of what happened. When the 10 commandments were given, they were accompanied by loud voices, fire, cloud, and deep darkness. The sound of the commands was so awesome that it was designed to make the people fear and obey them. The chapter ends with another reference to the need to walk in the right way and not deviate from it.

#### Day 36: Deuteronomy 6

This chapter follows on from the 10 Commandments. If Israel was to follow the commandments, then God would ensure that things would go well with the people. We then have one of the most important verses in Jewish teaching, verse 4 – “Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God, the Lord is one”. It is so important that the Jews have given it the name of ‘the Shema’ – meaning “hear”. There was only one God, and He must be heard. This must be taught to the children so that the next generation knows about it. The commands must be visible in their lives so that they are not forgotten. They needed to follow God’s way and not follow the ways of the world. Obeying God’s law would make them righteous – that is, it would make them right with God.

#### Day 37: Psalm 37

The theme of following the right way continues throughout the Bible. Psalm 37 is another place where the difference between those who follow the right way and those who follow the wrong way are very clear. This Psalm was written to stop people being tempted to leave the right way. The people should continue to trust in Him because it will turn out right in the end. Doing the right things will result in peace, blessings, and a great future. Those who follow wicked ways will live for a little time, but then will be gone. The writer is king David who is an old man at this stage. He reflects on his experiences in life. He has never seen the righteous forsaken by God. It ends with encouragement for God’s people to continue to do the right thing.

#### Day 38: Psalm 34

Psalm 34 describes how following the right way results in great blessings. The person walking in the right way is called ‘righteous’. This does not mean he is perfect, but it means he is genuinely following the right way. Like all people, they will have troubles. The difference between the righteous and the wicked is that the righteous are cared for by God, and they will be saved out of these troubles. God will send His angel to look after His people. God will be a refuge. This is a lovely Psalm that can give us comfort in our troubles.

#### Day 39: Genesis 4

We now go back to an important event early in man’s history. Way back with the first family, things did not go well with the children of Adam. One child, Abel, followed God. Another child, Cain, did not. The pattern of the two ways in life happened with the two children of Adam. Cain chose his own way. This was the path of jealousy and murder. Abel chose God’s way. We are all indirectly children of Adam. We too have the choice as to which way we will follow in life. Cain becomes a pattern of hate and what brothers should not do in the Bible. Brothers were designed to love one another. Love is the godly way. But Cain choose an ungodly way.

#### Day 40: Genesis 6

We have missed out Genesis 5 because it is genealogies. The Bible has many of these. These are given because it helps us put everything into a perspective. It also tells us that God sees everything and is interested in families. Although the time span of this genealogy covers 1500 years, we know little about it. This chapter takes us to the family of Noah and the events of his life. There are many

lessons picked up by the world of Noah. Noah was different from the rest of the world because he followed God's ways. The world itself had descended into violence and away from what God wanted. God stopped the cycle of human violence by sending a flood. God used Noah and his family to start again with man by the building of an ark. The covering of the world with the flood was like going back to the original state in the beginning when the water covered the earth. It was a fresh start.

#### Day 41: Genesis 9

Genesis chapters 7 and 8 describe the timing and events of the flood. By Genesis 9, Noah had come out of the ark and sacrificed burnt offerings as a gift of thanks to God. In response, God gave Noah a blessing. The rainbow is a sign that God will not flood the world again. It is through Noah that God saved the world and brought peace to it. Noah becomes a pattern of 'salvation' (a long word meaning 'saving') in the Bible. God made it clear to Noah and his family that they must not be like the violent people before the flood. Murder is not permitted. Apart from the obvious reason, another reason for this law is that man was made in the image of God, and in the act of murder an image of God is destroyed. Man was also asked not to eat meat with blood in it.

God set these laws and blessings in the terms of a covenant. This is an agreement between God and man that both sides keep their part of the agreement. God did this so that the world would not descend into violence like before the flood and so that God would need to destroy the world again. The chapter ends with the events of Noah's family. It reads as though Ham just saw his father's nakedness. However, when we look at the use of this term in the Bible, nakedness often refers to sex. There is usually more to the simple meaning of the words, and we must search the Bible to understand the full meaning of what has been written.

#### Day 42: Genesis 12

In Genesis 12 we are introduced to a special man chosen by God. Abraham had faith in what God said and he obeyed what God asked of him. In return, God made a promise to Abraham. Abraham would have many children. At the time of this promise, his wife was barren. God promised that all nations on earth would be blessed through Abraham. This means that Abraham is important to everyone. God also promised to give Abraham and his children the land of the Canaanites.

#### Day 43: Genesis 15

In Genesis 15, God repeated His promises to Abraham. Abraham still had no children and he still lived as a stranger in the land of Canaan. God confirmed His promise by a torch and oven passing between the two halves of animals. This was the form of covenant in those days (see Jeremiah 34:18-19). God was effectively saying, "Let me be cut in half if I do not keep my promise." This was a way of saying that this covenant of God was certain. God also predicted some troubles on Abraham's descendants. This would happen when his children - or descendants as the word also

means in the Bible – would go into a foreign country. This happened at the time of Joseph when they went down into Egypt, where they ended up as slaves before Moses lead them out.

#### Day 44: 1 Samuel 17

We now move on to another great Bible character – David. David was a young lad when God chose him because his heart was right. In 1 Samuel 17 we have the famous battle between David and Goliath. King Saul was afraid to fight this giant enemy and want one of his men to fight instead. David was an unknown. His victory over Goliath moved him to fame. It was a victory of faith because David trusted in God to save him. David's life was to become complicated because his victory made the king jealous. We later read of an unfortunate turn of events, where the king hunted David down. Many of the Psalms were written by David in this difficult period of his life. Only after fleeing to another country and the death of the king was David able to return and become king.

#### Day 45: 1 Chronicles 17

Like Abraham, David was an exceptional man of faith. Like Abraham, God made a promise to David. These promises were very unusual. God promised to bless the descendants of these two important people. Both these promises are referred to in many places in the rest of the Bible. 1 Chronicles 17 records what God promised David. David would have a descendant who would be king on his own throne. This descendant would build a house for God and would reign for ever. The words 'for ever' mean that this son could not be Solomon. He would also be called the son of God. We are sure you can work out who this descendent would be!

#### Day 46: Psalm 32

Many of the Psalms were written by David. We have a lot of information about the life of David from the history books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles. The Psalms give us the thoughts and feelings of David at different stages in his life. At one stage, David committed a great sin, by staging the death of a husband and then by taking the wife. This double sin of murder and adultery was something that David deeply regretted. He was greatly punished for it, and his life became a series of troubles. But his attitude to his sin and his regret is something that we can learn from. It can tell us what God views about sin, and how the sinner should appeal to God for forgiveness. If we sin, we do not need to feel our situation is hopeless. We must admit our sin with God and rely on God's great love and forgiveness. God is willing to forgive those who admit sin, are sorry in heart and determine not to repeat the mistake.

#### Day 47: Mark 1

The promises God made to Abraham and David spoke of a descendent by whom all the nations in the world would be blessed. They spoke of a son who would also be the son of God. Someone who was also born to be king. This is Jesus. In the next series of chapters, we will introduce the beginning and ending of the ministry of Jesus. We will also introduce some of his teaching. We have chosen the gospel of Mark to tell us about the beginning of his ministry, because it is concise, avoids

long genealogies and avoids spiritual language. This gospel just simply gives us the details. It tells us how Jesus was given spiritual gifts at his baptism which enabled him to heal the sick. It also tells us a bit about his cousin, John the Baptist.

#### Day 48: Matthew 5

The teaching of Jesus is best seen in the 'Sermon on the Mount.' We have already read part of it. Now we will look at the first part. It starts with a famous series of blessings known as the 'Beatitudes.' The focus of the teaching is on the believer having the right attitude and character. Jesus also teaches about the Law of Moses and brings out the real meaning of the laws. For example, murder comes from the heart that is angry with another. Jesus tells us not to get angry but to live peacefully with others. Another example is adultery. Here the problem is really lust. Lust must be controlled. In this way, Jesus goes to the source of the problem and promotes the believer to have the right heart. If we are honest, we will see that the standards of Jesus' teaching are harder than parts of the Law of Moses. Of course, Jesus also practiced what he preached.

#### Day 49: Luke 10:25 to 11:13

The passage in Luke 10 teaches us the parable of the good Samaritan. This teaches us who is our neighbour. Our neighbour is anyone regardless of nationality. It teaches what it means to love our neighbour. We must go out of our way to help those who are in need. We are then introduced to an important family and the sisters, Mary and Martha. We can be like Martha and worry about the things in this life. But it would be better to be like Mary and choose to learn about the spiritual things from Jesus.

Luke 11 is chosen because all believers must learn about prayer and must learn how to pray. The Lord's prayer is a good starting point. It teaches us to try and see things from God's point of view, and to ask for things which are reasonable. We should try not to only repeat the Lord's prayer but to use it as a model for our own words.

#### Day 50: Luke 18

Luke 18 is also about prayer. It is about the need to keep on praying and not stopping praying. If you have not started praying, then you should consider praying today. God does not need fancy language or educated speech. What He wants is humble words from the heart and words chosen following what we have learnt from reading His Bible. God wants a relationship with us. When we read the Bible, we hear Him talking to us. When we pray, God hears us talking to Him. If we are worried that God does not want to hear our prayer, then think about how God even wants little children to come to Him. The final part of the chapter includes a vital question; "How can we get eternal life?" The answer is important and is consistent with what we have already read. We need to keep the commandments of Jesus. We should note that getting eternal life is linked with the Kingdom of God. We will introduce the kingdom of God after we have read about the events at the end of the ministry of Jesus. Jesus refers to this right at the end of the chapter. Jesus knew what was to happen to him and that he had to die a cruel death. Imagine that!

#### Day 51: Luke 23

Luke 23 starts with the leaders of the Jews taking Jesus to the Roman governor to try and get the death sentence. The Jews did not have the authority to pass the death sentence, because they were ruled by the Romans. But justice was not done. The Jews pressurised the Romans to get their demands and an innocent man was killed. The Jews killed their king with the help of the Romans. God saw the events. He caused darkness to come on the land because spiritual darkness was gaining a victory. What a sad chapter in the Bible and in man's history!

#### Day 52: Luke 24

The death of Jesus was not the end of his story. God intervened and saw that justice was done. He raised Jesus from the dead. The disciples were so surprised that they needed a lot of convincing. Jesus explained that his death and resurrection had been predicted in all three parts of the Old Testament – the Law of Moses (the first 5 books), the Prophets, and the Psalms (which would include the section from Job to Song of Solomon). Jesus had to explain why this was so. Now that he had been raised from the dead, the message of repentance and forgiveness of sins needed to go out to the whole world. The gospel ends with Jesus blessing the disciples and going to heaven. The disciple's delight was expressed as thanks to God.

#### Day 53: Acts 1

The act of Jesus going to heaven is often called the 'Ascension.' The details of this event are contained in Acts chapter 1. This book of the Bible is more fully known as 'The acts of the apostles,' because it describes what the apostles did after Jesus went to heaven. After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples and spoke about the Kingdom of God. The disciples asked him the obvious question – when would the kingdom of God occur? In reply, Jesus said that they were not to know. Instead, they should concentrate on witnessing to the message of Jesus throughout the world. This was to start at Jerusalem. Jesus then went to heaven in a cloud from the Mount of Olives, which was the mountain just east of Jerusalem and overlooking it. We are told that Jesus would not remain in heaven but would come back in the same way. In the meantime, the disciples continued meeting and praying together. Judas was replaced as an apostle by Matthias. The word 'apostle' means 'sent', because the apostles that were sent to preach by Jesus.

#### Day 54: Psalm 72

Like the death and resurrection of Jesus, the kingdom of God is taught throughout the Bible. We will look at a couple of passages where the kingdom of God is taught in the Old Testament. The first of these is Psalm 72. It talks about a king who would reign with justice. In particular, he would ensure justice was done for the poor and needy. His reign would be a time of righteousness and peace. Righteousness is a long word which simply means doing what is right. The king would ensure that the people in his kingdom would do what is right. His kingdom would be a time of plenty. The reign of the king would be a long time - as long as the sun. The Psalm ends with the fact that all nations will be blessed through him. These are the words of the promise God made to Abraham. It is Jesus who will ensure God's promise to Abraham is achieved.

#### Day 55: Isaiah 35

Isaiah has many descriptions of the kingdom of God. Isaiah 35 is one of them. It gives us a picture of what a future time will be like, which matches the kingdom of God descriptions elsewhere. This is a time when flowers will grow in the desert. The language is not plain, but it is clear what it is saying. The land becoming glad meaning that it is a time when the land is blessed. We can work out what it means with a bit of thought. It is a time when the disabled are healed. It is a time when the threat of wild animals is removed. There is a road that goes to Zion, which is another word for Jerusalem. Those who walk on this road will have everlasting joy and no more sorrow. This is a time of great blessing for the earth.

#### Day 56: Revelation 21

We now go to the final book of the Bible. In the final chapters of the Bible we get a picture of what the earth will be like right at the end. The language is symbolic. It is like a new heaven and a new earth. The righteous believers are symbolised as the new Jerusalem – that is, it is a large number who have followed God in the right way. The city is called ‘heavenly’ which means that it is godly. They will physically live on earth with God. There is no more crying and pain. There is even no more death. This symbolic Jerusalem is also described as a bride. If there is a bride, then there is a husband. The husband is Jesus, who is also called the ‘Lamb’. He is the lamb because when he died, he was like a lamb going to the slaughter. The time is the opposite of the time at the beginning of the Bible. Instead of only darkness, there is now only light. Instead of sea, there is only land. We see that the God takes us from a dark stormy sea in the beginning to a kingdom of light at the end. We see many opposites or parallels between the beginning and end of the Bible. This gives us confidence that its message is consistent.

