

Introducing Bible Basics

Introduction and method of study

The aim of the Bible Basics Introductory Studies is to enable you to systematically study the Bible for yourself, by yourself. At the end of the studies, you will have a clear picture of the basic gospel which Jesus taught. He commanded his disciples to preach the gospel to the entire world, and to baptise those who believe by immersion in water – into his death and resurrection. We hope that by the end of these studies you will be in a position to decide to believe the gospel and be baptized. At this stage, of course, you are just beginning. Pray, as best you can, for God to open up His word to your understanding. Tell Him about all the issues in your life and try to see how He is guiding you, through His word, and seeking to bring you closer to Him.

There are 12 studies in this introductory course. After this, there are more detailed lessons in the *Bible Basics* course. All of these things are completely free of charge; we will never ask you for money.

We do truly care for you, and want to help you towards a place in God's eternal kingdom here on the earth, when Jesus returns. We therefore pray for you, and look forward to receiving your answers to the lessons or your comments on them.

How to do the course

You will gain the maximum benefit from these studies by going through them several times and looking up the suggested passages from the Bible.

At the end of each study there are some multiple-choice questions. Refer to the notes again if you are uncertain of the answers. There is no point in rushing through the studies and guessing the answers;

sufficient information is given to enable you to answer all of the questions correctly, and this will serve as a good foundation for the more advanced studies that follow.

When you are sure of your answers, submit them as indicated. Your answers will be forwarded to a personal tutor who will respond to you with comments on your answers.

You are welcome to add extra comments or to ask questions on any Biblical matters. We will be pleased to correspond with you about any of these things.

All quotes are taken from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise stated.

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Study 1 – The Bible

The Bible makes great claims. It clearly states that its author is God, the creator of the universe. It claims to reveal God and His purpose, and it speaks with authority. If this claim is false, then the Bible is the greatest and most cruel hoax which has ever deluded mankind. However, if the claims of the Bible are true, then we are in possession of the world's greatest treasure.

The Bible, as the true word of God, contains the key to peace and happiness. It answers the most perplexing questions concerning the meaning and purpose of our existence and the final outcome of the struggle between right and wrong.

The Bible's claims

Paul, writing of the Old Testament, says, "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God*" (2 Timothy 3v16, KJV). Every word of the original manuscripts was written under direct Divine guidance. The apostle Peter stressed the same fact: "*For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*" (2 Peter 1v21).

These two apostles claim that the writings of the Old Testament, recorded centuries before their own time, had Divine authority. This Divine authority is responsible for the complete harmony of the teachings revealed in the Bible. The authors were wrote in different times and places, and had different educations, occupations, experiences, and social positions, and yet their writings all combine to form one coherent, united Book.

Why the Bible was written

The Bible tells us how the human race began, and how God's plan of salvation will lead to the final victory of right over wrong and the removal of all sin and evil. The chief purpose of the Bible is to make known to the condemned human race this way of salvation through

Jesus Christ, and to guide them in this way. The Old and New Testaments combine to present Jesus as the only Saviour of mankind. “*But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name*” (John 20v31). In the pages of the Bible we find all the teaching necessary for man’s enlightenment: the Divine definitions of right and wrong, and of man’s duty to God and to his fellow-men (2 Timothy 3v15-17).

Finally, the Bible has been given to us to tell us, in broad outline, what the future holds, so that we can be prepared for the coming of Christ (John 20v31).

The contents of the Bible

The Bible is a collection of books, and is divided into two main sections. The books of the Old Testament were written before the time of Christ, and the books of the New Testament after the time of Christ. There are 66 books altogether. You will find a list of them at the front of your Bible. They were written by about 40 different writers over a period of 1,500 years. They were written in a number of different countries, such as Israel, Egypt, Italy and Babylon.

The books all have a consistent theme: the working out of God’s purpose with man, from the very beginning, recorded in Genesis, to the time when “*The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever*” (Revelation 11v15).

1. The Old Testament

The books of the Old Testament fall into four main sections:

(a) the books of Moses

The first book is called *Genesis*, which means the beginning. It tells us about God's dealings with the first men on the earth. Then follow *Exodus*, *Leviticus*, *Numbers* and *Deuteronomy*. They tell how God called Abraham, made a covenant with him and with his descendants, brought his descendants out of Egypt, and gave them the land now called Israel.

(b) the historical books

The books from ‘*Joshua*’ to ‘*Esther*’, are a record of the history of the Israelites (or Jews), and of God’s dealings with them.

(c) the poetic books

The books of *Job*, *Psalms*, *Proverbs*, *Ecclesiastes* and *Song of Solomon* were written in Hebrew (the language of the Israelites) in poetic form. They contain many important teachings about the ways of God and the feelings and duties of man.

(d) the books of the prophets

The word “prophet” means seer – one who has special insight or visions, not only of future events, but also of God’s requirements for men. The long prophetic books of *Isaiah*, *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel* are followed by a number of shorter ones, ending with *Zechariah*.

2. The New Testament

There are four main parts to the New Testament:

(a) the gospel records

These are four separate accounts of the life of Jesus, written by *Matthew*, *Mark*, *Luke* and *John*; each one tells the gospel message (the good news) in his own way.

(b) the book called “The Acts of the Apostles”

This was written by Luke and tells what happened after Jesus Christ had risen from the dead. We are told how the first churches were formed as the apostles carried the good news throughout the Roman Empire.

(c) the letters

These were written by some of the apostles to help the early believers in the small, scattered, young churches.

(d) the book of “Revelation”

The last message of Jesus, was given to the Apostle John in a vision.

Reasons to believe the Bible

1. Jesus Christ believed the Old Testament

Jesus Christ is the central figure of the Bible plan and when he was

born the New Testament did not exist. The Scriptures which he used and studied were the Old Testament. Jesus believed these Scriptures, he based his teaching on them and accepted them as indisputable authority. Look at these passages:

John 5v46-47; Luke 24v25-27,44-48; Matthew 22v29; Mark 7v6-13.

Jesus speaks of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon, and many other people who we read about in the Old Testament, and bases his teachings on the fact that these people were real, and that all of the Old Testament is the Word of God.

2. The Bible cannot be proved false

All of the developments of modern thought and technology have combined to show that the Bible records are true. Many enemies of the Bible, including some very clever men, have tried to prove it wrong, but they have all failed. Some have even started out to prove it wrong and have ended up believing it. Since the truth cannot contradict itself, we would naturally expect the Word of God to be in harmony with what we know from the world around us.

The way in which the Bible has been preserved over the centuries is further evidence of its truth. The Bible has triumphantly withstood every effort of man to prove it wrong. It has been suppressed and withheld from the common people; whole editions of it have been burned, and many books have been written in attempts to disprove it. No other book has been subjected to such continuous and determined opposition, but the Bible still stands, immovable and unconquerable.

3. Archaeology proves the Bible true

The great antiquity of the Bible, its preservation, and its influence upon the human race are factors which cannot be ignored. The evidence of archaeological discoveries by such people as Rawlinson, Layard, Smith, Woolley, and Kenyon, in Egypt, Nineveh, Assyria, Babylon, Ur, Syria, Lebanon, and Israel are all striking confirmations of the truth of Bible history. Exhibits in museums all over the world clearly demonstrate this. The inscriptions of nations which fought against Israel confirm the Biblical accounts of both events and

ancient customs and local habits. Even today, archaeological discoveries continue to add material supporting the truth of the whole Bible.

Even the criticisms relating to the care taken by the Jewish copyists of the original writings are discounted with the discovery of ancient manuscripts. The remarkable discovery in 1947 of the Dead Sea Scrolls has provided still more valuable evidence of the accuracy of the Bible. These manuscripts are some of the earliest available, dating back to the second century B.C. Despite their age, the slight variations that do occur are only in respect of spelling, and do not affect the doctrine, prophecy or historical facts of the Bible.

So the work of archaeologists confirms the truth and reliability of the Bible in a remarkable way, and thus, indirectly, confirms that it is the production of Divine inspiration.

4. Prophecy proves the Bible true

God himself has chosen prophecy as a great proof of His infinite superiority over all other beings (Isaiah 46v9-10; Isaiah 42v9).

From time to time the Bible speaks of events that came to pass hundreds of years later. In Matthew 2 it is recorded that the wise men came to Jerusalem and asked, “*Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?*” When Herod asked the chief priests this question, they at once replied, “*In Bethlehem of Judea*” because hundreds of years before it had been prophesied in one of the books of the Old Testament (Micah 5v2).

In addition to prophecies about Jesus Christ, there are many relating to ancient nations, and in particular, to the Jews. Many of the ancient nations have disappeared from world affairs, but the Bible said that the Jews would survive. The Jews still exist as a nation today, in spite of many efforts to destroy them (Jeremiah 30v10-11). If the Bible had been only a human production, such a declaration could have been found false at any time in history. Instead, the Jews are still with us today, with their own state, Israel, and its capital city, Jerusalem, now in their control.

The Bible gives us the reasons for this situation. This is a powerful proof that the Bible is Divinely inspired, and therefore infallible.

Summary of some of the reasons for believing the Bible to be inspired

- The unity of its message, in spite of the large number of individual authors who wrote over a very long period of time.
- Its miraculous preservation.
- The evidence of the discoveries of archaeologists.
- The fulfilment of Bible prophecies (further examples will be given in later studies).

Conditions to be met

If we are to understand the Bible, Jesus said we must become like little children (Matthew 11v25). We must have the faith of a little child, but we must want to find out for ourselves the truth and wisdom of God's word the Bible (Proverbs 2v3-6), and God will reward us in our search (Hebrews 11v6). We must be willing to make our lives in harmony with God's commandments.

Jesus said, “*If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them*” (John 13v17) and, “*Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.*” (Matthew 7v21). The Apostle Paul wrote, “*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*” (Philippians 2v12).

How can we best study the Bible?

As with any course of study, regular, planned reading is the most helpful. To begin with, follow the suggestions for study contained in this study. The Bible itself is its own best interpreter. Always consider passages in their context, and compare what you read with other Bible passages.

As you go through this course, you will see that every basic belief is supported by clear and positive Bible references. With this foundation, all apparently ‘difficult’ or ‘contradictory’ verses can be explained or harmonized.

A concordance, marginal references, or Bible commentaries can sometimes be helpful, but it must be remembered that the compilers of these were not guided by Divine inspiration. If their conclusions contradict the teachings of scripture, they must be in error (John 10v35, Acts 5v29).