#### Day 57: Revelation 22

This is the final chapter of the Bible. We can see more similarities with the beginning of the Bible. Instead of the sea, which cannot support land life, we have the water of life which must be fresh water and can support life. Instead of the tree of life in Genesis, which was lost, we have the tree of life which was found. Instead of the curse of Genesis, we learn that the curse is removed. The chapter confirms that these words are trustworthy and true. We are informed that Jesus is coming soon to bring about this time. We can agree with the final appeal of this chapter – come, Lord Jesus, and bring this time.

#### Day 58: Matthew 25

Much of Jesus’ teaching was about being ready for the kingdom of God. In Matthew 25, we are given three parables which teach that we must be ready for it. The parable of the ten virgins teaches us that we must have our light shining. This is a symbol of living by the gospel. The parable of the talents teaches us that we must not be found to be lazy in our faith when the time of the kingdom comes. The parable of the sheep and the goats teaches us that we must be active in our faith and help the needy. It teaches us that there will be a judgment. This is a time when the believers are judged as to whether they are faithful. God does not want fake believers in His kingdom, so there will be a time when the believers are sorted out like sheep and goats. Only those believers who



shine their light, who are active in their faith and who help the needy will be welcomed into the kingdom of God.

It may be a surprise to you that not everyone will be in the kingdom of God. It may be a surprise to you that there is a judgment. But this teaching is not alone. You will read more about this in tomorrow's reading.

Day 59: Matthew 13:24-52

Matthew 13 has another set of parables about the kingdom of God. These teach us that God allows the wicked and the righteous to develop side by side, but then there will be a separation or judgment. At this time the wicked are discarded and the righteous taken to the kingdom. The theme of the judgment follows in the parable of the fish net, where the good fish are kept and the bad fish destroyed. The parables of the mustard seed and yeast teach that the kingdom of God starts small but later fills the whole earth. The parables of the treasure and the great pearl teach us that the kingdom of God will be so good that it is worth giving all we have in life to find it and enter into it.

Day 60: Luke 13

Luke 13 contains words of Jesus about the kingdom. It starts with the question of disasters and whether the particularly wicked are destroyed by disasters. Jesus answers this by saying that all of us must be careful. We must make sure we have repented and turned to God otherwise we will pass away like those in the disaster.

Jesus tells us about a vineyard, which is a symbol of the nation of Israel. Jesus did not want it destroyed and wanted to give it an opportunity of one more year. By this Jesus meant that he wanted to give Israel extra time to repent.

Following another healing miracle, the disciples ask how many will be saved and enter the kingdom of God? In reply, Jesus says that it is like looking for a small door. It is hard to find, and not many will find it. We are told that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the prophets will be there, as well as people from all over the world. But some of God's people will not be there. The fact that there will be people there from all over the world gives us hope.

### **What we learnt in Month Two and what we can expect in Month Three**

We started by reading about the laws of God. These are as great as the heavens and can lead to life and blessing. By following the laws of God, we can walk in the right way with God. God sees the difference between the way righteous and the wicked walk. Examples of this were seen with Cain and Abel, and with Noah's family compared to the people of the world. It was the wickedness of man that caused God to send the flood, destroy all other men and start again from the family of Noah.

We read about the faith of Abraham and David, and how God made special promises to them. Both promises predicted the coming of Jesus. We then read about the beginning, the death, the resurrection, the ascension, and the future return of Jesus. We learnt about the kingdom of God that Jesus would bring about. Jesus taught about this future time of the kingdom in his parables.

Not many will find the way into the kingdom of God. We must seek carefully to enter it if we want to be there.

Now that we have learnt about the most important names in the Bible, we will look at some other important people. We will learn about Abraham's sons and Moses. We will add more understanding of wisdom and more information on what the kingdom of God would be like. We will then learn about the 12 disciples of Jesus and what it means to be a disciple.

#### Day 61: Genesis 22

The promise of God to Abraham meant that Abraham had to have a son. Abraham did not have a son until he was 100 years old, long past the normal age of childbearing. This meant that Abraham had to keep faith in God's promise even though it looked impossible from a human point of view. The promise meant that God had to perform a miracle so that an old couple could have a son. The son was born and was called Isaac, meaning 'laughter'. Everyone who heard about the birth of Isaac would laugh!

In Genesis 22 we read that God tested Abraham with Isaac. Abraham was required to kill his own son. Abraham was able to pass the test. When it came to it, Abraham put his faith in God above his love for Isaac. And God intervened so that Abraham did not need to kill his son. The event reminds us of what God went through when He let his own son Jesus be killed. The place where this happened was later the site of God's temple in Jerusalem and then the place where God's son was killed! Genesis 22 is just one example of very many patterns of the life of Jesus we see in the Bible.

#### Day 62: Genesis 26

We are not told much about Isaac's life. Genesis 26 tells us a few important things. We learn that Abraham had followed God's laws, although we do not know specifically what laws they were. It is probably that many of the commands became part of the law of Moses. God repeated the promise He made to Abraham to Isaac. This means that the promise did not go through his other son Ishmael but passed only to Isaac. We learn about Isaac's marriage and the importance of sex only within marriage. Lastly, we learn about Isaac's character. He lived in peace with his neighbours even when they were confrontational. Even though he was right, he did not fight them. Instead, he backed away and trusted in God to look after him and his family. This is an example of how to trust in God and love your neighbour.

#### Day 63: Genesis 28

Isaac had twins called Esau and Jacob. Both these sons had struggles with their faith and with each other. Jacob had a turning point in his life, which we read in Genesis 28. He had a dream in which God repeated the promise God had made to Abraham and Isaac. Jacob responded to this dream by making a vow to serve God. The promise to Abraham was repeated to his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob. The promise was to them and their descendants. This means that the promise is now held by the nation of Israel, who were the descendants of Jacob. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are together known as the fathers of the nation of Israel.

#### Day 64: Genesis 35

Jacob went to live in the country of Aram (modern day Syria) for 20 years before returning. True to the vow Jacob had made, Jacob had been faithful. God had been true to the vow too and had looked after him. God had blessed Jacob with wives, concubines, children, herds, and flocks. Jacob returned to the same place where he made his original vow to God. God appeared to Jacob again at this place. God repeated His promise to Jacob and changed Jacob's name from Jacob to Israel. We are told the names of twelve of Jacob's sons. When each of their families developed into larger groups, they became known as the twelve tribes of Israel. These twelve tribes were kept separate and given distinct territories within the land of Israel.

#### Day 65: Genesis 45

One of Jacob's sons became more important than the rest. This was Joseph. Joseph was the favourite son of Jacob, which resulted in jealousy from the others. In a sad part of family history, Joseph was sold by his brothers as a slave and he was taken down to Egypt. His brothers and father assumed Joseph was dead, although for different reasons. The story of Joseph occupies many chapters at the end of Genesis. God was with Joseph, so that Joseph had become the second most important man in Egypt after Pharaoh. When there was a severe famine, Joseph was the one used by God to ensure there was food available. Genesis 45 is the emotional reunion of the brothers who had come to Joseph to buy food. Last time they had seen him Joseph was a young man when they had sold him as a slave. Joseph, looking like an Egyptian, revealed his identity to the shocked brothers. Joseph was a good man, and he forgave his brothers. He even provided food for them. In due course, Jacob's family came down to live in Egypt, where they grew from a family of 70 people to a nation.

#### Day 66: Exodus 3

We know nothing of Israel's time in Egypt, from the time between Joseph and the next important person, Moses. After many years in Egypt, their numbers grew, and they became a nation. Egypt was afraid the Israelites would become too powerful for them, so they made them into slaves. They made the life of these slaves bitter. God intervened by talking to Moses and sending him to Israel. Exodus 3 tells us of this encounter in what is known as the 'burning bush'. God introduced Himself to Moses as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He tells Moses that He was sending him to deliver their descendants from slavery and take them to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

#### Day 67: Exodus 4

Moses asked God why should the descendants of Jacob believe him? In answer, God gives Moses the ability to perform three miraculous signs. His staff could become a snake and then a staff again. His hand could become leprous and back again. And he was able to turn water from the river Nile into blood. This is what happened when he did meet the Israelites, and they did believe him. In rare cases, God does give people the ability to perform miracles. The most well-known example of this is Jesus and his disciples.

Moses still did not have confidence to carry out God's task. He complained that he was not good at speaking. God gave him his brother Aaron to help him. While Moses was returning to Egypt, God threatened to kill Moses because Moses had not circumcised his son. Circumcision was part of God's promise to Abraham, and it required all the male children to be circumcised. This chapter teaches us that those God chooses must obey the commands. It would be a problem if Moses was leading the people of Israel and he did not keep the commands himself. This story also teaches us that God does not choose the greatest people from a human point of view to lead His people.

#### Day 68: Exodus 24

The story of how Moses led the nation out of Israel is covered in the early and middle chapters of Exodus. Moses led them to a mountain called Mount Sinai, where he received the 10 commandments and 70 other laws. Moses explained these laws to the leaders of the people, and they agreed that they would keep them. Exodus 24 describes that agreement between the people and God, which became known as the Mosaic covenant or the covenant of Moses. Like a will, this was a covenant which was sealed with a death. The death was that of a bull, and its blood was sprinkled over the people. The covenant was that Israel would worship God and keep His commands. On the side of God, the covenant was that God would look after Israel as His special people. When the covenant was made, an extremely rare event happened. God allowed Himself to be seen. Quite how much was seen and what was seen we do not know. It may have been an angel representing God. Following this, Moses was called up into the mountain for a further 40 days and nights. When the people looked at the mountain, it looked like a consuming fire which Moses went into.

#### Day 69: Deuteronomy 9 to 10:11

Deuteronomy 9 and 10 gives us a summary of what happened on Mount Sinai. Things did not go well. While Moses was away on the mountain for 40 days and nights, Israel got impatient, made a calf idol of gold, and started to worship it. Such disobedience became a feature of Israel while they were in the wilderness. On Mount Sinai, Moses pleaded with God to forgive the people. As a result, God gave Moses two stone tablets with the 10 commandments written on them. These were placed in a wooden chest called an ark. The 10 commandments became known as the 'testimony' or the terms of God's covenant with Israel. When Israel travelled, they travelled with the ark. It was also known as the 'ark of the covenant'. It was the evidence of the original covenant between God and Israel.

#### Day 70: Hebrews 11

Now that we have learnt about the main characters in the Old Testament, we are able to read the famous chapter on faith. Faith is the confidence in the reality of things we cannot see. Hebrews 11 tells us that we cannot please God if we do not have faith. When we look at the lives of the Bible characters, we learn that they all had faith. They lived in faith. They suffered for their faith, and they died in faith. They did not receive what was promised to them. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all died without receiving the promise. They will still receive these promises because God does not lie. They will receive the promises at the same time as other believers will be rewarded for their faith. This is still at a future time.

#### Day 71: James 2

We can read about faith in the second half of James 2. The only faith that God values is an active faith. Faith is not shown by words that we agree with a system of religion. Faith is only faith if it is living. Faith must be acted on and seen in practice. James gives two examples – Abraham and Rahab, both of whom are mentioned in Hebrews 11. In both cases, their faith is acted on. Otherwise, if faith is not acted on, it is dead faith.

James is a practical letter. The first part of James 2 teaches us about favouritism. We must not favour the rich over the poor. God has chosen the poor of the world, who have faith to be in his kingdom. We will be judged for our actions, so we need to make sure we are not prejudiced. When we judge others, we need to be merciful. If we are merciful, then God will be merciful to us. Mercy triumphs over judgment! What a great statement that is!

#### Day 72: Hebrews 12

A review of the characters of faith in Hebrews 11 is followed by an appeal for us to live faithful lives. We must avoid the distractions of this life and fix our eyes on Jesus. We will then be able to run the race of life in the right way. Jesus himself gave up having worldly pleasure so that he could enjoy the future reward. As we live by faith, we will face struggles. We should accept these as if God was disciplining us like His children. Just as a father guides his children through discipline to grow up to be like him, so God disciplines us so that we can be like God. God does it for our long-term benefit, so that we become holy. Our hope is a better hope than Israel saw at Mount Sinai. Even so, we should fear God so that we can be in His kingdom.

#### Day 73: Proverbs 4

Hebrews 12 told us that God is treating us as sons. Proverbs also treats us like sons and gives us advice of how to walk in the right way. It tells us to become wise in God's ways above all things. Wisdom will bless us with peace and grace and health and life. With wisdom we can run without falling. With wisdom we can avoid the pitfalls of going off the right path. We need to put this wisdom in our hearts. We must guard our hearts because that is who we are. If our hearts are good, then we are good. If our heart is bad, then we are bad. We must guard our hearts above all things.

#### Day 74: Proverbs 10

There is much advice in Proverbs about how to be wise. Proverbs 10 starts a long section of the book with lots of individual pieces of advice. It is best to read the verses one at a time and pause and think about what has been said before passing to the next verse. Notice that the chapter uses the word 'righteous' 15 times. The righteous are those who live right with God and do the right things. The opposite of the righteous is the wicked and the opposite for the wise are the foolish. We can learn from the right way, and we can learn from the wrong way. We need to follow the right way and avoid the wrong way. Following the right way brings life and blessing.

#### Day 75: Proverbs 11

Proverbs 11 uses the word 'righteous' almost as many times as the previous chapter. Both chapters will give you an understanding of some of the advice in this important book. We should try and put this advice into our hearts, so that it can guide our steps. We should read the whole of Proverbs to become fully wise. While reading Proverbs is very good, we will have to move onto other important parts of the Bible to get an understanding of the whole Bible rather than just one book.

#### Day 76: Galatians 5:16-6:10

We can get God's wisdom from all parts of the Bible. In this passage from Galatians, we see the difference between the right way and the wrong way. The wrong way is called the 'acts of sinful nature' or 'works of the flesh.' Here 'flesh' is a term meaning the negative things of human nature. A list of what these negative things are is given. These are contrasted with a list of positive things that come by someone thinking in a godly or righteous way. In the passage the positive things are called 'the fruits of the spirit'. Like fruits, they are good things which God is looking for us to produce. If we are like a tree, then we should be a fruitful tree producing good fruit rather than an unfruitful tree or one producing bad fruit. Just like Jesus avoided negative behaviours and followed positive behaviours, so should we. If we come across someone who fails to live in the right way, then we need to help them be restored to the right way. This does not mean we can do what we like. As the letter says, we will reap what we sow. If we sow negative behaviours, we will reap destruction. If we sow positive behaviours, we will reap eternal life.

#### Day 77: Matthew 13:1-23

The parable of the Sower is possibly the most important parable that Jesus taught. Like most of the parables, it was about the kingdom. The message of the kingdom is like seed that falls into different places. The seed will only grow if it falls on the right land. The growth of the seed is like the response of the human heart to the message of the kingdom. There are those where the message does not even start to grow. These are like the seed that is eaten up by birds. There are those who do receive the gospel well but change their minds when trouble or persecution comes. This is like seed landing on rocky ground. There are seeds which land among thorns. They grow up but then struggle to grow well. These are like those who hear the word but become disturbed by worries and wealth. Then there is the seed which grows and grows and produces fruit. These are the ones who will be in the kingdom of God. The parable carries the implied message for us all – How will we respond to the message of the kingdom?

#### Day 78: Isaiah 11

We will now add several passages which speak about the kingdom. We already did some of this at the end of last month. Many of the clearest pictures of the kingdom are from the prophet Isaiah. The language needs a bit of explanation. It starts with talking about Jesse, who was the father of King David. David's family tree of kings was cut down when the last of Israel's kings died. But a new king, a new branch, will grow. This is Jesus. Isaiah says he will be blessed with spirit gifts from God, which Jesus was. Jesus will come with justice and righteousness. There will be peace among the

animals and the land will be full of the knowledge of God. In his day, Israel will not be oppressed by hostile neighbours. These neighbours will become helpful!

#### Day 79: Isaiah 32

Isaiah 32 describes the future reign of a king. There will be righteousness and justice. The wicked will not get away with their ways but will be exposed as wicked. The fool will be exposed as a fool. The noble will be exposed as noble. There will be healing of the disabled. The chapter has a break from speaking of the future to the problems of the present, but then returns to the blessing of the future. It is the giving of the spirit of God that results in the blessings of the future time. There will be fertility of crops and livestock. There will be justice and righteousness resulting in peace. This future kingdom cannot be made by man. But there is a time coming when God will intervene and change the world into something better. This is the kingdom of God.

#### Day 80: Isaiah 60

Isaiah 60 also tells us of a future that is glorious for God's people. It is centred on the city of Jerusalem, which is also called 'Zion'. The nations will bring honour and wealth to this city and assist God's people travelling to the city. The nations will serve God. If the nations do not, they will be punished. Zion will experience a golden age of peace and prosperity. In figurative language, the walls are called 'Salvation' and the gates 'Praise'. Conditions never seen before will be experienced. God will provide the light for the city. There will be no more sorrow. The righteous will live for ever, meaning they have been given eternal life. The people are described as like plants who are fruitful.

#### Day 81: Isaiah 2:1-5 and 65:17-25

Isaiah 2 again tells us of a Jerusalem-based kingdom. It is on a mountain, which is Mount Zion. The Law of God will be taught in the city. God will judge among the nations and will ensure that there is peace. This will result in a time when, not only is there no war, but there are not even weapons or armies either. This is not a time of truce among armies; it is a time of full peace. This time is so different from the countries of the world today, that it is like a fresh start – a different era. Isaiah 65 describes it as a new heavens and earth. The physical heavens and earth still exist because it talks of Jerusalem and houses and trees. What is new is the new order, where the people (elsewhere called the heavens and earth) are new and different. Part of this difference is seen in the peace, employment, long life, and peace with God that they enjoy. Never has this been seen before. The teaching of Isaiah, and other passages, teaches us about a future era when there is true peace on earth and good will among men. This is the kingdom of God.

#### Day 82: Mark 3:1-19 and 6:1-12

Jesus is the one who will be the king of the kingdom of God. He taught about the kingdom in his parables. The people responded to this message in different ways, as we read in the parable of the Sower. Mark 3 gives us the extreme reactions. Some responded very badly by wanting to kill Jesus! Others responded by wanting to follow Jesus. Of those who responded well, Jesus chose twelve to

be his special apostles. The word 'apostle' means 'sent'. Jesus was to send these people out to preach the kingdom of God. He gave them the authority to heal people as well, which was evidence of the truth of their message. The twelve apostles are named in this passage. Peter, John, and James became the most well-known apostles and wrote some of the letters of the New Testament. In Mark 6, Jesus sent them out to preach and heal in the way Jesus did. By using the apostles, the message of the kingdom was able to go to many more people.

#### Day 83: Matthew 10

Matthew 10 contains more information on the sending out of the twelve apostles. It gives the principles involved when preaching the message of the kingdom and healing. There was the good and the bad aspects to this work. The good was that they would even be able to heal mental sicknesses and raise the dead. The bad was that they would get a bad reaction from people in authority. There was to be the same extreme reactions that Jesus himself received. This included the reaction of their own families. Jesus told them that peace on earth was not to be expected now. They were given advice on how to handle this. They were to be as wise as snakes but as harmless as doves. They were not to fight back. They must continue to witness for the message and carry their own cross, so that they will be acknowledged as being true disciples by God. True disciples are important to God, so they can take comfort in that. Those who welcome them also welcome Jesus. They will receive a reward.

#### Day 84: John 13:1-17

The challenges of being a disciple of Jesus became clearer as it got closer to the end of Jesus' ministry. Even two of the disciples struggled. Jesus predicted that Judas would betray him. Jesus also predicted that Peter would deny even being his friend. The chapter causes us to think about what it means for us to be a disciple of Jesus. Jesus said that all men will know that we are disciples of Jesus if we love one another. Jesus gave a demonstration of what it meant to love another. He washed the disciple's feet. Unlike today, where we wear shoes and our feet are usually clean, in those days they wore sandals, and their feet were always dirty. By washing the feet of Judas, Jesus set the example of how even the greatest among them needs to be a servant of the least.

#### Day 85: John 15

John 15 occurs during the last supper, which was the last meal Jesus was to have with his disciples. It has some of the last messages Jesus taught his disciples. Jesus calls himself a vine. He describes his disciples as branches. This means the disciples and Jesus are united, just like a vine is only one vine. We can only please God, the gardener, by remaining united and working together in this vine. We do this by loving one another. Jesus showed the greatest love that someone could for another by dying for them. We are the friends of Jesus if we keep his commands and produce spiritual fruit. There would be no point being part of a vine if we did not produce fruit (that is, grapes). Jesus warns that discipleship includes accepting that others will not like you. When disciples teach others about Jesus, it means they will get similar reactions as Jesus himself received. To help them, they would be given the spirit gifts from God.



#### Day 86: James 1

James writes in the name of Jesus to the disciples scattered about the countries. He wrote to Jewish Christians because he writes to the twelve tribes. They have been scattered, which means they have become refugees. They will have suffered in the process of being scattered. James writes to them to think positively about their troubles. Suffering for one's faith produces perseverance, which is necessary to become a mature Christian. The one who perseveres under trials will receive the promise of eternal life that has been promised. Those who are suffering from temptation should understand that temptations come from within a person and not outside. We must keep these under control and not forget what it means to be a Christian. We particularly need to control what we say. The final message is part of what it means to be Christian – we must not be like people of the world, and we must care for the needy such as orphans and widows.

#### Day 87: Acts 2

The full name of the book of Acts is 'Acts of the Apostles'. It describes what the apostles did after Jesus went to heaven. Since they were new 'Christians,' we can learn what the first Christians did by looking at their example. Acts 2 describes how the apostles and early disciples received the spirit from God. This help from God gave them the ability to teach the word of God as well as the ability to speak in other languages. When the Jews from other countries heard the message of Peter, they heard his words in the language of their birth. Amazed at this, they listened to what Peter had to say. Peter spoke about the death and resurrection of Jesus and how Jesus was a fulfilment of the promise God made to David. He also told the people what they needed to do. They needed to repent and be baptised for the forgiveness of sins. This resulted in 3000 being baptised. Then we are told what disciples of Jesus did – they kept the teaching of the apostles, they joined together in fellowship, they broke bread and they prayed together. They shared everything.

#### Day 88: Acts 3

Acts 3 has another feature of the gift of the spirit given to the disciples – healing. Peter healed a lame man who used to sit at the entrance to the temple. He must have been well known. When he was healed, what happened would have been a great witness to the name of Jesus. We then see the purpose of the gift of healing – as a witness to the teaching that was given. Of course, the people wanted to know what had happened. They listened carefully as Peter explained about Jesus. He referred to the teaching of Moses, the prophets, and the promise to Abraham in his explanation. All taught about the coming of Jesus.

#### Day 89: Acts 4

The healing of the lame man was so dramatic, that the Jewish rulers were aware of it. They reacted badly and arrested Peter and John. As Jesus had said to them before - some people would respond well to the name of Jesus and others badly. Peter told the Jewish leaders that it is only by the name of Jesus that people can be saved. In reply, the rulers forbade the disciples to speak in the name of Jesus. Peter replied that they ought to obey God rather than man. This is what a disciple must do when there is a conflict between the ways of men and the ways of God. God must come first. On

their release the disciples thanked God in prayer. The disciples continued to do what they had done in Acts 2 – they shared everything and prayed. In fact, they reached a standard of sharing that disciples must follow. Disciples should be united with others and not consider their own belongings their own. The early Christians had no needy people in their community because they shared so much. This means that they all had food and clothing.

Day 90: Luke 14

We end this month with another chapter on discipleship. The first incident is in the house of a Pharisee and teaches the need for humility and care for the needy. Both topics are themes throughout the Bible for believers to follow. Then we have the parable of the great banquet. The kingdom of God is like a banquet which everyone is invited to. When people refuse to accept the invitation, it must be taught to others. Those who do not listen to the gospel message are refusing the invitation to enter God's kingdom. The final part of the chapter teaches us that there is a cost of becoming a disciple. It will involve some hardship. Some of our family may even get in the way of our becoming one. Whatever the hardship is for becoming a disciple, then that hardship must be faced. A disciple is a disciple of Jesus if they pick up their own cross and carry it.

### **What we learnt in Month Three and what we can expect in Month Four**

During the last month we looked at the family of Abraham, through Isaac, Jacob and then his twelve sons including Joseph. We learnt about Moses and God's covenant with the people of Israel at that time. With this knowledge, we read Hebrews 11 and learnt about faith using examples in their lives. It confirmed what we have learnt - that the New Testament is based on the Old Testament. We learnt more about the path of the righteous from Proverbs, and then more about the kingdom of God. The righteous will enter the kingdom of God. To do that, we must become disciples of Jesus. We started to learn about discipleship, starting with the twelve disciples.

In the fourth month we will learn about some other important Bible characters, notably king Solomon, John the Baptist, and the apostle Paul. We will add more understanding of God's wisdom. We will focus on Christian roles and responsibilities in marriage, work, and citizens of a country. We will learn more about baptism and forgiveness. We will learn about how the gospel went from being a Jews-only message, to one that also went to non-Jews, who are also known as Gentiles.

Day 91: 1 Kings 3

We start the fourth month learning about the great king Solomon. Solomon was the son of King David. He was probably the richest man in the world in his day, and he started his reign by becoming the wisest man. 1 Kings 3 tells us how this happened. It gives an example of his wisdom. Solomon became the author of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Solomon, and Psalm 72. God's offer to Solomon was a unique offer. God was willing to grant Solomon one wish. How many of us would have chosen what Solomon chose? In his writings, Solomon encourages us to choose the wisdom from God's word.

#### Day 92: Proverbs 1

We have read Proverbs 2 to 4 and have learnt about the type of advice in the book of Proverbs. Now we go back to the first chapter, which is really an introduction to wisdom. It tells us what wisdom can do for us. It can help us do what is right, just, and true. Since this is what God does, it means that it can help us be godly. When we read Proverbs, or any part of the Bible, we should read with the attitude of learning from it. If we think we know it already, then we will not learn. If we are listening to learn, then we will learn. This requires humility from us. We need to keep a humble attitude which means we do not know it all already and we want to learn from God. It also requires a fear of God, in the way we may fear our father. We need to be wise sons and daughters and listen to what our heavenly Father is teaching us. From our Father's point of view, He wants us to listen to Him before He listens to us in our prayers.