The purpose of this course of studies is to help you to understand the Bible for yourself, so that you may accept it for what it is: the Word of God, offering the hope of everlasting life to all who will hear and obey it.

Summary

- The Bible is the word of God.
- We have good reasons to believe the Bible.
- Unless we believe in the Bible and obey God, we cannot get eternal life.

Passages for Bible reading

2 Timothy 3; 2 Peter 1; Luke 24; Acts 28v23-31; Ephesians 4v21-32

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Study 1: Questions

Underline the correct answer and then mark the correct answer on the yellow “Answer summary Sheet” in the centre of this booklet.

Occasionally a question may have more than one correct answer.

1. Who is the author of the whole Bible?
(a) Paul (b) Moses (c) God (d) Daniel
2. What parts of the Old Testament did Jesus use to begin explaining about himself to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus?
(a) The writings of the prophets (b) The writings of Moses
(c) The Psalms (d) The Proverbs
3. The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in:
(a) 1749 (b) 1794 (c) 1914 (d) 1947
4. Where did Micah prophesy that Jesus would be born?
(a) Jerusalem (b) Bethel (c) Bethlehem (d) Babylon
5. The books of the Bible were written over a period of:
(a) 50 years (b) 15 years (c) 1,500 years (d) 150 years
6. Jesus said, “If you know these things, blessed are you...”
(a) “if you tell others.” (b) “if you do them.”
(c) “if you remember them.” (d) “if you are sure of them.”
7. How many individual books does the Bible contain?
(a) 66 (b) 27 (c) 39 (d) 23
8. What was the “sure word” that Peter referred to in his 2nd epistle?
(a) of talking (b) of singing (c) of prophecy (d) of faith
9. In which city was Paul living at the time recorded in Acts 28v23-31?
(a) Rome (b) Ephesus (c) Jerusalem (d) Alexandria
10. What can give us a full understanding of God’s plan and purpose with the earth?
(a) The Dead Sea Scrolls (b) The Jewish Law
(c) The Holy Bible (d) The writings of archaeologists

Study 2 – God

There are a number of arguments for the existence of God. We discuss two of these below, before going on to talk about God as He has revealed Himself in the Bible

Arguments for the existence of God

1. The watch argument

If we found an old watch on the ground and had never seen a watch before, we might pick it up and examine it. We might open the back and look at the complicated mechanism, and notice how the tiny wheels worked against each other and turned the hands on the face.

We would know that such an intricate mechanism must have been made. The watch must have been designed; it must have been planned. The watch could not have made itself. The parts could not have come together by accident. The fact that the watch exists is evidence that there must be a designer: there must be a watchmaker.

The universe is made up of millions of stars. The earth has a moon revolving round it. The sun and the planets are all part of a marvellously intricate system, of which every part is moving exactly along its appointed path. This is much more complicated than any watch. This could not happen by accident. There must be a designer. “*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork*” (Psalm 19v1).

2. Bible evidence

One of the most powerful arguments for the existence of God is the prophecies in the Bible. The Bible contains many prophecies about the rise and fall of kingdoms and nations, and also about individuals and minor events. In many cases these prophecies were recorded hundreds of years in advance. This is something that man could not do. Only God, who controls all things, could have caused these prophecies to be written. Look at Isaiah 46v9-10.

Some of these prophecies will be dealt with in future studies. The purpose of this study is to examine what God has revealed about Himself in the Bible.

What the Bible tells us about God

- God has revealed Himself as the Creator.

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1v1)

“I made the earth and created man on it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host.” (Isaiah 45v12).

- God reveals his character to us through the Bible.

“The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.’” (Exodus 34v6-7)

- God has revealed Himself as eternal. He has always been and always will exist.

“Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.” (Psalm 90v2)

“Your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting.” (Psalm 93v2)

- There is only one God. Israel were reminded that the various gods the Egyptians worshipped had no power and were no more than man-made images.

“For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens.” (1 Chronicles 16v26)

- God is all powerful. He knows all that is going on, and is present everywhere by the power of His spirit.

“You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.” (Psalm 139v2-3).

David in this Psalm says that our minds are too small to understand the greatness of God (verse 6). But if we know that God sees and knows all things, it can be a great comfort and a source of strength. *“If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.”* (Psalm 139v9-10).

The Bible tells us that God's ear is always open to hear the cry of His children and God has declared, too, *“I will not leave you or forsake you”* (Hebrews 13v5; Joshua 1v5).

1. The unity of God

The Bible teaching that there is one God is important, particularly as there are many who do not believe this. It is the clear teaching of both the Old and New Testaments. Look up these verses: Isaiah 45v5; 1 Corinthians 8v6; and Ephesians 4v6.

The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, *“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”* (1 Timothy 2v5).

Jesus himself emphasised the importance of this Bible doctrine when he said, *“And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent”* (John 17v3).

1.1 The doctrine of the Trinity

Few doctrines are more generally accepted by the Christian world than that concerning the Godhead, known as the doctrine of the

Trinity. Roman Catholics, the Greek Church, and almost all denominations of Protestants, however they may differ upon some points, agree on this, and believe that “the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, and yet there are not three Gods, but one God”. They further believe that all three are co-equal and co-eternal.

Is this a true doctrine? If so, while we may not understand it, must we accept it? How are we to know? Obviously only by what God has revealed in His word. Therefore, we go to the Bible, and soon discover that there is no support anywhere in its pages for this popular doctrine; in fact, quite the reverse. The Scriptures always teach the unity of God, not the trinity. The following quotations clearly show this:

“*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.*” (Deuteronomy 6v4; quoted Mark 12v29)

“*I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God.*” (Isaiah 45v5)

“*one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*” (Ephesians 4v6)

These are not by any means isolated passages, there are many more verses that might be quoted, all teaching that God is one, not three. The last of the above passages is strikingly significant. At this time Christ had been born, had died, and had been raised from the dead and exalted to the Father's right hand, yet Paul says there is **one God!** And who is this? The triune God of orthodoxy – Father, Son and Holy Ghost? No! it is **the Father**. He was the God whom Paul worshipped.

1.2 Was Jesus God the Son?

What, then, of Jesus Christ? Was he not ‘God the Son’? In view of the frequent use of this expression today, it is remarkable that such a phrase is never found in the Bible. We read of ‘the Son of God’, but not ‘God the Son’. The natural inference is that a doctrine which

involves this expression is not a scriptural one. The Athanasian Creed says of the Father and Son that they are co-equal and co-eternal. Passing over the remarkable concept that a Father and Son can be co-eternal, what does the Bible say concerning their co-equality? It speaks most plainly on the matter. Was Christ the equal of the Father when he was here 2000 years ago? Let him answer for himself:

“I can do nothing on my own.” (John 5v30)

“My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.” (John 7v16)

“The Father is greater than I.” (John 14v28)

The very fact that he was sent by the Father (John 5v37-38, 20v21; 1 John 4v14) negates the idea of co-equality, whilst his lack of knowledge concerning the time of his second coming forms additional evidence against this popular belief, for one cannot imagine the Second Person of the Trinity being ignorant of anything. Not only was there this absence of equality in the past, it is the same now. Ponder the words of Paul when he speaks of *“the God and Father of the Lord Jesus”* (2 Corinthians 11v31). In fact, even Jesus himself, after his resurrection, referred to the Father as *“My God”* (John 20v17). The further fact that *“there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”* (1 Timothy 2v5), shows the same thing.

1.3 Christ's future position

This evidence can be carried further. If we look forward to the time at the end of Christ's thousand year reign on earth, what do we see?

“Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For ‘God has put all things in subjection under his feet.’ But when it says, ‘all things are put in subjection,’ it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in

subjection under him, that God may be all in all.” (1 Corinthians 15v24-28).

Thus the Father is supreme in the past, the present, and the future, high though the position assigned to Jesus Christ is; co-equality is never even suggested.

Who, then, is Jesus Christ? The Son of God, born of a virgin, as recorded in Matthew and Luke:

“An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.’” (Matthew 1v20)

“And the angel answered her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.’” (Luke 1v35)

As is recorded in the Scriptures, Jesus lived, was tempted, suffered, and died. He was then raised from the dead by the Father, and exalted to God’s right hand as high priest and mediator. He will remain there until the time when he returns to the earth to establish the Kingdom of God.

2. The love of God

If there is one attribute of the Almighty God which shows that His character is different from the gods which have been invented by men, it is the love that He shows.

Think of the love that a parent shows to his children. God shows all that love to us, and more.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3v16).

The work of the Lord Jesus Christ forms the subject of another study. Man’s need for salvation is also dealt with fully later. However, the purpose that God has with the earth and with man needs to be outlined here.

It is the clear teaching of the Bible that God intends in the future to change the world, to remove the evils which at present afflict it.

2.1 God's plan for the earth

Very early in the history of Israel, God declared, *“As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord”* (Numbers 14v21, KJV).

The earth is certainly not filled with the glory of God now. But it will be. This is God's purpose.

The apostle Paul spoke to the people of Athens and told them that one day the world would be ruled in righteousness by a king appointed by God, and that this was guaranteed by His raising the this appointed one (Jesus) from the dead.

The world is certainly not ruled in righteousness now, but it will be. When this time comes it will be called the Kingdom of God, and Jesus will be the king. God's purpose with the earth is dealt with more fully in the next study. One of the sure ways in which God has shown His love for man is that He has made His purpose known to us through the Bible. His love is also shown in the provision of His own son as the centre of that purpose.

3. The Spirit

A study about God would not be complete without mentioning two words which are often associated with the Almighty and His work. The word ‘spirit’ is often used in the Bible to mean the power of God, which is universally present. *“Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?”* (Psalm 139v7). *“Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground!”* (Psalm 143v10).

3.1 The Holy Spirit

The word ‘holy’ means special, set apart, sacred, consecrated. When we read of the Holy Spirit, the Bible is speaking of the Power of God which is being used for a particular, special purpose. The Authorised Version of the Bible sometimes translates the word for spirit as

‘ghost’ but newer versions use the word ‘spirit’; if we look at some of the places where the words appear, the meaning will be clear.

When Mary, the mother of Jesus, was told that she was to have a son who would be called Jesus, she was told that the Holy Spirit would come upon her, and Luke emphasizes the meaning by also saying that “*the power of the Most High will overshadow you*” (Luke 1v35). Look at the verse. The angel is explaining that the birth of Jesus would be a miracle brought about by God’s special power operating upon Mary. Because of this, Jesus would be the Son of God.