#### Day 93: Proverbs 22:17 to 23:34

In the next two days, we will read the section of the Proverbs known as the 30 sayings of the wise. This is not a summary of what is elsewhere in Proverbs, but a section of important advice. Chapter 23 has advice on eating and drinking. The description of being drunk explains why the Bible is against drunkenness. It is less clear why eating is a problem. The implication is that spending so much time and effort feeding oneself with the best flavours is misplaced energy. In the same way, we should not wear ourselves out to get rich.

#### Day 94: Proverbs 24

Proverbs 24 covers the last sayings of the wise, plus some additional comments. The first verse is a repeated theme, which occurs throughout the Bible. Do not envy the wicked and do not wish to be like them. This is important, because the righteous may be tempted to be like the wicked, by trying to get what they have. The Bible tells us that these people are accountable for their behaviour and will face their judge. They will get the justice they deserve. Instead of being like the wicked, we should build our lives around wisdom, which gives power and strength. Wisdom teaches us what should be the priorities and targets in our lives.

#### Day 95: 1 Kings 8:22-66

Perhaps the greatest moment of Solomon's life was the completion of the temple of God. It was the centre of Israel's worship of God. It was built to replace the portable Tabernacle that Israel used. The most important part of this Tabernacle was the ark of the covenant. This was a golden box containing the Ten Commandments. The ark of the covenant that was made at the time of Moses was placed in the centre of the Temple. When this happened, the glory of God in the form of a cloud filled the temple. God has appeared to mankind at Mount Sinai, travelled with the Tabernacle, and now He has rested in the temple at Jerusalem. From this time on, God associates His presence with Jerusalem.

Solomon explained to the people the importance of the temple as the place that God had chosen for His name to be there. Although God lived in heaven, this was a piece of earth where He allowed

man to worship Him. Solomon knew that it was not possible for the Almighty God to be confined to a small piece of land. Solomon then offered a very important prayer. It may not be a prayer that you would expect to hear at this event. He basically spoke about times when Israel would have problems, because of its own sin. Then, when Israel humbles itself, repents and prays to the temple, then God will hear and help. What is also unusual is that God would even listen to the prayers of foreigners!

#### Day 96: 1 Kings 9

The dedication of the temple of God by Solomon was such an important event, that we should now read of God's reply to Solomon and the people of Israel. God spoke to Solomon from the temple for the first time, showing that His presence was in the temple. God said that He would always be watching the temple and His heart would be there. God would be with Solomon and his dynasty providing they continued to be godly. He warned Solomon and his sons against disobedience. Unfortunately, these words were necessary. Both Solomon and many of his sons became guilty of disobedience. Like all great kings, Solomon embarked on many building projects and obtained wealth from other countries by trading or other means. Solomon became very rich.

#### Day 97: 1 Kings 10

At the height of Solomon's greatness, Solomon was visited by many people. The most famous visit was by the Queen of Sheba, recorded in 1 Kings 10. This visit is referred to by Jesus in the New Testament. She describes what she saw and her experiences. It is like an independent witness of the greatness of Solomon. She was overwhelmed with what she saw. She saw a king reigning with justice and righteousness, causing the people to be happy. Solomon was the greatest in riches and wisdom.

#### Day 98: Psalm 15

Solomon was able to speak to God in the temple and gain a blessing. It is not just Solomon who can live near with God on His holy mountain. Psalm 15 explains how a believer can live with God. This can happen if a believer is careful how they live. They must follow righteousness and truth. They must be careful in what they say. We note that to live with God, the believer must behave well to his neighbours. Loving God involves loving our neighbour. Jesus knew this when he was asked in Matthew 22 verse 36, 'What was the greatest command?' Jesus did not give a single answer to this question. He gave two answers. He said that it was loving God and loving one's neighbour. To show our love for God and live with God, we need to love one another.

#### Day 99: Psalm 27

The writer of Psalm 27 expresses the wish to live in God's house. He knows that if he lived there, then God would protect him from all his enemies. David, the writer, has many enemies. There were armies trying to catch him and there are also false witnesses and oppressors. David knew that, provided he walked along the right path, then God would protect him and save his life. Even if his own parents did not help him, David knew that God would help. With God's help and protection,

the believer can rejoice and make right offerings to God. For this to happen, the believer must be right with God.

#### Day 100: Psalm 33

Psalm 33 is about a believer rejoicing in everything that comes from God. It is the word of God that is the subject of this praise. The word of God is right and true and just. In God's word we also see faithfulness and love. It is right to offer praise for these things. This is the same great word of God that made the heavens and restrained the waters. When God speaks it always happens. It is not like man who speaks a lot, promises a lot, and then little happens. With God, His plan and purpose are seen in the word of God, and it will happen. This includes promises like the kingdom of God. Therefore, the people of the world should fear God. Those who do fear God will be blessed. It is not armies or weapons of man that rule in this world, it is God. God watches man from heaven and considers everything that man does.

#### Day 101: John 1

We will now enter the New Testament to learn about the lives of John the Baptist and Jesus. We start with John 1 which sets the scene for their coming. The word of God is the subject of the start of the gospel of John. It was there in the beginning. Through it, God made life and light. Through it, God sent John to explain and witness to this light. Afterwards, God sent Jesus to teach it. Jesus was the greater light because it was not just the words which he spoke; everything thing about him was based on the word. When people looked at Jesus, they could see God's word in action. John explained to the people that he was not the promised Christ. This was the great prophet that the Old Testament predicted would come. It was Jesus who was the Christ. John was a witness of this when he saw the spirit come down from heaven. John showed his own disciples the prophet Jesus, so that they too could follow Jesus. The reason that God sent both John and Jesus was to give people the opportunity to become children of God and to be 'born of God.' Through their work, we too can become children of God.

#### Day 102: Matthew 3

Matthew 3 tells us about the work of John the Baptist. John tried to bring the people to repentance. Repentance means to change. John tried to get the people to change from the ways of man to the ways of God. This is the work of all prophets - to turn people from their own evil ways to God's ways. John was one of the great prophets. Like all prophets, he had a message of warning to evil people. If the people did not repent, then Israel as a nation would be cut down like a tree is cut down with an axe. Those who listened to the warning and repented were baptised in the Jordan river. Jesus was also baptised by John. John said that Jesus did not need to repent and therefore did not need to be baptised. However, there were other reasons why Jesus needed to be baptised. So Jesus was baptised. God approved of this baptism and gave a voice of approval from heaven as well as giving Jesus the gift of the Holy Spirit.

#### Day 103: Matthew 11

When John the Baptist spoke about repentance from sin, not everyone liked his message. One of the leaders, who wanted to carry on in his sin, put John in prison. John's imprisonment was a problem for many, especially the disciples of John. John sent his disciples to learn about Jesus, because they needed to believe in Jesus and follow him. Jesus preached the good news and healed the sick including the dead. This was evidence that John's disciples needed to believe in Jesus. Many of the people did not believe in Jesus, despite the many miracles that Jesus did. Jesus named the people of three of these cities. When Jesus reflected on who believed the message, he thanked God. It was not the wise or clever who listened. It was those who received the word like 'little children'. Jesus ends with a lovely appeal for those who are weary to find rest. We all need to become like little children and believe in his message.

#### Day 104: Mark 6:14-56

Mark 6 describes the death of John the Baptist. It was a noble death because he died for doing what was right. The cause of his death was far from noble. With the death of John, Jesus was left without a friend who properly understood his mission. Jesus tried to have some time to himself to mourn, but the people followed him. They behaved like sheep looking for a shepherd. Like a good shepherd, Jesus fed them. Jesus then spent much of the night in prayer, talking to His father, before walking to his disciples on the surface of the water. We do not know how many of John's disciples were there in the crowd. If they were, they would have been greatly encouraged. The mission of John continued with the mission of Jesus.

#### Day 105: Matthew 19

The message of John and Jesus was of repentance and change. Change from the ways of man and follow the ways of God. This applied to many aspects of life. There now follows several readings about some of these changes. This passage starts with marriage. What did Jesus think of it? What did Jesus think about divorce? In his answer, Jesus takes them back to the beginning of the Bible when God designed marriage. He takes lessons from Genesis. The chapter continues with Jesus' reaction to children, which is interesting given that marriage produces children. Children are important. Let us bring the children to Jesus as well. Finally, we meet a rich man who seemed to be doing the right things. However, he was not willing to leave behind his riches. This proved where his heart really was. He loved his riches more than God. We cannot do this. We must love God more than other things.

#### Day 106: Ephesians 5

God designed marriage from the beginning to be one man and one wife. When God looked at what He had made He called it 'very good'. This included marriage. We are told more about what God expects in marriage with advice about the roles and responsibilities of husbands and wives. We are given lessons based on how Jesus loved the church, which was a pattern of how a husband loves a wife. Christians should model their marriages on the way Jesus loved the church and the church loved Jesus. The first part of the chapter tells us about the need for Christians to be holy. Being holy in marriage is just one aspect of being holy and right with God.

### Day 107: Ephesians 6

The letter to the believers at Ephesus, having spoken about marriage, continues with advice for children. The advice is one of the Ten Commandments. Unlike the other 10 commands, the original commandment came with a promise. If a person honours their parents, then they will be blessed with long life. What a blessing! Concerning children, fathers were not to abuse their position in the family. They were not to make their children despair. They were to bring them up to know God and God's ways. There are roles for slaves and masters too. These can apply generally to servants with their masters or to employees with their employers. Finally, we must be strong in the Lord and put on the armour of God. These are not for attack but for defence. The sword can be used for defence and attack, but we would not use the word of God to attack people, only falsehood. We must defend ourselves against the ways of the flesh (that is, man's ways), whether these are from within ourselves or from others. Our greatest defence is prayer.

### Day 108: Romans 13

Our responsibilities to the rulers we live under are given in Romans 13. We must submit to them. Christians are not rebels or disobedient. In fact, God has put the authorities in place, even the bad ones. If we do what is right, then we can expect no problem with the authorities. We must honour and respect those in authority because God has put them over us. We must pay taxes to the authorities.

We also have responsibilities to one another. We must love one another. We must show that we belong to God and the ways of light, rather than man and the ways of darkness. We must behave like Jesus. Behaving like Jesus is like putting on the clothing of Jesus. We must choose to behave like Jesus, just as if we chose to wear our clothes.

### Day 109: Romans 14

The responsibilities of a Christian for another Christian continue in Romans 14. One way of loving them is to avoid disputes with them. If someone has a weak faith and thinks it is critical to eat only vegetables, then someone can help them by not eating meat in front of them. What is important is that we do not cause another Christian to lose their faith. Another example of this could be that a certain Christian thinks it is critical to a certain day is special. The same thing holds. We allow them to keep it and do not put them off. In this way, we can show love to another. We need to be careful because we will have to give an account to God of how we behave to others. We must do what is best to help and encourage each other, even if it means not doing what we want.

### Day 110: Romans 11

One of the important relationships is the relationship of the Christian to the Jew. Romans 11 tells us that God has chosen to preserve a small number of Jews by grace. He has not rejected the Jew. The chapter tells us that Jews and non-Jewish Christians (non-Jews are known as 'Gentiles') can both be considered part of an olive tree. The Jews are like branches. Some of the bad branches have been cut off. The Gentile Christians are like other branches that have been grafted onto the Jewish trunk. Just like they are all part of the one tree, so we are all one in Christ. And God is fair. If any of the Jewish or Gentile branches becomes bad, it will be cut off regardless of who it is. This shows the

kindness and severity of God. Although we should be concerned, we should not overly worry about being cut off. God wants to be merciful to Jews and Gentiles. The chapter ends with a song of praise for God's mercy.

#### Day 111: Acts 8

We learnt about baptism when we read about the work of John the Baptist. We will now read about baptism in the early church. We read several passages where we Christians got baptised as a response to the gospel message. Acts 8 gives us the most complete example of a baptism. The chapter starts with a period of persecution of Christians caused by a man called Saul. This resulted in Christians being scattered from Jerusalem. As they were scattered, they took the gospel message with them. Philip took the message to Samaria. He taught the good news of the kingdom of God and the things about Jesus Christ. As a result of the gospel message, the people of the city were baptised. Philip then met an Ethiopian pilgrim. The Ethiopian was reading a passage of the Old Testament which taught about the sacrifice of Jesus. Philip explained this passage and taught him about Jesus. The Ethiopian realised that he needed to be baptised. When he found enough water, he was baptised. He went down into the water with Philip. This teaches us that baptism is a covering with water. Then they came up out of the water and rejoiced. This covers the process of baptism - teaching first, leading to understanding and a commitment, followed by the baptism.

#### Day 112: Romans 6

Romans 6 teaches us about the meaning of baptism. Baptism is a commitment to stop sinning. Those who are baptised are baptised into Jesus. That is, when someone goes into the water, it is acting out the death of Jesus. When they come up out of the water, it is like acting out the resurrection of Jesus. Baptism acts out the death and resurrection of Jesus. If people associate themselves with the death and resurrection of Jesus in baptism, it means that they will be raised from death even if they die. For this to happen, they must live in the right way and avoid sin. If we continue sinning, then it is like we are slaves to sin. If we sin, then we will deserve death. But if we live holy lives and avoid sinning, then we will get eternal life through Jesus Christ.

#### Day 113: Acts 9

Another example of conversion and baptism is given in Acts 9. This was from someone who was least expected. Saul had become an extremist leader of the Jews who led in persecuting Christians. He would imprison and kill Christians. Yet Saul changed when on a journey to Damascus. Saul was made to understand the reality of Jesus by the appearance of Jesus to him. As soon as he could, Saul was baptised. His conversion was a surprise to his former friends and enemies. It brought peace to the Christians. Saul had been chosen by God to take the gospel to many people especially Gentiles (non-Jews).

#### Day 114: Acts 10

Acts 10 is another example of a conversion and baptism. It is also the key event that resulted in the gospel going to the Gentiles (non-Jews). The person was no ordinary Gentile. He was a man named



Cornelius, who happened to be from the hated Roman occupying army. He was not just a common soldier, he was a centurion who controlled an army unit. God carefully chose Cornelius for the example it set. If a hated Roman centurion could become a Christian, then anyone could.

It was stated in Acts 1 that the gospel message would go first to Jerusalem, then to Judea (Jewish areas), then to Samaria (as we saw with Philip preaching in the Samaritan areas) and then to the ends of the earth (Gentile areas). The events of Acts 10 were the critical event for the next phase to take the gospel to the Gentiles. God had planned this. Another example of this plan was the gift of the holy spirit which allowed the gospel to be spoken in other languages so they could understand it. The fact that the New Testament was written in Greek, one of the languages of the Roman empire, rather than Jewish language of Hebrew was another way to get the message to the Gentiles.

#### Day 115: Acts 11

The events of Acts 10 had such enormous implications that the apostles met to discuss it. Acts 11 records what happened. When the believers heard that God had given the Gentile believers the Holy Spirit gifts, it was clear to all that God wanted them to share the spiritual blessings with the Jews. It was at Antioch in modern Syria that they started teaching the Gentiles (in this case Greeks) the gospel. And it was in the same city that those who followed Jesus were first called Christians. The conversion of the Gentiles was not welcomed by all the Jews. In several of the New Testament letters, we read messages to overcome this resistance. In all these passages we are told that God wanted Gentiles to be saved alongside Jews.

#### Day 116: Galatians 1:11-2:10

We now return to the life of Saul. Saul was a key figure in the New Testament. Saul had a name change and became known as Paul. He wrote about half of the New Testament books, which were letters to ecclesias and individuals. Paul had a miraculous conversion which we read about in Acts 9. We can learn about his early years from this section in his letter to the believers at Galatia. Paul learnt the gospel directly by revelation from Jesus, not from anyone else. We learn of his first meeting with Peter. They agreed that Peter would preach to the Jews and Paul would preach to the Gentiles.

#### Day 117: Acts 13

The apostle Paul went to the Gentiles (non-Jews) by travelling around different countries. He specifically was chosen by God to go on missionary journeys. He travelled with Barnabas on his first missionary journey and started from Antioch in modern Syria. Barnabas came from Cyprus, and Cyprus was the first place where they preached. They had one main opponent in Cyprus who was a sorcerer. In an unusual use of the holy spirit gifts, Paul made the sorcerer blind. This helped make the preaching a success. They then left Cyprus and went to another place called Antioch. This one was in modern Turkey. They went to a Jewish religious meeting place called a synagogue and preached there. This worked well until the Jews became jealous of the success of Paul's preaching. This set a pattern of Paul's preaching – going to the Jews first in a synagogue but then going to the Gentiles afterwards.

#### Day 118: Acts 14

Acts 14 describes the second part of Paul's first missionary journey. It includes his return to the starting point of Antioch in Syria. We learn further about the success, but also the challenges they faced. At the end of the journey, they reported back to their ecclesia (the New Testament word for church) what had happened. Paul established many ecclesias which became the recipient of many of his letters. Paul wrote to the ecclesias to encourage them and to deal with different problems that arose. This information teaches us the way that ecclesias should be run today - and how they should not be run. The letters of Paul are a primary resource on how ecclesias are to run.

#### Day 119: Acts 28

The rest of the book of the 'Acts of the Apostles' is an account of the missionary journeys of the apostle Paul. Paul was accompanied by Barnabas on the first journey. His later journeys included other travel companions such as Timothy, Titus, and Silas. When Paul was at Jerusalem, he was arrested and falsely accused by the Jews. As a result, he had to appeal for a fair trial to Caesar. It was through this means that he was taken to Rome. The book of Acts ends with his shipwreck near Malta and his arrival at Rome. At the centre of the Roman empire, Paul continued to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. The book ends with Paul preaching the kingdom of God and about Jesus Christ. This is a fitting end to the book which described how the word of God would go from Jerusalem to Judea, to Samaria and then to the ends of the earth (Rome).

#### Day 120: Romans 8

Paul's letter to the Roman ecclesia was written before he arrived in Rome. Romans 8 is a lovely chapter explaining the benefits of being in Christ. Christians are destined for life (through the resurrection), rather than death being their final end. But Christians must follow the way of God rather than the way of man. The way of man is sometimes called the 'flesh' or 'sinful nature'. The way of God is also called the way of the spirit. The word 'spirit' can mean several things, including teaching, mind, and attitude. But we do not need to get confused. Here it means the way of God. These are two ways that we can follow; but only God's way leads to life. If we are in Christ, nothing – we repeat nothing – can stop us having the blessings in Christ. This is a great encouragement to Christians.

#### **What we learnt in Month Four and what we can expect in Month Five**

In month four we have learnt about several key believers found in the Bible. We learnt about Solomon the son of David and learnt about his wisdom. Solomon built the magnificent temple of God at Jerusalem. The Queen of Sheba witnessed Solomon at his greatest. The temple taught that God wanted to live with man, but for this to work, man had to be careful to follow God's ways.

We learnt about John the Baptist and baptism. We learnt about marriage and responsibilities within it. We learnt about the Christian responsibilities to governments, to Jews, and to work. Then we learnt about the apostle Paul and the mission to take the gospel to the Gentiles. God wants all people to be saved by following the right way.

In month 5 we will learn more about the teaching from the apostle Paul. We will read from his letters to Timothy, where he speaks about how to live the right way. We will then look back into the Old Testament to learn how the Old Testament predicted many of the things about Jesus. We will start with the Law of Moses, then look at the Psalms and then the Prophets, which all spoke about Jesus in advance. We will then look at Old Testament characters who are mentioned in the New Testament – people like Lot, Jonah, Rahab, Elijah, and Daniel. All these have important teachings for us. These teach us how the New Testament is based on the Old Testament. It teaches us the value of Old Testament passages which we need to understand if we are to understand the full message of the Bible.

#### Day 121: 1 Timothy 1

Timothy was one of the apostle Paul's helpers on his missionary journey and who helped set up ecclesias. In the letters to Timothy, Paul teaches him and us on how to live as a Christian and guide the ecclesias. Those who guide ecclesias must know what to aim for, and how to deal with the problems that will arise. Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to guide the ecclesia away from false teaching and arguments. The goal of the ecclesia is live in love, with a pure heart, and with sincere faith. Unfortunately, not everyone would follow this. Paul recalls how he used to be the one of those who was against the faith, when he persecuted believers. We read about this in the early chapters of Acts. However, he was shown mercy and grace by Jesus when Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus. Paul argues that if Jesus can do that for me, a great sinner, then Jesus can do that for any sinner. No past life is too bad for the mercy and grace of God to overcome.

#### Day 122: 1 Timothy 4

Paul told his helper Timothy that not all believers will stay in the faith. Some believers would become teachers of what is not right, such as forbidding people to marry and commanding people not to eat certain food. Others will teach foolish stories. None of this is helpful or right. For example, abstaining from certain food is not right because it could be eaten by offering a prayer of thanks to God. This is one of several occasions where believers are told it is good to offer thanks for food. We can train ourselves physically to be fit, but it is more useful to train ourselves to be godly. This will make living better and will give us life in the future. Timothy is told to set an example in every aspect of his life to help the believers. All teachers should teach by example by their behaviour as well as by their teaching.

#### Day 123: 1 Timothy 6

Paul concludes his first letter to Timothy with further warnings about false teachers. There are many of them, teaching many different false teachings. These believers had the truth but then developed an interest in things that are not helpful. They caused arguments. One example of a wrong teaching is that godliness helps one get money. Instead, Paul teaches that godliness leads to contentment. We must be content with what we have. Those who love money and try to get rich fall into temptation. Of course, it is not money that is the problem. It is the *love* of money. Those who wish to be godly must avoid this trap. There is a great prize on offer to those who live godly lives. Although it is only God who is immortal, those who are godly will be given eternal life. Like Timothy, every believer needs to fight the good fight of faith to achieve this.

#### Day 124: 2 Timothy 2

Paul continues his second letter to Timothy with similar words to his first letter. The situation has not really changed. There are many false teachers causing problems. What believers need to do is to focus on the word of God (the Bible), understand it correctly and teach it. The best way to do this is through gentle instruction. Timothy needs to teach others to be teachers of good things. In that way the gospel will spread. If it relied on only Timothy, then it would not spread very far. However, this requires the choice of people who will teach the right things rather than false teaching. Paul draws examples from soldiers, athletes, and farmers and gets lessons from each one. We are to remember the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and that those who die in faith will live with him. Those who endure with Jesus through the troubles of life will reign with him. And there is a warning to those who leave Jesus. Jesus will leave them!

#### Day 125: 2 Timothy 3

Paul had explained to Timothy that there were many false teachers. But now he says there will be even more false teachers in the future. We know that this has happened in the history of Christianity. The description of problems in the chapter could be describing spiritual problems in our day. We must avoid these. With so many false teachers around, how can anyone live the right way and keep it? Paul gives a clear answer. Read the Bible. That is where you get God's wisdom to save you. It is by reading the Bible that we can be guided in the right way. We must get our teaching from it. We must listen to its rebuke when we need to. We must listen to its correction when we are leaving the right way. In this way we can become a complete and mature person of God. Our lives and teaching must be based on the Bible and not on the ideas of man.

#### Day 126: Deuteronomy 18:9-22

We now go back to the Old Testament to learn more about how it connects to the New Testament. We start by going back to the Law of Moses. The point of interest is in the second part of this passage. The section starts with the clearest condemnation of witchcraft in the Bible. Witchcraft includes the reading of signs, talking to the dead, claiming to have powers and such like. God's people must not get involved in these things. Then in the second part of the chapter, we have an important prophecy. God would send a prophet who would be like Moses. Just as the people had to listen to Moses, so they would have to listen to this new prophet. Moses was a unique prophet because he spoke directly with God, did miracles, and received God's commands. This new prophet would do the same. We now know that this prophet 'like Moses' is Jesus. Jesus spoke directly to God, performed miracles and was given commands. The prophecy said that the people must listen to him. The Jews were looking out for this prophet, and they came to Jesus looking for signs that Jesus was this prophet. Despite many signs, they missed him! Instead, they treated Jesus as if he was a false prophet (there is another passage for that). Deuteronomy 18 is referred several times in the New Testament both directly and indirectly. There were many other parts of the Law of Moses that taught about Jesus.

#### Day 127: Psalm 22

We now go to the Psalms to see how they speak about Jesus. Psalm 22 was written by David. However, the words apply to Jesus. It starts with the words that Jesus used when he was dying on the cross. It includes the words spoken by those who mocked him on the cross. It describes how the hands and feet of Jesus were to be pierced and how his enemies would cast lots for his garments. Although Jesus may have remembered these words and said them, this cannot be said of those who mocked him or cast lots. This Psalm shows how God knows what is going to happen a long time before it happens. How God does this is beyond our understanding. God gives everyone free choice, but God still knows. This passage and many others teach us that God had planned the life, the death, resurrection and kingship of Jesus from the beginning according to God's plan.

#### Day 128: Psalm 118

Just as Psalm 22 is a Psalm about Jesus, so is Psalm 118. Psalm 118 describes the last week of Jesus and his journey into Jerusalem and his sacrifice. Several of the phrases were said as Jesus came into Jerusalem. It describes what the people said to Jesus and what they did to him on his triumphant entry into Jerusalem. It describes what Jesus said to the rulers. Again, the words of Jesus may have come from his memory of the Psalms, but the words of his enemies did not. The Psalm gives us an insight into the attitude of Jesus as he made this journey to the cross. He thanked God for His love! Jesus trusted in God and was not afraid of man. Jesus sang of his deliverance and salvation. He said he would not die but live. This is a reference to his resurrection which Jesus believed in. Jesus had such a confidence in His God to do the right thing.

#### Day 129: Isaiah 53

We have taken references from the Law and the Psalms to how they spoke about the life of Jesus in advance. Now we will take one example from the prophets. It is perhaps the most famous example. It is the one that the Ethiopian pilgrim was reading when the apostle Philip went to him (in Acts 8). Philip told him that Isaiah 53 is about Jesus. Jesus was the lamb that was taken to be slaughtered. He was flogged, wounded, and pierced. His appearance was so ruined that people were appalled and did not want to look on him. He was wounded and punished for our sins. It was God's plan that Jesus would offer himself for our sins. And it was God's plan to give Jesus his life back from the grave so He can save many others. When one thinks of the suffering Jesus went through for us, what can one say? No wonder the Ethiopian was moved to be baptised!

#### Day 130: Matthew 2

Matthew's gospel was written as though its audience knew the Old Testament. Many times, it says about Jesus that 'this was to fulfil what was written.' Matthew 2 has four examples. Some of the examples are clear, but others are not. This shows that there are clear examples of Jesus fulfilling prophecies as well as many less obvious passages. Those who understand this look out for connections with Jesus when they read the Old Testament. You will find references to Jesus in very many places. Of course, these are all put there by God, who planned the life and work of Jesus from the beginning. These references are evidence that the word of God is just what it says – the words of God who knows what He is doing with the world. No one else could include such complexity and harmony in a book written over many centuries, by many different people from many different cultures. This harmony is one of the greatest pieces of evidence for the truth of the Bible.