3.2 Writing the Bible

We have already looked at a verse in the second letter of Peter which says that “*no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*” (2 Peter 1v21). It was God’s special power that caused the prophets to speak and the writers of the scriptures to set down God’s Word. They were moved by the power of God.

The word ‘spirit’ in the Bible is often a translation of a Hebrew (in the Old Testament) or Greek (in the New Testament) word that means ‘breath’. So when the Spirit of God moved a man, it could be said that “God breathed into him”. This meaning behind the word makes some of the passages which speak of the power of God particularly beautiful. This, too, is the reason that Paul, writing to Timothy, says the scriptures are God-breathed: “*All Scripture is breathed out by God*” (2 Timothy 3v16).

As the New Testament tells us, the power of the Holy Spirit was given to Jesus. Later, the apostles were also given this power, which enabled them to perform miracles. The last verse in Mark (Mark 16v20) tells us that the purpose of this was to confirm the words that the apostles spoke.

Paul speaks of the way in which the gifts of the Holy Spirit were used in the first century. The greatest attribute which we should try to cultivate is love, which is greater than all gifts (read 1 Corinthians

12v28-31 then 1 Corinthians 13).

God has shown His love for us in many ways. We can best show our love for Him by trying to live our lives in a way that pleases Him.

Summary

- There is one God.
- He is the Creator.
- He is immortal – from everlasting to everlasting.
- God sees and knows all things.
- God is righteous and loving.
- God has revealed His purpose to us through the Bible.
- The power of God is described as His Spirit.
- The scriptures were written by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus was born as a result of the action of the Holy Spirit upon Mary.
- It is important to our salvation that we should understand the nature of God.

Passages for Bible reading

Genesis 1; Exodus 34v6-7; Psalm 139; Isaiah 45; Acts 17v10-32 (notice what those at Berea did); 1 Timothy 6; 1 John 4.

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Study 2: Questions

Underline the correct answer and then mark the correct answer on the yellow “Answer Summary Sheet” in the centre of this booklet.

1. How was the universe formed? By...
(a) chance (b) God’s power (c) evolution (d) a Big Bang
2. The true God is:
(a) The God of the Bible (b) An Egyptian idol
(c) The image of Baal (d) We do not know
3. Which of the following are evidence that God exists?
(a) National hymns (b) Bible prophecy
(c) Traditional legends (d) Creation
4. In Psalm 139 verse 6 the writer says:
(a) “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me”
(b) “God sees and knows all things”
(c) “God is all powerful”
(d) “You know when I sit down and when I rise up”
5. The Bible teaches that:
(a) God is a Trinity (b) God is one
(c) God is many gods in one (d) There is no God
6. John 3v16 tells us that by giving His son God showed:
(a) His hope (b) His love (c) His faith (d) His justice
7. What does God intend to do with this earth?
(a) Destroy it (b) Leave it as is
(c) Fill it with His glory (d) We don’t know
8. What is the Spirit of God?
(a) The power of God (b) The love of God
(c) The freewill of God (d) The offering of God’s son
9. By what means did God cause the Bible to be written?
(a) His majesty (b) His Holy Spirit (c) His truth (d) His grace
10. In Acts 17v11 we read that those at Berea:
(a) sang praise to God (b) searched the scriptures daily
(c) stirred up the people (d) set the city in an uproar

Study 3 – God’s plan and purpose

The love of God was stressed in the last study: His love for the world in giving His only begotten Son. This love which God shows, and which we need to show in return, must not be confused with sentiment or ‘softness’.

The Bible emphasizes God’s *righteousness* and *justice*. The reason that Jesus rose from the dead was the absolute justice of God, as well as His love for man. Because Jesus did no wrong it was not possible that he should remain dead (Acts 2v24). It would not have been right for Jesus to remain in the grave, and so God raised him from the dead.

In the same way, it is not right that the world should continue to be a place where wickedness flourishes and where so much that is wrong takes place. The book of Proverbs tells us, “*A false balance is an abomination to the LORD*” (Proverbs 11v1).

Look at these verses:

“God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day.” (Psalm 7v11)

“the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.” (2 Thessalonians 1v7-8)

This is the side of God's character that is often overlooked. The righteousness of God will not allow wickedness to continue. God is not going to permit the world to be ruled by men who may set wrong standards. It is God's purpose that one day the world will be ruled in righteousness by the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 17v31). When he is King, many of the problems that man faces today will be solved. We refer to this wonderful future time as the Kingdom of God.

Jesus taught his disciples to pray for the Kingdom to come so that God’s will would be done on earth in the same way as the angels now obey Him in heaven (Matthew 6v10).

Prophecies of things to come

In the Bible we find the most confident assertions about the future: not just one, nor a mere handful, but dozens of prophecies. We find prophecies concerning individuals, and prophecies concerning both powerful and weak nations, some of which did not yet exist at the time of the prophecy. There are both long-term and short-term prophecies; prophecies of things to come, the like of which had never happened before. Prophecies of extraordinary experiences which nations would have, experiences which could never have been expected or even guessed at. We find all this in the Bible. We also see that many of these prophecies have been fulfilled in completely unexpected ways, while others are still being fulfilled today. As a result, we can have confidence that those which have not yet been fulfilled (such as prophecies about Jesus' return) will be fulfilled when the time is right. What are we to make of this? Could men do this by themselves? Of course not. There can be only one conclusion: the men who wrote the Bible received directions from God.

“For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 1:21)

Do not underestimate the force of Bible prophecy. Peter, in the chapter just quoted, speaks of it as “something more sure, the prophetic word” and compares it to a light shining in a dark place (v19). This is a very apt comparison. We look around the world and it seems to be all confusion, with no apparent meaning or purpose. History seems just a haphazard sequence of events, with no obvious aim, apart from the fleeting ambitions of the men who pass across the world's stage. However, a careful study of the Bible shows beyond all doubt that human affairs *are* under control and are moving forward to a totally unexpected climax – unexpected, that is, to all but a few.

“The Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.” (Daniel 4v32)

These words were addressed to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. He was no fairy-tale figure, but a powerful monarch in the ancient world. In recent times, his city, Babylon, has been excavated and proved to have really been the immense city of which the Bible speaks. The hundreds of thousands of bricks that have been dug up all bear the name of the proud monarch who ruled the world of his day. Indeed, Nebuchadnezzar might reasonably claim to be the first monarch of the world. And it this man to whom it was said, “*the Most High rules the kingdom of men*”. But he was told far more than just that.

Nebuchadnezzar’s dream

1. An amazing vision

King Nebuchadnezzar must have wondered what the fate of his vast empire would be after he himself had passed from the scene. Such questions must normally go unanswered, because no man can tell what the future holds, but Nebuchadnezzar was given the answer by God. We can read it in the second chapter of the book of Daniel. Please read it through for yourself, it is one of the most remarkable chapters in the whole of the Bible.

In this chapter we are told of a dream in which Nebuchadnezzar was told about the future of his kingdom in symbolic form. It may be asked why Almighty God troubled tell the future to a pagan king; why he chose to do so by way of a dream; and why the visionary message was clothed in symbols which the king could not understand.

The following observations may be made in answer, and will introduce the details of the prophecy and its fulfilment:

- The importance of Nebuchadnezzar in the purpose of God lay not so much in the greatness of his empire as in the fact that his dominions included the land of Israel, and that the people of Judah (the southern kingdom of Israel) were taken as captives to Babylon for 70 years. God’s land and God’s

people were subject to Nebuchadnezzar's rule.

- The method used to give the information also brought to the forefront the man Daniel, a Jew, the only man who could explain the dream. This underlined the fact that the "*God in heaven who reveals mysteries*" is especially the God of Israel. A vital aspect of God's plan was thus shown.
- The symbolic style adopted is a most effective way of conveying a great deal of information in a very compressed form. Modern political cartoons are an apt example of the same thing. However, while these cartoons illuminate events of the past and present, Nebuchadnezzar's vision threw light on the future.

2. The vision's meaning

In his dream the king saw the image of a man composed of various metals – golden head, silver breast and arms, bronze belly and thighs, iron legs, feet part iron and part clay. This statue stood erect – until some unseen power directed a stone at its feet. Then the image crashed down, and its remains were ground to powder and blown away by the wind, while the stone that had done the damage "*became a great mountain and filled the whole earth*" (Daniel 2v35).

What did all this mean? Daniel's clear words placed the meaning beyond doubt. The image stood for the kingdoms of men in the ages that were to follow. The nations of the known world were at that time subject to the king of Babylon, who was represented by the golden head: "*you are the head of gold*" (verse 38). Following this there was to be a second, "silver", empire, then a third and a fourth. The fourth kingdom was to be "strong as iron"; but after the strength was to come weakness: "*And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay.*" (Daniel 2v41-43).

The question that must now be answered is, how do the facts of history compare with this prophecy? There is a perfect match – so much so that some have tried to say that the second chapter of Daniel was written after the events it describes. This is sufficient testimony to the accuracy of the prophecy, but it is clearly untrue, because the prophecy is still being fulfilled! In addition, copies of the book of Daniel have been found amongst the Dead Sea Scrolls from the second century BC.

3. An outline of world history

Four great world empires followed each other. Consult any history book covering the period and you will find a description of how Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians, a joint empire in which first the Medes and then the Persians took precedence. Their supremacy was ended by Alexander the Great, who founded the Greek Empire. This, in turn, yielded to a stronger power: Rome was unquestionably the strongest and most durable of the four empires.

Rome held sway for centuries. The world had never known anything to compare with the mighty “strong-as-iron” Roman Empire. What power on earth could ever break it or conquer it? No single power could. Rome was not to be superseded. There was not to be another great empire in the line of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome.

First the empire was split in two: Eastern Rome, ruled from Constantinople, and Western Rome, ruled from Rome itself. (Remember that the image Nebuchadnezzar saw had two iron legs.) Later, both halves gave way by degrees to hostile forces from without and decaying processes within, and a number of independent kingdoms emerged over the vast area once ruled by Rome, some strong, some weak. This has been the state of affairs ever since. There has been no fifth undisputed empire in succession to the four we have named, whose dominions included the land of Israel. Many attempts have been made, but all have failed: Philip II of Spain, Napoleon I, Kaiser Wilhelm II, Hitler. Today we see the countries of Europe trying to weld themselves together into a united whole – what a task! (*Note: Europe does not include Israel.*) How true are the prophet’s words:

“they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay”.

Who could have foreseen all this two and a half thousand years ago? Who could have asserted so confidently that there would be four great empires, not three, or five, or six? Who, in a few bold strokes, could have delineated the outstanding features of their history, and its sequel, with such uncanny accuracy? Could any man? From all that we know of human forecasts, we must answer, No. We note that Daniel disclaimed all credit for his message: *“A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure”* (Daniel 2v45).

Men and women of all times since who have studied this prophecy have found here solid grounds for confidence in God and His word. It is a confidence which you, who read these words, can certainly share.

4. Part of the prophecy is still future

Moreover, the steady, accurate fulfilment of Daniel’s words leads us to look with renewed interest at the last stage of the prophecy. How should we understand the stone which fell with shattering effect on the feet of the image, grinding it to powder, and then becoming a great world-filling mountain?

If the image represented the kingdoms of men, obviously the stone stands for some power external to human rule, which is to establish itself as a world power upon the ruins of human governments. These it will *“break in pieces”*. This is the explanation Daniel gave: *“And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed... It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever”* (Daniel 2v44).

This is one of many promises in the Bible that God has not forsaken the earth. He has devised a plan for our salvation, and that plan centres around the Lord Jesus Christ. Thoughtful readers will readily identify the stone which was *“cut from the mountain by no human hand”* with the one who was born the Saviour of mankind, ‘cut out’, as it were, of the mountain of humanity, not by human hands, but by

the power of God, in the miracle of his birth. Jesus, in fact, spoke of himself as being “*the stone that the builders rejected*”, and he went on, “*...the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.*” (Matt. 21:42-44).

All of the signs indicate that soon the stone will fall with devastating effect on an unsuspecting world. Will you escape the coming destruction? Will you share in the benefits of the Kingdom of God, which Jesus is coming to set up on the earth? Jesus alone has power to save.

But before we leave the prophecy of Daniel, let us note that the teachings of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream were elaborated in a vision seen by Daniel himself, as is recorded in Daniel 7. The symbolism is changed and extended in detail, using the figures of four beasts to represent the four great empires portrayed in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. The equivalent of the reference to the Kingdom of God in Daniel 2v44 is given in the words of Daniel 7v27, as follows:

“And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them.”

5. The Kingdom of God

However, let none of our readers think that the only Old Testament prophecies about the coming Kingdom of God are those in the two chapters in the book of Daniel to which we have referred. Other examples are found in the book of the prophet Isaiah, where details of the coming Kingdom of God are given in plain language, i.e., without symbology. Because of the many references to the Kingdom this book, Isaiah has been referred to as the prophet of the Kingdom. Some examples include the following quotations:

“It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: ‘Come, let us

go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.’ For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” (Isaiah 2:2-4)

“Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.” (Isaiah 40v10)

Equally important are the references to the conditions of salvation. One example of this is Isaiah 66v2:

“But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.”

6. Daniel’s explanation

This explanation is not the invention of the publishers of these studies. Read Daniel 2 for yourself. Daniel said:

“...just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.” (Daniel 2v45)

God’s Kingdom

Just as Medo-Persia followed Babylon; just as Rome followed Greece; just as certainly as there has been no fifth universal Empire, so the last part of the prophecy will also be fulfilled.

“‘And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and

bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.” (Daniel 2v44)

The stone destroyed the image which represented human rule through the centuries, and it grew into a great mountain which filled the earth. This stone represented the Kingdom of God.

Daniel concluded the prophecy by saying, “*The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure*” (Daniel 2v45). This is only one of many prophecies which give us confidence that God's purpose with the earth will be fulfilled.

1. The teaching of the Old and New Testaments

First, find in your Bible these two passages that you looked at in the last study, Numbers 14v21 and Acts 17v31.

When the kingdom of God is established, there will be divine justice in the way the kingdom is ruled. There will be no oppression and no persecution.

“And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.” (Isaiah 11v3-5)

At this time, the words of Numbers 14v21 will be fulfilled, just as the angels sang at the birth of Jesus. When Jesus is king over all the earth, there will be “*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!*” (Luke 2v14).

The last book of the Bible also describes the state of affairs which will exist when God's purpose is fulfilled:

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no

more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21v3-4)

2. A real kingdom

Peter was the spokesman for the other disciples when he asked Jesus a question, “*See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?*” (Matthew 19v27).

The reply of Jesus is important. He emphasized that the kingdom he taught was a real kingdom in which his disciples would share: “*‘when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life*” (Matthew 19v28-29).

3. Jesus will come again

In order to establish a real kingdom on the earth, Jesus will come again. When he ascended to heaven at the end of his ministry, angels told the disciples, “*‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.*” (Acts 1v11)

The return of Jesus to bring about the last stages of God's purpose with the earth is dealt with more fully in later studies. The teaching of many of the parables of Jesus shows that it is at his return that the righteous will be rewarded. It is, therefore, very important that we are ready for his coming.

Summary

- The Bible emphasizes the righteousness and justice of God, as well as his love.
- God does not intend to allow the world to continue in its present state.
- God will interfere in world affairs, and divine rule will be established with Jesus as King.
- The outline of world events given in Daniel 2 gives us confidence that the final stages of God's plan will certainly come to pass.
- When Jesus returns to rule over the Kingdom of God, his followers will be rewarded with places in his kingdom, but they need to be ready for his coming.

Passages for Bible reading

Isaiah 11; Isaiah 35; Daniel 2; Matthew 19; Matthew 25.

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Study 4 – Death

A disaster is invariably headline news. Sudden and violent death arouses curiosity, but the subject of ‘death’ itself is not news, nor, strangely enough, does it generate much interest. Yet in the time that it has taken you to read the previous two sentences, it is estimated that 25-30 people will have died (that is, over 6,250 people an hour or 150,000 a day), and one day you will be one of them! The chances are that you not will be involved in one of the disasters, which account for relatively few deaths, but that on one otherwise ordinary day your daily routine will cease and the world will carry on without you. This is why the subject of death is of prime importance.

Thoughts of death give rise to the questions, ‘What am I?’ ‘What happens to me when I die?’ and ‘How do I fit in with God's purpose in creation?’

Attitudes to death

Basically, there are three possible attitudes to death:

1. Ignore it
2. Take the view that it is not really what it seems to be.
3. Face its stark reality and look for a way of escape.

Let us look more closely at these three attitudes.

1. Ignore death

This is the attitude of a growing section of those who are influenced by Western culture. The goals of materialism, the philosophy which predominates in Western society, are centred in science. The scientific approach to the problems of life deals with these things which can be measured. Speculations such as ‘What happens after death?’ do not lend themselves to the scientific method and therefore they are largely ignored.

Many people, dazzled by the bewildering array of marvels which science has produced, dismiss all thoughts of death from their minds as much as possible.

2. Take the view that death is not really what it seems to be

This is the age-old view taken by the vast majority of the world's religions. Death, it is said, is not the end of life but the gateway to eternity. At the root of the great variety of forms which this belief takes is the idea that man has an 'immortal soul'; that there is something in man which cannot die, but which at death is released from the body and lives on in another form.

But these ideas cannot be proved from experience nor from the religious books of the world which, apart from the Bible (2 Timothy 3v16), are only the speculations of minds groping in the dark. The experiments in telepathy and extra-sensory perception may prove that there is more to man than science has yet discovered, but they do not prove that 'something' lives on when the body dies. Man needs a reliable revelation from God, his Creator, on the subject of death.

The Bible is the only book which provides this. It demands that man must face reality.

3. Face the stark reality of death and look for a way of escape

3.1 Immortal souls?

Nowhere in the Bible can be found the idea that man has an immortal soul which lives on after death. This may come as a shock to those who hold orthodox Christian beliefs. But the Bible says, "*the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing... there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going*" (Ecclesiastes 9v5, 10).

This fact may not be very comforting, but it should be a cause for humility, and should provoke a realization of man's urgent need for a way of escape.

3.2 Salvation commences with humility

God has declared, "*this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.*" (Isaiah 66v2).

To be “humble” is the opposite of being proud. The word “contrite” is similar, but means being sorry for what you have done wrong.

Man is naturally a proud creature. The idea of having an immortal soul appeals to his inborn pride. But if we want the whole truth, we will do well to cast aside all preconceived ideas, however flattering, and to consider carefully what God has revealed about man's natural condition.

The nature of man

The Bible goes to the very root of this vital subject. It tells us how death came about, right at the start of human existence. The record of the first human beings, Adam and Eve, is no myth! Consider the deep significance of the facts recorded in the opening chapter of the Bible.

“then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” (Genesis 2v7)

Adam’s body was made from the elements which form the basis of all matter. These elements were shaped by the all-powerful Creator into the marvellous complexity of the human body, with all its delicate and interrelated organs. In principle, the same marvel occurs today in the development of a baby in the womb.

Adam’s body of dust was given life from God, who *“breathed into his nostrils the breath of life”*, and what otherwise would have been a lifeless body *“became a living creature”*.

The soul

Life is something that is hard to define, but normally easy to recognise. The Bible tells us that humans need a body for life – without a body there is no life.

“For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.” (James 2v26)

The word ‘soul’ is widely applied in the Bible (particularly in older translations) both to man and to the animal creation. It is also translated ‘mind’, ‘beast’, ‘man’, ‘creature’, but it is never connected in any way with the idea of immortality.

Look at Ecclesiastes 3v19-20: *“For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return.”*

The soul cannot live on separately from the body in men or animals. The verses quoted show that man is entirely dependent upon God for his life. If God withdraws the breath, or spirit, of life from a man, he becomes a dead creature: *“When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust”* (Psalm 104v29). It is essential to understand this, as many Christians believe that man has an immortal soul that lives on after death. This is not what is taught in the Bible. This was, in fact, the serpent’s lie in the garden of Eden. He said to Eve, *“You will not surely die”* – a direct contradiction of what God had said to Adam and Eve.

Job 34v14-15 proves man’s dependence upon God for his existence: *“If he should set his heart to it and gather to himself his spirit and his breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust.”* It does not prove that man goes to heaven when he dies. Look at John 3v13, and note in particular the words, *“No one has ascended into heaven.”* Man dies because of sin: *“...the soul who sins shall die”* (Ezekiel 18v4,20). And in Romans 3v23 we read, *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* Therefore it follows that all die and become unconscious until the resurrection. 1 Corinthians 15 deals with the hope of the resurrection in some detail.