#### Day 131: Jonah 1 and 2

We will look at the Old Testament prophet Jonah because he teaches us some important lessons about Jesus. Parts of the life of Jonah are a pattern of the life of Jesus. We will see this if we look at the lives of many people in the Bible. Jonah 1 and 2 tell us that Jonah did not want to be a prophet and he did not want to go and preach to the Gentile city of Nineveh. He ran away from God and went in the opposite direction by ship. Of course, it was not possible to get away from God's presence. God sent a storm to stop him. Jonah offered himself to be thrown overboard to save the lives of those in the boat. It was when Jonah was prepared to lose his life to save Gentiles in the boat, that God knew that Jonah had truly changed his mind. God sent a fish to swallow and save Jonah. In the belly of the fish, Jonah prayed to God as if he was already in the grave. God answered his prayer and saved him.

#### Day 132: Jonah 3 and 4

God told Jonah a second time to go to Nineveh. This time Jonah went. He preached repentance from sin, just like the other prophets. Surprisingly, the city repented. God did not destroy the city and now that they had repented, God did not need to. Jonah was not pleased with the outcome. He complained to God that he knew God was gracious, compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. What a thing to complain about! God taught Jonah a lesson with a plant. God can respond to repentance even from Gentiles because that is the way God is. He is gracious and merciful. We should praise and thank God that He is like this!

#### Day 133: Matthew 12:38-50

The story of Jonah is a lovely story, but it was more than that. It was a pattern of Jesus. We read this in this section of Matthew 12. Just as Jonah was in the fish for 3 days and nights, so Jesus would be in the grave for 3 days and 3 nights. When Jonah was in the fish, it was like he was in the grave. Jonah's time in the fish was a pattern of Jesus being in the grave and then coming out of it. It was a pattern of the death and resurrection of Jesus. This would be a sign to the Jews to help them believe. Just as the Queen of Sheba went to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, so the people should listen to the wisdom of Jesus. But because the Jews did not listen to Jesus, they were like a sick man with an evil spirit. Even though that generation partly listened to Jesus and were healed by him, in the end they became far worse, and they killed him. They were a wicked generation. If that was all they were, then the gospel teaching would have been useless. But there were those who did listen and they became his spiritual family.

#### Day 134: 2 Peter 1

The words of the Old Testament prophets are referred to by the apostle Peter in his second letter. We are to see the Scripture (the words of God) as light guiding us in this dark world. The world may have seemed dark and without any purpose, but there was also light. The words of the prophets were the light. Peter makes it clear that the words of the prophet did not come from the prophet themselves but from God. God gave the prophets the words and they wrote them. Peter makes a reference to the word of God which he himself heard from heaven. This is a reference to the time

Peter was with Jesus on the mountain of the transfiguration of Jesus. These words were from God not man. Because the Bible is true and from God, we should believe it. Once we have faith in this, believers must add other things to our faith. Peter lists the things believers must add to their faith. goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly love, and general love. In other words, faith alone is not enough. It must be applied in the life of the believer.

#### Day 135: Genesis 19

Genesis 19 is the account of Lot, who was the nephew of Abraham. Lot is referred to several times in the New Testament. Lot travelled to the land of Canaan with his uncle Abraham. Over time, they both had so many flocks, herds, and servants that they were too big to be together. Abraham gave Lot the choice of where to go. Lot chose the area of Sodom and Gomorrah. This did not prove to be such a wise choice, because Lot ended up moving into the wicked city of Sodom. The city was so wicked that God chose to destroy the city. Before this happened, God sent angels to rescue Lot and his family. In the event, because of some reluctance, the angels had to take Lot and his family by hand and lead them out. Even then Lot's wife looked back, as if her heart was still in the city. She turned into a pillar of salt. We have a story of punishment and mercy. God punishes the wicked and saves the righteous. God also wants to save families.

#### Day 136: Luke 17

Jesus referred to the incident of Lot in Luke 17. Luke 17 speaks of the coming of the son of man, which is another way of saying the coming of Jesus to the earth. There are similarities between the time of Lot and the time of the coming of Jesus. In both cases, judgment happened suddenly and unexpectedly. In both cases, the wicked were punished and the righteous were saved. The family of Noah and Lot were saved but Lot's wife was not saved. These events are given to us as warnings to make sure that we and our families are ready for the coming of Jesus. To do this, we need to have faith in the teachings of the Bible, and to be living by our faith. But we must make sure we do not really love the world, so we are not like Lot's wife. Disciples of Jesus must watch themselves, so that they do not sin and get destroyed with other sinners.

#### Day 137: Exodus 14

We have seen how Jonah and Lot are referred to in the New Testament and used to teach us important lessons. The same is true of when the people of Israel came out of Egypt. This is an event we know as the 'Exodus' and which is given in the book of Exodus. Exodus 14 tells us about how the people left Egypt by crossing of the Red Sea. Israel had escaped from Egypt following the 10 plagues on Egypt. Although they had been given permission to leave by Pharaoh, Pharaoh changed his mind. He sent his army after them to capture them and bring them back as slaves. The Egyptian army would easily have done this had not God intervened. As the army approached the fleeing people, God put His angel between the two groups to protect His people. Then God sent a wind to blow open a path in the Red Sea. Israel went through the sea on dry land. When the Egyptian army chose to follow, they were only allowed to get part way. The water was allowed to go on top of them. This incident is referred to elsewhere in the Bible. It is an example of how God can save His people.

### Day 138: 1 Corinthians 10

The Exodus events are referred to in 1 Corinthians 10. We are told that the events in the Old Testament are examples and lessons for us. The Old Testament is relevant for Christians to learn from. We see many patterns. One pattern is that of baptism. When Israel came out of Egypt and passed through the cloud and the sea, it was like they were baptised. They received God's protection, and this was a pattern of God saving His people. When they later disobeyed, they were destroyed in the desert. This was a pattern of disobedience and punishment. When they committed sins like sexual immorality, they were punished. While God does not currently intervene in dramatic ways like this today, God is giving these events as warnings for us to learn from. We may have difficulties in this life, but God assures us that we will be able to bear them and come through them. We should avoid participating in evil practices because that will be punished. We must do what is right because that will be rewarded with salvation.

### Day 139: Exodus 17

In this passage, we look back at the Exodus and some examples of how Israel behaved. There are many examples of Israel's poor attitude to God in the wilderness journey. Having been saved through the Red Sea, they were also given a miraculous provision of daily food in the form of manna. Not long after, they became thirsty and complained to God. It was not a humble request but a demand! The demand was putting God to the test as to whether He could or would help them. Given what God had already done for them, a humble request would have been more appropriate. Despite their bad attitude, God gave them what they wanted. However, God called the place Massah (meaning 'testing') and Meribah (meaning 'quarrelling'). The second half of the chapter describes how God saved them from a particularly nasty enemy. Elsewhere we are told that the Amalekites picked off the weak people who were at the back. We can contrast the complaining people with the saving God. This is what God had to put up with during the time of the Exodus.

### Day 140: Hebrews 3

The book of Hebrews refers to this time of complaining during the Exodus. Chapter 3 compares Jesus to Moses and says that Jesus is greater. It looks back at the time when the people of Israel travelled for 40 years in the wilderness to reach the Promised Land. During this time, Israel was often unbelieving and rebellious. We have just read one example of this in Exodus 17. As a result, God said that generation would not reach the Promised Land. This generation died in the wilderness. This is a lesson to us not to become unbelieving and rebellious. If we turn to evil ways after we have chosen to follow God, we will not reach the promised kingdom.

### Day 141: Joshua 2

In the next series of chapters, we will read about Old Testament characters who are referred to in the New Testament. In Joshua 2, we read about the life of Rahab. Rahab was mentioned as an example of faith in two New Testament chapters we have already read – Hebrews 11 and James 2. Rahab was a prostitute who lived in Jericho. She had heard of the drying up of the Red Sea and other events of the Exodus and came to believe that the God of Israel was the only God. In an act of faith, she risked her life by helping Israeli spies escape. In recognition of her saving their life, they



agreed to save her life and the life of her family. This is what later happened, and Rahab became a member of God's people. She even became a mother in the family line of Jesus. The fact that she was a prostitute shows that God is not prejudice and can accept anyone who truly repents and changes their ways.

#### Day 142: 1 Kings 17

1 Kings 17 introduces us to the prophet Elijah. God sent Elijah when Israel was in a particularly bad way spiritually. They had abandoned the God of Israel and were worshipping a false god called Baal. Elijah was sent to turn them back to the God of Israel. What he did may sound surprising. Elijah prayed for no rain. The reason for this was that Israel thought that Baal was in control of the rain. Elijah wanted to show them that God was in control. There was no rain for three years and things got very bad. To start with, Elijah hid by a river and God fed him using ravens. Then, when that river dried up, God sent him to a Gentile widow. The widow believed in the God of Israel and Elijah's words. In an act of great faith, she and her son were saved. This incident describes the first time in the Bible that someone was raised from the dead. This was another reward for the widow's faith.

#### Day 143: 1 Kings 18

After 3 years, God told Elijah that He would send rain on Israel. The events that led to this were dramatic. Elijah met the evil king Ahab and requested a meeting with the false prophets on the top of a mountain. Both God and Baal (and Baal's woman Asherah) were to be tested as to whether they could produce fire to burn a sacrifice. In one way, it was an uneven contest. There were 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah and only one prophet of God. The false prophets cried and cut themselves to get their gods to notice and respond. But there was nothing. Then Elijah prayed to God and fire came from heaven. The people shouted that Elijah's God was the true God. Elijah was turning back the people of Israel to the true God.

#### Day 144: Luke 9:18-62

Luke 9 refers to Elijah twice. Some people thought that Jesus was Elijah come back to life. But Jesus was not. Jesus was the Christ, meaning the anointed (that is, the chosen one of God). Shortly after these events, we have the transfiguration where Jesus's form changed, and he became dazzling bright. We are told that Jesus spoke to Moses and Elijah on a mountain. Whether this was only a vision or whether the real Moses or Elijah were resurrected we cannot be sure. But they spoke to Jesus about his death. There was a voice from heaven telling the disciples to listen to Jesus. This reminds us of the words of Deuteronomy 18, where Israel was to listen to a prophet like Moses. Peter later referred to this event in the passage we read from 2 Peter 1. The chapter continues with an example of healing which only Jesus could do, and advice on how to be a disciple.

#### Day 145: 2 Kings 5

The prophet Elijah was succeeded in his prophetic work by another prophet called Elisha. Both Elijah and Elisha were unusual prophets in that they were able to do miracles. The event of 2 Kings 5 is referred to by Jesus. There was a commander of an enemy army called Naaman. Naaman had

leprosy. He had a slave girl from Israel who told him about Elisha who could do miracles. Naaman went to find Elisha. But Naaman was set a humility test. He had to wash in a river. When he humbled himself before the God of Israel, he was cured. In a sad twist, Elisha's servant was tempted to get rich quick and lied to Naaman. He ended up with leprosy. The event teaches us that God can give and take away disease. It teaches the need for us to be humble before God and not love money.

#### Day 146: Luke 4:14-44

Both Elijah and Elisha are referred to by Jesus in Luke 4. Jesus was at a synagogue in his hometown Nazareth. But they did not believe him. Jesus made the point that no prophet is accepted in his hometown. And he used the examples of Elijah or Elisha, neither of whom were sent to their hometown. They were both sent to Gentiles, which did not please the Jewish audience. The people of Jesus' hometown tried to kill Jesus by pushing him off a cliff. In his teaching, Jesus referred to a passage from Isaiah which predicted Jesus and his work. We see that in Luke chapter 4 alone, Jesus referred to the Old Testament three times. This is not surprising as the Old Testament was the Bible of Jesus and it taught so much about his own life. Jesus taught about the Kingdom of God in the synagogues from the Old Testament and he healed the sick.

#### Day 147: Daniel 1

Daniel is one of the most well-known prophets. He has a book named after him. Daniel 1 explains the beginning of his life as a young man with his 3 friends. They had been exiled to Babylon from Israel and received training in the language and literature of Babylon. Daniel and his friends did not want to eat unclean food, based on their need to keep the Law of Moses. When they kept the Law of God through Moses, God blessed them. When they were questioned by the king of Babylon, they were found to have excellent wisdom and understanding. So, they were employed in the King's service. This incident shows the importance of doing the right things. If that is what is done, then the righteous may be blessed.

#### Day 148: 2 Corinthians 6

Daniel had his hardships like the apostle Paul. Believers will experience these things even if they do the right things. A believer must continue to do the right thing even if there is hardship. The apostle Paul made an appeal to the believers at Corinth - keep separate from unbelievers. Righteous and wickedness are so different. Therefore, believers should not be joined closely with unbelievers. Believers must be separate. This is what Daniel and his friends did. They separated themselves from the uncleanness of Babylon. Paul then explains the need for separation more clearly. The believers are the temple of God. God wants to live among the believers. He can only do this if the believers are holy and separate from the evil around them. If they do that, then God will be their God and look after them.