Man – a creature to give God pleasure

The purpose of man’s creation was, as with that of all creation, to give God pleasure: *“for it is God who works in you, both to will and*

to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2v13).

Unlike the animal creation, man was given free will; he could choose to either obey or to disobey. We can appreciate how much more happier God is be when man, using his free will, chooses to please God and not himself. It is the pleasure which, on a lower scale, parents gain from children who voluntarily obey and respect them.

Man’s failure

To see how man would use his free will, God gave one simple rule to Adam and Eve. They were told: “*You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*” (Genesis 2v16-17)

Man failed, and so brought upon himself the sentence of death. Adam and Eve were tempted by the serpent’s suggestion that they would be “*like God, knowing good and evil*”, and because the fruit looked tempting and good to eat. In this way their pride and lust overcame them. These two characteristics have formed the basis of human behaviour ever since. Note carefully the words of the serpent tempting Eve, “*You will not surely die*” (Genesis 3v4). This was a lie, a denial of God's word, and this lie has formed the basis of man-made religions ever since.

Man’s condemnation

Adam and Eve were subjected to the just condemnation of God. The words of the sentence pronounced upon them are significant, because they give us the basic definition of death:

“*By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return*” (Genesis 3v19).

That is, when a man dies he ceases to exist and decomposes into the elements of which he was made. “*When his breath departs he returns*

to the earth; on that very day his plans perish.” (Psalm 146v4)

Death is a punishment for disobedience. After God had pronounced this sentence, He set a guard to prevent man from eating of the tree of life, “*lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever*” (Genesis 3v22).

Sin

Death is a punishment for sin. “*The soul who sins shall die.*” (Ezekiel 18v4)

There is a simple logic in this statement. Sin brings death. It is therefore of the utmost importance to find out what ‘sin’ is if we are to find a way to escape eternal death.

Sin is disobedience to God’s will (1 John 3v4; James 4v17). Its effects are universal.

“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3v23)

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6v23)

Adam and Eve have passed on this fatal tendency to all their descendants. This flaw in man is ‘human nature’ or what the Bible calls ‘the flesh’, or ‘the carnal mind’.

It can lead to many different results: “*Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*” (Galatians 5v19-21).

These are the natural consequences of the way of life which Adam and Eve embarked upon six thousand years ago. An obstinate disregard for God’s way has brought the world to its present troubled state.

The only hope

We examined some of God's characteristics in study 2 and we have now briefly considered some of man's characteristics. The obvious and startling contrast is expressed by God in these words:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55v8-9)

It is clear then not only why man dies, but why he must die. God is just, and His justice cannot permit sinners to live for ever. But two of God's other characteristics are mercy and forgiveness.

“But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.” (Psalm 130v4)

“To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him.” (Daniel 9v9)

“But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” (Psalm 86v15)

There is a vital need for God's forgiveness, because man cannot stop sinning. *“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us”* (1 John 1v8).

The Bible describes in detail God's way – the only way we can be set free from sin and death. The Way, in a phrase, is ‘through faith’ (Galatians 2v16). The faith which God requires is a very special quality. It is defined as *“the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”* (Hebrews 11v1).

Faith is neither blind credulity nor belief in the absurd. It is completely trusting in God and having a firm belief that He really means to carry out what He has promised, even if its fulfilment appears to be impossible. We demonstrate our faith by obedience to

God's commands. The eleventh chapter of the letter to the Hebrews describes many practical examples of faith. Foremost among these is the faith shown by Abraham. *"And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness"* (Genesis 15v6). Thus, his faith was shown by his obedience to God.

Read James 2v17-26: *"So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works... Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness'—and he was called a friend of God... For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead."*

Thus, by God's mercy, those who are faithful and obedient can obtain the forgiveness of sins, and in consequence, death also can be overcome. This is the only hope man has of attaining immortality. Eternal life is, in truth, a gift.

"The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6v23)

In a later study we will discuss the way in which this has been made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Eternal life will be given at a future time, when there will be a resurrection of the dead.

"And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth (i.e., those who are dead) shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." (Daniel 12v2)

At this time, those to whom God chooses to give this precious gift will be changed into immortal beings. The resurrection of the dead may sound incredible, but it is one of those things which we must just believe. We know that all things are possible with God.

This resurrection will occur when Jesus Christ returns to the earth.

“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven... And the dead in Christ will rise first.” (1 Thessalonians 4v16).

Some of the signs which tell us that these momentous events are very near will be explained in study 9. We need to be ready for that day.

Summary

- Death is the end of life, not the gateway to eternity.
- Death is caused by sin.
- Sin is disobedience to God’s will.
- All men sin, and there is no way we can stop sinning without God’s help.
- Salvation begins with humility.
- Man can obtain forgiveness by belief in God’s word and obedience to His will.
- Faith is belief in God’s word, and is shown by obedience to it.
- Eternal life is the gift of God, to be given to His faithful children.
- Eternal life will be given to the faithful at the resurrection, when Jesus Christ returns to the earth; this is man’s only hope of obtaining immortality.

Passages for Bible reading

Genesis 2 and 3; Psalms 49 and 146; Ecclesiastes 9; Romans 5 and 6; 1 Corinthians 15.

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Study 4: Questions

Underline the correct answer and then mark the correct answer on the yellow 'Answer Summary Sheet' in the centre of this booklet.

- Which of the following statements are true?
(a) All men sin (b) Death comes as a result of sin
(c) Good men do not die (d) Eternal life is a gift from God
- Which verse in the Bible shows that death is complete unconsciousness?
(a) Ezekiel 9v5 (b) Proverbs 9v5 (c) Esther 9v5 (d) Ecclesiastes 9v5
- What human quality does God require of a person who is seeking salvation?
(a) Pride (b) Wealth (c) Humility (d) Happiness
- The Bible teaches that God formed man from
(a) another kind of creature (b) the dust of the ground
(c) the water (d) he did not form him
- What is a "living soul"?
(a) A living creature (b) An eye
(d) An immortal being (c) An immortal part of the body
- How can we get eternal life?
(a) By being good (b) All men are immortal already
(c) Only by forgiveness of sins and obedience to God
(d) We cannot have eternal life; man is mortal and death is the end
- What was the punishment for the disobedience of Adam and Eve?
(a) They were beaten (b) They were condemned to die
(c) They were stoned (d) God completely rejected them
- What is sin?
(a) The carnal mind (b) Death
(c) Breaking God's law (d) Human nature
- Faith is...
(a) belief of the impossible (b) knowledge of God's plans
(c) trust in the unknown (d) the assurance of things hoped for
- The Bible teaches
(a) there is no hope (b) a resurrection from the dead
(c) a life beyond the grave for all (d) life in heaven for the righteous

Study 5 – The Promises of God – 1

Study 4 outlined from the Bible why man dies, the nature of death and man's only hope of salvation from an eternal grave. In study 5, we will gain a greater understanding of the development of the scriptural revelation concerning that salvation, by considering some of God's promises. (We will consider further promises in study 7.)

A promise of deliverance

In the beginning, after the disobedience of Adam and Eve, in the curses that God pronounced in consequence of man's sin, a short but wonderful promise provided a ray of hope. It comes in a verse that is not easy to understand:

“The LORD God said to the serpent, ‘...I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.’” (Genesis 3v14-15)

A full explanation of this promise is outside the scope of this study and will be dealt with in ‘Bible Basics’, but as we gain a greater knowledge of God's plan of salvation, it is clear that this is the first promise that sin would ultimately be overcome by one of Eve's descendants. Sin would be dealt a mortal blow, but the descendant who did this would only be wounded temporarily (in figurative language, a wound in the head and a wound in the heel). This is a promise of a coming saviour, and the Bible leaves no room for doubt that this saviour is Jesus Christ, to whom all of God's promises point.

God's promise in Eden

The serpent, because of the part it had played in Adam and Eve's transgression of God's law, became the symbol for sin. Jesus used the same term for his enemies, addressing the Pharisees with the words, *“You serpents, you brood of vipers”* (Matthew 23v33). The bruising in the head, a fatal wound to a serpent, promises the utter destruction of sin and death. The seed of the woman is the destroyer, and in

carrying out this work he receives a bruise in the heel, a wound from which there can be recovery.

A careful reading of the Bible will show that this parable of the seed of the woman speaks of the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, in which he gained the victory over sin and death, and has paved the way to everlasting life for all who believe in him.

A clue to the identity of the seed of the woman is given in the words, "*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel*" (Isaiah 7v14).

This was quoted in the message of the angel to Joseph telling him that his espoused wife Mary was to "*bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet...*"; then follows the quotation from Isaiah 7. The Apostle Paul comments, "*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law*" (Galatians 4v4).

By Jesus' triumph over sin and death, the serpent (sin) was bruised in the head; that is, he was utterly destroyed (at least as far as Christ was concerned). In the process he received, by his death on the cross and his short stay in the tomb, a bruise on his heel, as the prophet Isaiah had foretold, "*he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities*" (Isaiah 53v5).

The first stage of God's plan of redemption was thus completed, but there are to be two further stages to the harvest in which sin and death will be completely abolished.

The second stage will be completed when Christ returns to reward his friends, those who have done all that he commanded them (John 15v14), and to punish God's enemies. These he will raise from the dead, and will bestow on them either eternal life or eternal death. Those given eternal life will rule with Christ over the nations who submit to him at his coming (Revelation 20v4). This stage will last for a thousand years.

The third and final stage will be at the end of the thousand years, when there will be a final judgment, and sin and death will be completely destroyed. *“For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death”* (1 Corinthians 15v25-26).

As unbelief and disobedience brought death, so belief in the Gospel, baptism, and continued obedience can bring everlasting life through God’s promises.

The unfolding plan of God

1. Noah

As the descendants of Adam and Eve increased, sin increased, and men gradually forgot their creator. Genesis 6 records that *“The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”* (Genesis 6v5).

Such was the state of mankind that *“the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart”* (Genesis 6v6).

Noah was the only man with whom God was pleased (see Genesis 6v8-9). God determined to make a fresh start with His creation, and to use Noah in this purpose. *“And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth”* (Genesis 6v13).

God chose to flood the earth so that all air-breathing creatures, including man, would be drowned. The Bible uses the account of the flood to teach powerful moral lessons (Matthew 24v37-38; 1 Peter 3v20-21). The life of Noah stands out as a shining example of faith in contrast with the unbelief of his age.

2. God’s promise

At this time, God declared that He would never again destroy the earth with a flood. God has a purpose with the earth, and He promised that from that time on, the seasons would follow in their turns, and day and night would succeed each other without interruption in this way again. Look at Genesis 8v21-22: *“when the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in his heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.’”*

2.1 Few are saved

A further lesson taught by this record is that there are only relatively few who are prepared to believe God, and consequently few who will be saved. This principle, so vividly displayed in the account of the flood (1 Peter 3v20), also applies to the far greater salvation from eternal death. Jesus Christ said: *“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”* (Matthew 7v13-14).

This, and many similar Bible examples and statements, cast doubts upon world religions which claim the adherence of millions of ‘believers’. The Bible teaches that salvation from eternal death is a highly individual matter, and that few are ever prepared to accept God’s challenging requirements – the hard, narrow way of faith.

3. Abraham

Abraham is an outstanding example of a man who was prepared to accept and successfully endure many hardships because of his faith in God’s word.

3.1 Archaeology brings the Bible to life

Abraham lived at about 2,000 BC in an ancient city called Ur, which was situated near the head of the Persian Gulf. In recent times the

site of Ur has been excavated by archaeologists. Their discoveries show that the city was part of a highly advanced civilisation capable of building large houses, palaces and temples, and of producing exquisite works of art. Archaeology helps us in our study of the Bible by giving us a vivid picture of bygone ages. It certainly aids the appreciation of the greatness of Abraham's faith, when God commanded him: "*Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you*" (Genesis 12v1). From the archaeological evidence, we know that God was asking Abraham to leave behind a life of comparative ease and security to face the dangers of the unknown, in which God alone would be his guide. Abraham, unlike Adam and Eve, believed and obeyed.

"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going." (Hebrews 11v8)

4. The promises to Abraham

Abraham's faith was founded upon the promises of blessings which accompanied God's command. He realised that when God, the all-powerful and all-wise creator, makes promises, they are certain to be fulfilled. God said to him:

"And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 12v2-3)

Throughout Abraham's long life these promises were repeated many times, and each time something was added to the original promise. For the present, we will consider the most significant aspects of the promises under the following headings:

1. Abraham's descendants to possess the land of Canaan.
2. Abraham's descendants to become a great nation.
3. All nations to be blessed through one of Abraham's descendants

4.1 Abraham's descendants to possess the land of Canaan

The land to which God eventually led Abraham was called Canaan at that time. It is an area which roughly coincides with the modern states of Lebanon, Israel, Syria and Jordan at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea (see Genesis 15v18-21). When Abraham reached Canaan, God said to him, “*To your offspring I will give this land*” (Genesis 12v7).

The promise was later repeated: “*for all the land that you see (the land of Canaan) I will give to you and to your offspring forever*” (Genesis 13v15).

Note particularly the addition of the words “*to you*” and “*forever.*” If it were not for these two important points, we might understand the promise as referring to the conquest and possession of Canaan by the Israelites in ancient times, as recorded in the book of Joshua. However, this was only a partial fulfilment because, firstly, the promise was to Abraham, as well as his descendants; and, secondly, they were to possess it for ever.

On the first point, the Bible reveals that while he was living in Canaan, Abraham was like a modern Bedouin, and that when his wife died he had to buy a piece of land in which to bury her. Finally he died, not having received the promised inheritance of the land (Acts 7v2-5).

On the second point, it is clear that neither Abraham nor his descendants, the nation of Israel, who have spent long periods of time exiled from Canaan, have yet obtained possession of it for ever.

4.1.1 *The resurrection provides the answer*

Clearly then, the complete fulfilment of this promise must still be future. However, the fulfilment of this promise requires the resurrection of Abraham and his true descendants, whom the Bible defines as those who are like Abraham in their faith and obedience to God’s commands (Romans 9v8). After the resurrection they, as immortal beings, will take possession of Canaan for ever (Galatians 3v7,29; Hebrews 11v39-40). These points will become clearer as the other promises are considered.

4.2 Abraham's descendants to become a great nation

This promise is given several times through Abraham's life (Genesis 12v2; Genesis 13v16; Genesis 15v5; Genesis 22v17), and has largely been fulfilled, as the Bible shows (1 Kings 3v28).

The book of Genesis records that Abraham's son Isaac and grandson Jacob (whose name was changed to Israel) were the ancestors of the nation of Israel. They lived in Canaan until Jacob, in a time of famine, took his family into Egypt. The book of Exodus tells us how Jacob's descendants increased into a nation of more than two million people and became enslaved by the Egyptians. In about 1,500 BC God sent Moses to free them and lead them back to Canaan. The book of Joshua, who was Moses' successor, tells how the twelve tribes of Israel conquered Canaan. Later books of the Bible describe how Israel developed, until it became a great and prosperous kingdom during the reigns of David and Solomon, in about 1,000 BC.

4.2.1 The New Testament explains the promise

The Bible shows that after the death of Solomon, Israel declined and was eventually exiled from Canaan, because, generally speaking, the people were faithless and disobedient to God (Deuteronomy 28v15-68). It is in the New Testament that we find a wonderful exposition of the promise to Abraham. In the letter to the Romans the apostle Paul makes it clear that "*not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring*" (Romans 9v6-7).

This introduces an important principle which was briefly referred to in the consideration of the first promise. Ultimately, the great nation which was to be descended from Abraham was to be composed not of faithless natural descendants, but of those who showed a similar faith to Abraham. There have been few in each generation, but when they are raised from the dead, at Jesus' return to the earth, they will be gathered together into one great nation. Then Abraham will see his immortal descendants, praising God for their salvation, and forming

“a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Revelation 7v9). Thus, in the future the promise will be fulfilled in a far more wonderful way than it was in the past.

4.3 All nations to be blessed through one of Abraham's descendants

However, mankind has not yet received the greatest of all blessings with which this promise is concerned – the deliverance from the universal curse of sin and death. The Bible reveals that there is a time coming when, *“all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD”* (Numbers 14v21).

There is little room for God's glory while man fills the earth with violence and oppression, and sin and death remain. A great change is obviously necessary to bring about this wonderful time of blessing, which we read of in many Bible prophecies (e.g., Psalm 72; Isaiah 32), but however whatever changes are necessary, the ultimate result is certain! This is the message of the gospel (good news) which is taught throughout the Bible. Few realise that the promises made to Abraham, 2,000 years before Christ, are the foundation of the gospel! *“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’”* (Galatians 3v8)

4.3.1 Jesus Christ – Abraham's descendant

The central figure of the gospel, and therefore of the promises to Abraham, is Jesus Christ. The New Testament opens with the words, *“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham”* (Matthew 1v1), and there follows a genealogy which traces Jesus' descent from Abraham. This theme is found throughout the New Testament. Paul points out in his letter to the Galatians that one particular descendant is referred to in the promise, and that this one is Jesus: *“Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ”* (Galatians 3v16).

Jesus is revealed as more than just a natural son of Abraham; in the same letter it is stated that “*it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham*” (Galatians 3v7).

When we remember that faith in the Bible involves belief in God and obedience to Him (the very opposite of sin), it is clear that Jesus was the greatest of all of Abraham’s many sons. He alone of all the human race could truly say to his adversaries without fear of contradiction, “*Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?*” (John 8v46 NIV). The supreme message of the New Testament is that Jesus by his faith overcame sin, and thus “*abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*” (2 Timothy 1v10).

4.3.2 The gospel preached to all nations

In Old Testament times, the message of salvation (the gospel) was the privileged possession of the nation of Israel, but they failed to respond to the demands of faithful obedience to God. Then Jesus came and sent his apostles to preach the gospel of salvation to every nation (Mark 16v15).

Many see this as the fulfilment of God's promise that all nations should be blessed through Jesus Christ, Abraham’s descendant. It was, however, only a step, although an important one, in God's unfolding plan to fill the earth with His glory. Jesus knew that relatively few would accept this wonderful message, because it involves entering the narrow gateway of faith; and now, 2,000 years later, the preaching of the gospel still has not brought about the blessing of all nations.

4.3.3 The kingdom of God on earth

However, this glorious time is coming! Jesus Christ will return to the earth to raise all who are responsible, including those who have “*put on Christ*” and have therefore become heirs of the promises to Abraham (Galatians 3v26-29).

At that time the blessing of Abraham will truly come upon all nations

through his descendant Jesus Christ (Galatians 3v14). Jesus will be king over all the earth and the Kingdom of God will be established, ushering in a time of blessing such as the world has never seen. This is what Jesus taught his disciples to pray to God: “*Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*” (Matthew 6v10).

Summary

- A promise of ultimate deliverance from sin and death was made immediately after Adam and Eve’s sin.
- God’s plan of salvation is revealed in the promises He made to the faithful.
- The record of the flood demonstrates that few will be saved.
- God made great promises to Abraham because of his faith.
- None of these promises has been completely fulfilled.
- The promises point forward to Jesus Christ, who overcame sin and death.
- Jesus Christ will give eternal life to all those who, like Abraham, believe and obey God.
- The promises will be fulfilled when Jesus returns to the earth to establish the Kingdom of God.
- The Kingdom of God will bring a time of blessing to the earth, which will then be filled with God’s glory.

Passages for Bible reading

Genesis 6, 12, 15, 22; Deuteronomy 28; Psalm 72; Isaiah 32; Acts 7; Romans 4; Galatians 3; Hebrews 11.

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Study 5: Questions

Underline the correct answer and then mark the correct answer on the yellow 'Answer Summary Sheet' in the centre of this booklet.

1. What was the name of the man who God was pleased with, as recorded in Genesis 6v9?
(a) Adam (b) Noah (c) Enoch (d) Abel
2. How did God destroy the wicked people according to the record in Genesis chapters 6 to 8?
(a) Earthquake (b) Famine (c) Flooding (d) Disease
3. How were the faithful people protected in the disaster of Genesis 6–8?
(a) They lived in an ark (b) God hid them
(c) They lived on a high mountain (d) God took them away
4. Where did Abraham live before God spoke to him?
(a) Canaan (b) Bethel (c) Sodom (d) Ur
5. To which land did God lead Abraham?
(a) Egypt (b) Canaan (c) Edom (d) Salem
6. Was the gospel message preached to Abraham?
(a) Yes (b) No (c) Probably (d) We don't know
7. When will Abraham receive the final fulfilment of God's promise to him?
(a) He has already received it
(b) We do not know
(c) When Jesus returns to the earth to establish God's kingdom
(d) Abraham died so he will not receive the fulfilment of the promise
8. Who was the greatest of Abraham's descendants?
(a) Judas (b) Jacob (c) Joseph (d) Jesus
9. Who are the true descendants of Abraham today?
(a) The Arabs (b) Everyone (c) The faithful (d) They are all dead
10. What did God promise to Abraham?
(a) He and his descendants would possess the land of Canaan
(b) He would live for ever in heaven
(c) He would have great riches immediately
(d) All his descendants would be faithful to God

Study 6 – The Lord Jesus Christ

This study will consider the Lord Jesus Christ – the centre of the purpose of God.