#### Day 149: Daniel 2

One of the hardships Daniel and his friends faced was the death penalty in Daniel 2. The king of Babylon had been disturbed by a dramatic dream. He asked his advisers to tell him the dream and then interpret it otherwise they would be killed. Daniel sought God's mercy to get an answer. God answered his prayer. Daniel then told the dream and the interpretation to the amazed King of Babylon. The dream was about a succession of great empires. These were represented by a statue of a man of which Babylon was the head. Although they did not know at the time, the second empire was to be the Medes and the Persians, followed by the Greeks, followed by the Romans, followed by a time of strong and weak nations. The dream was the history of empires. The fact that God predicted the succession of empires shows not just that God knows about what is to happen, but that He makes it happen. The dream ended with a stone coming to destroy the empires and to fill the earth. This represents the kingdom of God. It is reasonable to conclude that if the succession of empires has happened, so will the final part of this dream.

Day 150: Daniel 7

A second king of Babylon was given a dream a bit like the one in Daniel 2. The dream of Daniel 7 was also about a succession of empires. They were the same ones as Daniel 2. In this case, the empires were represented by different beasts coming out of the sea. The lion was Babylon. The bear was the Medes and the Persians. The leopard was the Greeks. The last frightening beast was like the Romans. Then there was someone called the 'Ancient of Days' sitting on a throne opening books. This was a vision of God. Someone called a 'son of man' approached the one on the throne. The phrase 'son of man' is the phrase Jesus used to refer to himself. Jesus was approaching God. God has planned a time when Jesus will rule the earth and his kingdom will last for ever. This is the kingdom of God which God has planned. Just as the four empires occurred, so the kingdom of God will occur. The righteous believers will be in this kingdom.

### **What we learnt in Month Five and what we can expect in Month Six**

The month started by looking at the advice from the apostle Paul to the young Timothy, which has important advice for believers. We then looked at examples of how the Old Testament predicted the events of Jesus and how the New Testament referred often to the Old Testament. It showed that the two parts of the Bible are closely connected and how the New Testament is based on the Old Testament. The two parts should not be separated. The Old Testament is needed to help explain the New Testament.

We learnt about Old Testament people referred to in the New Testament, such as Jonah, Lot, Rahab, Elijah, and Elisha. These were righteous people. We ended with the prophet Daniel and the prophecies about the future empires of the world. The work of the prophets was partly to lead the people back to God's way and partly to explain what would happen in the future. They show that God is in control of world events. God knows what He is about to do in the future. At times, God has given pieces of this information to His prophets. The message of the coming Kingdom of God is one of these.

For the sixth month, we will focus on the New Testament. We have seen how the Old Testament leads into the events of the New Testament. This has led us to Jesus. The work of Jesus in the New Testament was continued by the apostles. We will start by looking at the words of John and Peter, who were the two of Jesus's closest disciples. Then we will complete the letter of James. We will

end this introduction to the Bible with another look at the life of Jesus. This time we will look at his birth, death, and resurrection. This is what God would have wanted. It provides a message of hope for the reader and a direction in life for them to follow.

#### Day 151: 1 John 1

The apostle John was the disciple that Jesus particularly loved. His letters carry the message of love. It explains what love is and how disciples should show it. The first chapter is short but important. The starting point is faith in Jesus. The disciples had seen and touched the risen Jesus and had believed in his resurrection. It is this belief in Jesus that gives the hope of eternal life. Those who believe have fellowship with John and God and Jesus. This results in joy. Those who are in fellowship are described as 'walking in the light'. There are also those who walk in darkness. Those who 'walk in the light' are in fellowship with others who 'walk in the light'. If they live in fellowship together, then the sacrifice of Jesus saves them from sin. Believers cannot say they have no sin, because all people have sinned (except Jesus).

#### Day 152: 1 John 2

John continues by saying that believers should not follow the way of sin. However, if believers do sin, then it is not the end. Jesus can remove that sin. Believers must keep the commands, which includes loving your brother. But believers should not love everything. They must not love the world with its desires and pride. The world will pass away, but the one who keeps the commands will not pass away. Neither must believers love those who are against Christ. These are people who deny that Jesus was the Christ (the anointed or chosen of God). John calls these people the 'anti-Christ' because they are against Christ. On the other hand, true believers were anointed by God (meaning they were chosen). They follow what is true and do not follow what is false. That is the challenge all believers have.

#### Day 153: 1 John 3

John tells believers that those who do what is right are called 'children of God.' This is an immense privilege. God becomes the Father of believers, and He treats His children as His own. God does not love those who ignore His commands and follow a life of sin. These people are called 'children of the devil'. Devil is a term meaning 'someone who falsely accuses someone else.' It is a reasonable term for people who ignore the commands of God because they are treating God's words as if they were false. In effect, they are saying that God is a liar. They falsely accuse God of lying. John uses the example of Cain to illustrate this. Cain knew the commands of God, but he ignored them. He chose to do evil and killed his brother. Cain behaved as if God did not mean what He said when He gave the commands. A person cannot expect to be given eternal life if they behave like this. God will not enable an evil doer to live for ever doing evil. Jesus showed us what love really is, not by killing anyone, but by letting others killed him because of his love for others. To be like Jesus, believers must love by deeds and not only with words.

#### Day 154: Acts 5

We return to some of the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles to understand what happened shortly after Jesus went to heaven. We have read up to chapter 4 but have missed out chapters 5 and 6. Acts 5 describes the unfortunate story of Ananias and Sapphira. This couple gave money to the early church but lied about how much they gave. By doing this, they showed that they loved money more than God. As a result, and to everyone's great surprise, they both died immediately. This was a sobering example. Anyone hearing this would be careful not to lie to God nor to love money above God. This was an important lesson for this time, as well as today. Many believers were donating money to the church and there was a danger of attracting those who loved money. God gave this lesson to keep the early church free from the love of money.

Acts 5 describes further persecution that the disciples went through. The apostles were thrown in prison, but an angel released them. They were arrested a second time and appeared before the top judges of the land. In describing what happened we are taught an important lesson. Where the wishes of human rulership conflict with God's commands, believers must follow God. Despite what the rulers said, God wanted them to continue preaching, which is what they did.

#### Day 155: Acts 6

Acts 6 describes a case of tension that arose in the early church. It concerned the distribution of food for widows. The Gentile widows felt they were not receiving a fair share compared to the Jewish widows. This problem was resolved by putting together a group of faithful brothers to ensure fairness. The example illustrates the importance of looking after the needy, including widows who are among the poorest. It also shows us a way to help the poor believers. We must ensure other believers have daily food. There may be many ways that these people can be helped, but advice in the Bible is consistent that the hungry should be fed and the naked clothed. The second part of Acts 6 covers Stephen. Just like Jesus, the Jews falsely accused Stephen of blasphemy. Blasphemy is one of the 10 commandments in the Law of Moses where people were forbidden to speak bad of God. It carried the death penalty. Like with Jesus, the Jewish rulers misused the law and killed the innocent. It is not surprising that God was angry with them.

#### Day 156: Acts 12

The Christian persecution at the time of Stephen was one phase of persecution caused by Jews opposition. Acts 12 contains the next phase, which was the persecution conducted by Herod Agrippa I. Herod killed the apostle James and imprisoned Peter with the intention of killing him. God intervened to free Peter and then remove Herod. God intervened to protect the believers and allow the word of God to spread. We see another example of God protecting the early church. The apostle Peter wrote to believers about aspects of persecution. We will look at his first letter.

#### Day 157: 1 Peter 1

The book of Peter tells us many aspects of Christian living which are important for believers to know. He addresses the issue of trials in the first chapter, which includes persecution. The problem of trials and suffering recurs throughout the letter. If believers endure trials faithfully, then this is pleasing to God. For believers it should be considered more important than gold. Those who endure for their faith will receive the 'salvation of your souls' which means they will be saved from sin and death.

For this to happen, believers must be holy. The word 'holy' means 'separate' and it means that they are separate from the world. They do this by living like strangers in the country where they live. They live in the country, but they are more like citizens of God rather than citizens of the country they live in.

Peter says that Jesus was chosen before the creation of the world. This means he was in God's plan from the beginning and has been revealed in recent times. The prophets in the Old Testament foresaw this future time, albeit without seeing the plan clearly. Believers have been 'born again' of the word of God. In this way they have become children of God.

#### Day 158: 1 Peter 2

Chapter breaks in the Bible were not put there by God. Chapters and verses were made by men who made them to allow easy reference. However, the chapter breaks do not always help us to understand what is said because they break the flow of thought. In the previous chapter that believers are born of the word of God. Now we are told these people need to grow on the word of God. The word of God is like their milk, and they were spiritual babies. When they read and keep the words of God, then they grow up into mature believers.

Another way to look at the position of believers is that the house of God is a building. Jesus is the chief corner stone, which the builder uses to guide the placing of the other stones. The believers are the other stones that together with the corner stone make up the house.

Believers must submit to the ruling authorities of the land and live good lives so that no one can complain about them. Slaves (we could say employees) must submit to their masters (we could say employers). If believers must suffer, then let it be for doing good. If they do that, then it is like following the example of following Jesus, who suffered for doing what was right.

#### Day 159: 1 Peter 3

Peter continues the Bible theme of speaking about the importance of marriage and the roles of husbands and wives in marriage. The wife should submit to her husband. It is more important that the wife is beautiful on the inside rather than the outside. The husband must be considerate of the wife, especially so that they obtain the spiritual gift of eternal life together. If the husband does not love his wife in this way, then it does affect him. His prayers are not so effective. Husbands and wives should be believers together serving the Lord. There are instructions on Christian behaviour which are necessary for a Christian to follow if they are to get salvation. Jesus is now in heaven with all power to enable this to happen.

#### Day 160: 1 Peter 4

Believers should not follow the ways of sin. The ways of sin bring death. Peter talks about those who follow the way of sin as being 'dead.' They are dead in the sense that that is what will happen to them if they do not repent. Believers should no longer spend their lives on selfish pleasure but should instead live by godly principles. Christians may need to suffer for their faith if this is the will of God. This is what happened to Jesus, so it can also happen to his followers.

#### Day 161: 1 Peter 5

Peter ends his letter by addressing the elders. Elders must not rule harshly. They should be like shepherds who care for the sheep. They are carers not rulers. This was Jesus' final advice to Peter in John's gospel and Peter now passes it on to other elders. All believers must be humble. They must submit to God and His commands.

Peter ends with another reference to suffering. Those that cause the persecution are called 'lions.' That is they are like lions waiting for an opportunity to pounce on their prey. If the Christian does have to suffer, then they should understand that it is only for a little while. This suffering is nothing compared to the eternal glory that the righteous will receive.

#### Day 162: James 4

We have read James 1-3 and now we complete the remaining chapters of the letter. The letter of James contains many of the same points made by John and Peter. For example, James also speaks of the need to submit to God and be humble. Believers must be different from those in the world who follow worldly things. Believers must not be friends of the world but friends of God. They cannot be both and must make a choice. Believers must not fight and slander one another. They must not be proud or boast. Believers should understand that they do not really have control over their lives. Their lives are ruled by God. When they speak about their plans, they should say, "if it is the Lord's will" I will do this or that.

#### Day 163: James 5

James ends with a warning to the rich. If they have become rich by unfair means they will receive their punishment. The poor should wait patiently for Jesus to return when the difficulties of life will be past. They should consider the example of the prophets or Job. Job was a man who underwent extreme short-term suffering. Even though it was hard, he maintained his faith until the suffering ended. There is a whole book of the Bible about Job. One way that believers can cope with suffering is through prayer. The faithful prayer of a righteous man really works. Elijah as an example of this. Believers should have a strong prayer life. If they are righteous and earnestly pray for the right things, then they will say at the end of their life that prayer really works.

#### Day 164: Luke 1:1-38

We now turn to look in more detail at the beginning and end of the life of Jesus. The birth of Jesus is given in most detail in Luke's gospel. The starting point is really John the Baptist and his birth. John's father had an angel visit him. But his father did not believe the angels message and so he lost his voice for the duration of the pregnancy. In contrast, Mary believed the angel who visited her. The birth of Jesus was to be caused by the Holy Spirit coming on her, so that she would bear a son without a natural father. Her son would be known as 'son of God.' The angel made it clear that what was happening was in fulfilment of God's promise to David.

#### Day 165: Luke 1:39-80

Mary visited Elisabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. Elisabeth welcomed Mary with a special greeting. Mary then gave what is known as 'Mary's song'. It is a bit like Hannah's song. Both praised God for blessing the humble and lowly. Mary referred to the promise God made to Abraham and Israel. Jesus was the way in which God would fulfil His promises to Abraham, Israel, and David. Luke 1 then describes the birth of John. His father now believed and praised God. He also refers to the promise of Abraham and the words of the prophets who spoke of Jesus in advance. We notice the emphasis on the events of Jesus as being foretold in the Old Testament. John the Baptist would prepare God's people for the coming of Jesus, so that they would listen to Jesus.

#### Day 166: Luke 2

The birth of Jesus is described in Luke 2. Mary had the baby before she was married. Both Mary and Joseph would have suffered community shame because of this. The shepherds at Bethlehem were the first to know about the birth. According to the Law of Moses, every male child needed to be circumcised on the eighth day. When this happened, he was given the name 'Jesus.' The name means 'saviour' ('one who saves'), because he would save the people from their sin. After 40 days, the parents had to offer an offering at the temple as also required by the Law of Moses.

Two faithful Israelites were permitted to see the baby Jesus – Simeon and Anna. Jesus was then taken to a town called Nazareth where he spent his childhood. As law-abiding Israelites, the men needed to keep the pilgrimage feasts, which meant travelling to Jerusalem three times a year. On one occasion, Jesus was left behind talking to the teachers of the law. Jesus amazed the teachers with his understanding. Like any child, Jesus grew. As a good child, he obeyed his parents and pleased both God and man.

#### Day 167: Matthew 1

Matthew chapter 1 is not an obvious start to the New Testament, but it does the job very well. It starts with a statement to challenge the reader. Jesus is the promised Messiah. Verse 1 makes it clear that Jesus was both the son of Abraham and David. This points the reader to think of the promises God made to Abraham and David. Jesus is the answer to the promises. We have the qualifications of Jesus, that is his genealogy, proving that he was their son. This is such an important point for the Jews.

The Matthew account of the birth of Jesus focuses on Joseph's point of view. Joseph had found that his wife-to-be was pregnant. What was he to do? God spoke to Joseph in a dream so that Joseph married Mary. The virgin birth was needed to fulfil God's plan that was spoken about in the Old Testament.

#### Day 168: Matthew 4

The ministry of Jesus began with his baptism. Jesus received the Holy Spirit powers at this time and a voice from heaven told the people that Jesus as the son of God. Both these things became an immediate temptation for him when he was taken into the wilderness. Jesus was tempted to misuse his power for personal reasons. But Jesus refused to make bread from rocks to feed his hunger. Secondly, he refused to use his sonship to display God's protection of him to others. Thirdly, he



refused to use his abilities to become a worldly king there and then. Because Jesus resisted temptations throughout his life, he died sinless.

Jesus had a mission from God. This was to teach the good news of the kingdom of God, which was to come. As evidence that this message came from God, Jesus was able to do miracles and heal those suffering from sickness. Not surprisingly, he got a lot of interest. Jesus carefully chose some of the people to follow him as his disciples.

#### Day 169: Matthew 7

The greatest single teaching we have from Jesus is the Sermon on the Mount. We have already looked at parts of it. Now we will read the final part. Followers of Jesus were not judge others harshly, especially when they are not perfect themselves. They should make sure that they follow the way of Jesus very carefully. The way to do this is not easy to find. There are many false teachers. Seekers must look for it carefully. Those who follow this way must do to others as they would like others to do to them. It is the way of living that marks a disciple out as being true. Being a teacher and calling on the name of Jesus is not enough to be called a true disciple of Jesus. A true disciple of Jesus is one who behaves like one. The parable of the wise and foolish builders was given to teach this lesson.

#### Day 170: Matthew 8

Matthew 8 tells us about some of the miracles Jesus did and some of the people he met. Jesus was able to heal incurable diseases like leprosy and mental sicknesses. He touched and healed the leper and the demon possessed. His ability to heal was a fulfilment of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. Jesus admired the faith of a special Gentile. He was a hated centurion. The centurion was not appealing to Jesus for selfish reasons but on behalf of his servant. The servant would probably have been Jewish. Here was a lesson on faith for the Jews.

Jesus gave a lesson on discipleship. One disciple wanted to bury his father. What this meant was he wanted to live with his father until his father died, and then he could follow Jesus after many years. But people should not delay in following Jesus, and neither should they put their family before Jesus. Finally we have the calming of the storm by Jesus, which showed that Jesus had power over the wind and the waves. Why would someone not follow a man with such power and words from God?

#### Day 171: Matthew 9

Matthew 9 continues the examples of healing. These are highly selective because Jesus healed many people. The healing of the paralyzed man connects this man's sickness with sin and his healing with forgiveness. We cannot do this for every sickness. Jesus came to save sinners and to heal the sick. Jesus was willing to show mercy to whoever was willing to listen. Whoever was unclean according to the Law of Moses could be made clean by Jesus.

The chapter ends with the teaching about the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God was coming, and everyone needed to hear the message. Jesus sent his disciples out to teach this, so that everyone could hear. One group that were told were the Pharisees. They were a group of Old

Testament teachers who thought that they were righteous, and that Jesus was not. They called Jesus 'mad' and claimed he had evil powers.

#### Day 172: Matthew 15

Jesus met the Pharisees on many occasions. The Pharisees added many laws to the Law of Moses to try and become even more righteous. These additional laws were 'traditions of the elders.' The Pharisees considered these additional man-made laws as important as the Law of Moses. Jesus pointed out that these additional laws were flawed. Some of them even broke the Law of Moses! When Jesus pointed this out to them, they did not like this. The difference was that Jesus understood the point behind the Law of Moses, whereas the Pharisees did not. Uncleanness comes from an unclean heart - not from (for example) washing hands. A Canaanite woman demonstrated this. Although she was unclean according to the Law of Moses, she had a humble heart, understood her need for mercy, and had faith in Jesus. Jesus helped all who came to him sincerely. The feeding of the 4000 demonstrated the willingness of Jesus to be merciful to all who seek Jesus.

#### Day 173: Matthew 21

After a ministry of over 3 years, Jesus entered Jerusalem for his final week. The gospels give a lot of attention to this final week. His first entry was greeted with a great crowd cheering. They had seen the miracles Jesus had done and were expecting great things. Jesus went to the temple and saw that the holy temple was run more like a corrupt business. When he stopped the business, it did not make him popular with the temple rulers.

We then have the unusual cursing of the fig tree. This needs to be understood as a real-life parable. The people of Israel were like a fig tree that should produce spiritual fruit (that is, repentance and good works). When they did not, it would be cursed. Given that the holy temple was run like a business, it was clear that religion in Israel was in a bad state. The leaders challenged Jesus. Jesus turned this around and challenged them with three parables (two in this chapter and one in the next). The messages of these parables is clear.

#### Day 174: Matthew 26

The religious leaders of Israel did not like Jesus' teaching. During the final week, their opposition grew more and more hostile. Jesus knew it would end in his death. Even so, Jesus did not avoid it. He was anointed in readiness for his burial. He knew that he would be betrayed by one of his close disciples. Jesus was kind to all his disciples, even the betrayer (Judas). At the last supper, Jesus introduced a new feast for the disciples were to follow. This is called the 'breaking of bread.' The disciples were to break and eat bread as a memory of his broken body. And they were to drink wine as a memory of his poured-out blood. Jesus knew that another of his disciples (Peter) would deny him, and all his disciples would flee from him. His disciples were not a source of strength to him in his last hours. His strength came from prayer to his Father. At his arrest Jesus did not resist and he acted to protect his disciples. At his first trial he spoke up about what was true. This resulted in his death sentence.

#### Day 175: Matthew 27

Events moved quickly in that final day. The Jewish leaders went to the Roman leader to get authority for a death sentence. This they achieved by shouting and screaming rather than by following the path of justice. The Romans continued the injustice and the brutality and the mockery. The betrayer (Judas) realised his mistake and committed suicide. The events of the crucifixion were witnessed by a centurion, who concluded that Jesus must be the son of God. The curious event of people rising from the dead was a sign of the effectiveness of Jesus in raising the dead. Once the rulers made sure Jesus was dead, he was buried in a tomb and guarded. The guard was to prevent false claims about a resurrection.

#### Day 176: Matthew 28

All gospels end with the resurrection of Jesus. For three days Jesus had been dead in the tomb, but at dawn on the third day he was raised from the dead. God sent an angel to raise him. Even though the guard saw the angel, they were more interested in money and pleasing their rulers. They chose to tell lies for money. The angel appeared to the women. Then Jesus appeared to them. They held him and confirmed that he was real and alive. Jesus appeared to his disciples as well. Jesus told them that God had given him all authority. Now Jesus gave the disciples authority to teach the good news of the kingdom of God and to baptise. The final words are a comfort to all disciples. Jesus continues to be with his disciples.

#### Day 177: 1 Corinthians 15

The gospels end with the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection of the dead is taught in many places. The greatest chapter on this is 1 Corinthians 15. Paul emphasises that there is a resurrection and that every believer must believe in it. The Christian hope depends on there being a resurrection of dead believers. Just as death is certain for all descendants of Adam, so the resurrection to life is certain for all followers of Jesus. At different times, false teachers have come along and denied the resurrection. They have raised questions to turn people away from believing in it. These false teachers still exist today. Paul is clear - there is a resurrection from the dead for the believers. They will be changed suddenly at a trumpet call. They will change from being mortal flesh and blood to become immortal. When this trumpet sounds, there will be some believers still living. These are described as people who have not all 'slept.' Here sleep is described as like death. Death is like sleep in the sense that both are states of unconsciousness.

#### Day 178: 1 Thessalonians 4

The church at Thessalonica had some who did not really believe in the resurrection. Some thought that the dead were gone for ever. But Paul describes what will happen in the future. Jesus will come from heaven. Then he will give a loud command. This will result in a chief angel calling and a trumpet sound. At this point, those who have died with faith in Jesus will be raised from the dead. These people will have lived in different countries from all over the world, so they need to be brought to Jesus. This happens by aerial transport, or through the 'air' as the letter says. Then they will be with Jesus for ever. Believers need to comfort each other with this hope, especially when believers die.

#### Day 179: 1 Thessalonians 5

The apostle Paul tells us about the return of Jesus to the earth. This will be sudden and unexpected. Believers must be careful to be spiritually awake rather than spiritually asleep. We notice that the same chapter speaks about sleep in two different ways, and neither of them is the usual sleep we have every night. One refers to sleep as being like death. The other refers to those who are no longer active Christians but are spiritually asleep. The Bible will often change from literal meanings of words without warning in the text. We need to think carefully about passages to make sure we are not misled by taking the wrong view. For people new to reading the Bible, this is difficult. However, with practice, readers will learn how the Bible speaks about things. The letter ends with advice about how to be an active Christian and how to help others too.

#### Day 180: Philippians 3:12-4:23

This passage is the last reading of this series of chapters from the Bible. It is a happy ending! We must make sure we are active Christians. This is what Paul was. He did not stop being active, and neither should we. We should avoid being distracted by worldly thinking. We should have godly or heavenly thinking. If we think about the things of God, then we can rejoice in the Lord. We can use prayer to help us not worry about things in this life. We should turn away from the things of the world. We should think about things that are good and right and pure and lovely. We should be content with our life. If we are worried about our ability to do anything, let us be like Paul who could do all things through him who gave him strength (that is, God). God will help us through our prayers too. Let us help one another too in our lives. May all the glory be to God. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

#### **What we learned in the Last Month**

We have listened to the advice of three key disciples - John, Peter, and James. They have had similar things to say as well as different things. Christians will suffer in different ways. In this respect, they are like Jesus. We must also love one another in the way that Christ loved. Key to this way of life is having a godly way of thinking and not a worldly way of thinking. Another way of putting this, is for the Christian to follow the life and thinking of Jesus.

We ended with another look at the life of Jesus, mainly through the gospel of Matthew. His life's work was to teach the kingdom of God and enable the kingdom to come through his sinless death. God then raised Jesus from the dead and gave Jesus the authority to rule from heaven and return to the earth. It is the resurrection of the dead that will enable the followers of Jesus to meet Jesus and be with him in the kingdom.

Our reading of the Bible has shown that the Bible is all connected. God had a plan from the beginning and God is bringing about the end of that plan. This is to set up His kingdom on earth, with Jesus as king and with the faithful as citizens of this kingdom. God has all power and can do this. The kingdom will come, and the message of Jesus was for everyone to get ready for it.

## **Review of 6 months of Bible Reading**

We have read approximately 180 chapters of the Bible; 86 from the Old Testament and 94 from the New Testament. We have read about 15% of the Bible and about 36% of the New Testament. This is a good introduction to both. We have looked at the passages which can help us grow in knowledge and understanding the quickest. We have read three books of the Bible completely: Jonah, James and 1 Peter.

In the passages we have read, we have selected some of the more important passages. These cover origins, conclusions, main teachings and important events and people. We have not covered the more complex or longer topics.

You will have seen many references to the problems of false teachers, and these still exist today. The only way to deal with these is to check everything with the Bible and prove everything from the Bible. A single verse is not enough to establish a teaching because of the danger of misunderstanding it. Fortunately, all main teachings in the Bible can be established from many verses.

We have seen examples of Bible language where not everything is taken as literal. This is one way in which people misinterpret the Bible. This means that we need to think carefully as we read the Bible. It is a real help to have a knowledge of the whole Bible. We have seen, for example, how the New Testament is based on the Old Testament. It is helpful to look at the whole Bible to establish important teachings.

We started by reading Psalm 1 and learnt that we should read and meditate on the Bible every day. We recommend this practice. In this way you will grow in your knowledge of the Bible and will become a mature Christian. As the Bible says, you will grow from one who feeds on milk to one who feeds on meat. There are other readings and teachings that we provide for you to help you with this. We also recommend you speak to someone so that your personal questions can be answered, and you can grow spiritually at a pace that is best for you.

This introductory course has introduced you to many parts of the Bible. However, it is still not enough for a reader to go to any part of the Bible and read it easily. There are still 31 books of the Bible we have not introduced or read. Since there are 66 books of the Bible, this is a significant amount. We therefore recommend moving to the Second Steps in Bible Reading. This will go through examples of all the books of the Bible and introduce them. It will go through the Bible in chronological order and cover the main people and events. The aim of this course is to provide enough background to the reader so that they can read any part of the Bible with understanding.

Whatever step you take next, may God bless you as you sincerely and humbly listen to what God has to say to you from the Bible. It is our desire that you honour God in your life and follow the Lord Jesus. It would be our pleasure in helping you be saved from death and to obtain eternal life in God's kingdom.