“*You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins*” (Matthew 1v21). ‘Christ’ is really a title and means ‘anointed’, that is, specially chosen. Jesus was the Christ just as John was spoken of as the Baptist.

God’s purpose in the beginning

In the last study it was shown that God promised in the very beginning, in Eden, to provide a Saviour – one who would overcome the power of sin. The study showed that the one who would bring such a blessing upon the human race would be in the line of Abraham. Mary recognised that her son was the one promised and in her song of rejoicing she sang, “*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour... He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.*” (Luke 1v46-47, 54-55).

Various prophets also spoke about the coming saviour. For example, the prophet Daniel spoke of the time when the Messiah would appear. The prophet Micah wrote of the place of his birth. In the gospel of Matthew, the visit of the wise men to Herod is recorded. Notice how many times in this passage Matthew says that events happen in fulfilment of the words of the Old Testament prophets (e.g., Matthew 1v22; 2v5,15,17,23).

From the very beginning it was God's purpose to send Jesus, and when the right time came, God's purpose was put into effect. John wrote, “*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth*” (John 1v14).

Why did Jesus come?

A well-known verse quoted earlier in these studies says, “*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*” (John 3v16). Jesus was given to the world by God in a very real sense. The angel Gabriel had appeared to Mary to tell her that she was to have a son. Mary asked how this was possible, since she was a virgin. The angel replied, “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God*” (Luke 1v35). This, too, had been the subject of prophecy, as Matthew records (Matthew 1v22-23; Isaiah 7v14).

Sacrifice

As you may know, in Old Testament times, animals were sacrificed as a continual reminder of the consequences of sin and as a way of forgiveness. The man who offered, recognised that death was the result of sin, and sometimes he had to associate himself with the death of the animal as a sign that he recognised this principle (Leviticus 1v3-4). Paul wrote, “*the wages of sin is death*” (Romans 6v23).

In the Letter to the Hebrews, three points about sacrifices are made very clearly:

1. The sacrifices in Old Testament times provided a reminder of the principle that sin brings death – a principle established in the beginning (Hebrews 10v3).
2. As the animals could do no wrong, they only represented the teaching: “*For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.*” (Hebrews 10v1).
3. The sacrifice of animals could never take away sin: “*For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*” (Hebrews 10v4).

The Bible makes it clear that Jesus did what the sacrifice of animals could never do, by giving his life as a perfect sacrifice: *“But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God”* (Hebrews 10v12).

A new beginning

The Bible shows that as Adam brought sin, and therefore death, into the world by his disobedience, so Jesus by his perfect life, *“brought life and immortality to light through the gospel”* (2 Timothy 1v10).

Because Jesus lived a perfect life, when he died it was *“not possible”* that he should remain dead (Acts 2v24), so God raised him from the dead.

The contrast between the effects of Adam’s disobedience and Jesus’ obedience is referred to many times:

“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.” (Romans 5v12)

“For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.”(Romans 5v19)

“so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 5v21)

Just as we chose to follow the pattern set by Adam, so we can chose to follow the pattern set by Jesus. We can thus receive to the life he came to bring: *“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive”* (1 Corinthians 15v22).

Faith is needed

Study 4 explained that man is mortal and dies, and that he must have faith to accept the life that God has offered: *“And without faith it is*

impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Hebrews 11v4).

It also pointed out that this has only been made possible by the work of Jesus: *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 6v23).

So the salvation that God offers is conditional, God rewards those who have faith, and who seek him. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3v16). This is why the Son of God was called Jesus (“God saves”): *“He will save his people from their sins.”*

The work of Jesus now

After his resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven. At his ascension, two angels declared he would return again: *“This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven”* (Acts 1v11).

Peter said that Jesus would remain in heaven until the *“time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago”* (Acts 3v19-21).

Jesus will return to fulfil the rest of God's purpose. Meanwhile, he is a mediator between God and man. He is described as a High Priest who can intercede for us to the Almighty:

“There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2v5).

“Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven” (Hebrews 8v1).

“Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7v25).

The Letter to the Hebrews explains that because Jesus lived his life on earth and was “*made like his brothers in every respect*” (Hebrews 2v17) he can understand how we feel and can be sympathetic to our needs: “*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need*” (Hebrews 4v15-16).

Summary

- Jesus was born by the action of the Holy Spirit upon the virgin Mary. He was, therefore, the Son of God.
- The name ‘Jesus’ means ‘Saviour’, and from the beginning it was God’s purpose to provide a way of escape from the natural consequences of man’s sin.
- The wages of sin is death. The sacrifice of animals provided a regular reminder of this principle, but could never “*take away sins*”.
- Jesus provided the perfect sacrifice.
- Jesus is now in heaven where he is a merciful High Priest, because he understands from his own experience.
- God has promised to send Jesus Christ back to the earth to be King, and to complete His purpose of filling the earth with His glory.

Passages for Bible reading

Matthew 1v18-2v23; Luke 1v26-38; 2v1-21; Romans 5; Hebrews 4v14-16; 7v11-8v6

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Study 6: Questions

Underline the correct answer and then mark the correct answer on the yellow 'Answer Summary Sheet' in the centre of this booklet.

1. The name 'Jesus Christ' means
(a) Saviour (b) Saviour Anointed
(c) Anointed (d) Anointed Saviour
2. Who was the mother of Jesus?
(a) Elizabeth (b) Mary (c) Martha (d) Ruth
3. Who was the real father of Jesus?
(a) Joseph (b) David (c) Abraham (d) God
4. In Micah 5v2 the birthplace of Jesus is given as
(a) Nazareth (b) Galilee (c) Jerusalem
(d) Bethlehem Ephrathah
5. Animal sacrifices in Old Testament times
(a) were a reminder that sin brings death
(b) were to appease an angry God
(c) were the result of superstition
(d) were to provide salvation
6. Why was Jesus sent 2,000 years ago?
(a) To save the Jews
(b) To feed the poor
(c) To be the perfect sacrifice for sin
(d) To establish God's kingdom on earth
7. Where is Jesus now?
(a) In the grave (b) In heaven (c) On this earth (d) We don't know
8. Will Jesus Christ come back to the earth?
(a) Yes (b) No (c) We don't know (d) Possibly
9. What does Jesus do now?
(a) He controls our lives (b) He acts as high priest before God
(c) He controls the governments (d) We do not know
10. What is the gift of God through Jesus Christ?
(a) Prosperity (b) Eternal life in the future
(c) Long life now (d) Peace and quiet now

Study 7 – The Promises of God – 2

God promised Abraham that all families of the earth would be blessed through him and his seed (descendant). Study 5 showed that the one descendant who would bring blessing to the earth was Jesus. This is clearly taught in the New Testament (Galatians 3v16).

Abraham is used as an example of faith, and we are told that if we want to show our faith we must live our lives as Abraham did, trusting God and being obedient to His will.

The nation of Israel, who were descended from Abraham, became slaves in Egypt. They were led out of Egypt by Moses after ten terrible plagues had forced the Egyptians to recognize that there was a God in heaven who was in control of world affairs. The book of Exodus (the name means ‘departure’) tells us about these events.

At last the nation of Israel settled in the land of Canaan where Abraham had lived. Their first king was Saul, and the second was David, who wrote many of the Psalms.

The promises to David

In the Psalms David says that God had made a special promise to him. *“The LORD swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: ‘One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne’”* (Psalm 132v11).

David, when his kingdom was established and the nation was at peace, wanted to build a temple, a house of worship, for God. The prophet Nathan was sent to David to tell him that although God did not want him to build a house, God would establish David's royal house, and one in his royal line would rule over his kingdom for ever.

“When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me.

Your throne shall be established forever.” (2 Samuel 7v12-13,16)

There are three important points in these verses:

1. The ultimate fulfilment of the promise did not refer to Solomon, David's son, because God said that the “*throne of his kingdom*” would be established for ever. Although Solomon was noted for his riches and for his wisdom, and fulfilled some parts of the promises (for example, “*He shall build a house for my name*”), he certainly did not reign for ever. In verse 14 Nathan tells David that God would be the father of this great king who would come in his line: “*I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son*” (2 Samuel 7v14).
2. The king would rule on David's throne (2 Samuel 7v12).
3. God declares that He will bring it to pass (2 Samuel 7v11).

The teaching of the prophets

The same points are emphasized throughout the Bible. Read the following passage from the book of the prophet Isaiah, which is often quoted at Christmas time, and notice the same three points.

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.” (Isaiah 9v6-7).

The same points are stressed:

1. “*Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end*”
2. “*on the throne of David and over his kingdom*”
3. “*The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this*”

Jesus was the one promised

There is no doubt as to who the great king in David's line will be.

The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary before the birth of Jesus and told her, “*He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.*” (Luke 1v32-33).

Notice the same three points again:

1. The kingdom would be established for ever.
2. He would rule on David's throne.
3. God would bring it to pass.

Mary's song of rejoicing

Later in the same chapter, Luke records a wonderful song of rejoicing in which Mary praised God for His promises. A remarkable feature of it is that although the angel told Mary that the child would be born to fulfil the promise God made to David, Mary thanked God for the promise that He had made to Abraham. She must have realized that both of these promises would be fulfilled in the same individual.

“*He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.*” (Luke 1v54-55).

The kingdom

There can be no doubt that the kingdom which Jesus came to proclaim was a real kingdom on the earth. He would be the king and his followers would also have positions of rulership. Jesus told his disciples “*when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*” (Matthew 19v28).

From the very beginning it was the purpose of God to fill the earth

with His glory and with peace: “*all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD*” (Numbers 14v21).

This will happen when Jesus returns to the earth as King.

One of the main points that Peter made in his address on the day of Pentecost was that Jesus was the great descendant of David that God had promised. Peter referred to the Psalm we have already quoted to show that David looked forward to the establishment of the Kingdom with Christ as king:

“Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne” (Acts 2v29-30).

He also explained that the resurrection of Jesus was a sure sign that the promise God had made to David would be fulfilled. *“This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses”* (Acts 2v32).

Peter said that David understood that the time would come when the Almighty would say to the Lord Jesus Christ, *“Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”* The apostle then said, *“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified”* (Acts 2v34-36).

God’s guarantee

Paul summed up the wonderful hope which the Bible offers when he was speaking to the people of Athens: *“because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead”* (Acts 17v31).

Summary

- God has revealed His purpose with the earth to us through the Bible.
- Abraham and David were both told by God that the one through whom this purpose would be fulfilled would be one of their descendants.
- Jesus was the one promised.
- He will rule the world in righteousness when the kingdom of God is established.
- This hope, based on the foundation of Old Testament teaching, was contained clearly in the message of Jesus and the apostles.

Passages for Bible reading

2 Samuel 7; Psalm 132; Isaiah 11, 35; Luke 1; Acts 2; Romans 4.

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Study 7: Questions

Underline the correct answer and then mark the correct answer on the yellow 'Answer Summary Sheet' in the centre of this booklet.

- Which descendant of Abraham will bring blessings on the earth?
(a) Isaac (b) Joseph (c) David (d) Jesus
- In which country were the Israelites slaves?
(a) Africa (b) Egypt (c) Canaan (d) Italy
- Which book of the Bible tells us about the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery?
(a) Genesis (b) Exodus (c) Leviticus (d) Numbers
- Who was the first King of Israel?
(a) Saul (b) David (c) Solomon (d) Samuel
- What did David want to build for God?
(a) A palace (b) temple (c) A city (d) An altar
- What did God promise David?
(a) Great wealth
(b) Long life and good health
(c) That the throne of his kingdom would be established for ever
(d) Happiness and prosperity
- Which prophet of Israel said, "*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse*"?
(a) Isaiah (b) Samuel (c) David (d) Hosea
- Who was the promised descendant of David who would rule on his throne for ever?
(a) Solomon (b) Jesus (c) Hezekiah (d) Rehoboam
- Where will the promised kingdom of God be established?
(a) On this earth (b) In heaven
(c) In the hearts of human beings (d) In space
- What is the guarantee that God will carry out His promises that the apostle Paul referred to at Athens?
(a) The seasons (b) The birth of Jesus
(c) Day and night (d) The resurrection of Jesus

Study 8 – The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

The word ‘*resurrection*’ means ‘rising up from the dead’. In the New Testament it is translated from the Greek word ‘anastasis,’ which means ‘rising up’ or ‘standing again’.

Jesus rose from the dead – this can be shown beyond any reasonable doubt. The focal point of the whole purpose of God with the human race is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Christian faith is built round it: Christianity exists upon the basis of Christ’s resurrection from the dead. This was the driving force in the lives of the disciples in the first century AD.

The importance of resurrection

After Jesus had gone to heaven, we learn that the apostles chose another disciple to take the place of Judas. We read that they chose Matthias to “*become with us a witness to his (Christ’s) resurrection*” (Acts 1v22).

The apostles were imprisoned because “*they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead*” (Acts 4v2).

Paul was put on trial over the question of, “*the hope and the resurrection of the dead*” (Acts 23v6; Acts 24v21).

The letters of the New Testament are full of teaching about the resurrection of Jesus and its importance for all of us. This was emphasized by the apostle Paul when he said, “*And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain... and you are still in your sins*” (1 Corinthians 15v14,17).

Why did God raise Jesus?

Earlier studies have shown Jesus’ work as a sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 9v26). The death of Jesus, however, could not be an effective sacrifice, without him being raised from the dead. Study 4

explained how Adam brought sin and death to mankind by his disobedience of God's commands. In contrast, Jesus kept all God's commandments and lived a perfect life, as was discussed in study 6.

Jesus, who was "*born of woman, born under the law*" (Galatians 4v4), came under the same condemnation of death that we have inherited from Adam. However, he personally was free from sin, and therefore death could not hold him. The righteous principles of God could not allow such a man, who had perfectly kept His laws, to remain subject to the law of sin and death. The apostle Peter tells us, "*God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it*" (Acts 2v24).

Study 3 showed how it was because of the absolute justice of God, as well as because of His love for man that Jesus rose from the dead: "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*" (John 3v16).

Belief in resurrection

As has been shown, Abraham and David expected to be raised from the dead to enjoy the promises of God. They were not alone in this hope. We learn from the Bible that a rising again from the dead was the hope of the faithful in the ages before the time of Jesus. This is why Jesus said, "*Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad*" (John 8v56).

Peter quoted the words of David, King of Israel: "*“I saw the Lord always before me... therefore my heart was glad”... he (David) foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption*" (Acts 2v25-26,31; quoting from Psalm 16v8-11).

David also said, "*As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness*" (Psalm 17v15).

Job said, "*For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet*

in my flesh I shall see God” (Job 19v25-26).

Isaiah said, *“Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!”* (Isaiah 26v19).

Daniel was told that *“‘many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake’”* and that he personally would rest in the sleep of death and *“‘stand in your allotted place at the end of the days’”* (Daniel 12v2,13).

The apostle Paul also confirmed that this was the hope of those before Jesus: *“‘To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here... saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles’”* (Acts 26v22-23).

Resurrection – the only true hope

Peter declared plainly that, *“‘David did not ascend into the heavens’”* (Acts 2v34). We have seen that this was not David’s hope. God had promised that Christ would sit on his (David’s) throne in Jerusalem (Acts 2v30).

As Paul explained in his speech in Athens, referred to in Study 7, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead was an assurance from God that Christ would rule the world in righteousness, at some appointed date in the future (Acts 17v31).

Martha was a follower of Jesus, and we can clearly see her hope of a future life. We hear of her response when her brother Lazarus died: *“Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha said to him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live’”* (John 11v23-25).

Paul also spoke of this hope in his defence: *“‘having a hope in God... that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust’”* (Acts 24v15).

Who will be raised?

The scriptures tell us that *“the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 6v23). Those who do not seek God or who have no desire to serve Him, or understand His purpose through Jesus Christ, will not obtain the gift of God.

The Bible tells us that not all will be raised. Daniel was told that *“many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt”* (Daniel 12v2). This tells us that at that time there will be three classes of people:

1. Those who did not know about God, and will not be raised at all.
2. People who did not love and obey God, who will receive the punishment of eternal death.
3. Righteous people, who will be raised and given eternal life.

We read of the people in the first category in several places:

- *“One who wanders from the way of good sense will rest in the assembly of the dead.”* (Proverbs 21v16)
- *“Man in his pomp yet without understanding is like the beasts that perish.”* (Psalm 49v20)
- *“They are dead, they will not live.”* (Isaiah 26v14)

Those of the second category are also spoken about many times:

- *“And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”* (Matthew 25v46)
- *“those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”* (John 5v29)
- *“In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out.”* (Luke 13v28)

However, in contrast to those statements, Jesus gives us hope by saying, “*this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent*” (John 17v3). There are also passages speaking about the reward of the righteous, such as:

- “*Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”*” (Matthew 25v34)
- “*For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land... The righteous shall inherit the land and dwell upon it forever.*” (Psalms 37v9,29)
- “*Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.*” (Matthew 13v43)

If we want to become part of God’s plan with this earth, we must have understanding. We must know the true God and have a proper understanding of His word. However, knowledge is not enough. We must love God, and if we love God we will obey His commands (John 15v10). With this knowledge and a belief of the truth of these matters, we can take the next step of *baptism* into Christ, which will be dealt with fully in Study 11. Paul points out the importance of baptism to the true believer who wants to obtain resurrection: “*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.*” (Romans 6v3-5)

Christ the first to rise – others to follow

The Bible clearly shows that Jesus was the first to rise from the dead to immortality. Paul wrote about “*Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*” (2 Timothy 1v10). This life and immortality that Jesus has brought to light is the hope of a rising up from the dead, to stand on the earth.

Paul also told us that *“Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep”* (1 Corinthians 15v20). The first fruits are the first results of the harvest, a sign of many more good things to come. Paul uses this picture of the harvest to show the order of resurrection: *“But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ”* (1 Corinthians 15v23).

Resurrection at Jesus’ second coming

The second coming of Jesus is bound up with the resurrection in the last days. Paul wrote of *“Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom...”* (2 Timothy 4v1).

Paul also wrote:

“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.” (1 Thessalonians 4v13-16).

Resurrection and judgment

As we have seen, Daniel was told that *“‘many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt’”* (Daniel 12v2). This speaks of the assembling together of those who have been raised, and those living at the return of Christ, for judgment; and also of the possibility of rejection by Jesus. Jesus taught the same:

“‘Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done

good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” (John 5v28-29)

All responsible people (those who have known about God, and either accepted or rejected His way) must appear at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. Those who trust in God, have a knowledge of His love and mercy, and have tried to please Him and follow the example of His beloved Son, will, by the grace of God, receive the gift of eternal life in that day.

Jesus speaks to all of us when he says, “*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live*” (John 11v25).

Summary

- The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fact, and is the main teaching of the New Testament.
- Jesus was raised because he did not sin. The righteousness and justice of God could not let him stay in the grave.
- Resurrection has been the hope of all the faithful, both before and since Jesus’ birth.
- We do not have eternal life now; if we did, there would be no need for God to promise it, or for it to be a matter for hope.
- Man is naturally mortal; this is why Jesus had to be a sacrifice to bring salvation to mankind.
- Not all will be raised; those without understanding will remain in the grave.
- Understanding, belief and baptism are necessary to “*put on*” Christ and his resurrection.
- Jesus was the first to rise to immortality; we can be like him if we follow his example.
- Resurrection and judgment will take place when Jesus returns to the earth.

Passages for Bible reading

Psalms 37; Isaiah 26; Mark 16; John 11; Acts 26; 1 Corinthians 15

Study 8: Questions

Underline the correct answer and then mark the correct answer on the yellow 'Answer Summary Sheet' in the centre of this booklet.

1. The word 'resurrection' means:
(a) lying down (b) lifting up (c) rising from the dead (d) waking
2. What did the faithful people in the Old Testament look forward to?
(a) Life in heaven for ever (b) Resurrection
(c) We don't know (d) Nothing
3. Who was the first person to have been raised to live for ever?
(a) Lazarus (b) Jesus (c) Stephen (d) Jairus' daughter
4. What does Jesus' resurrection mean for us?
(a) Nothing (b) Faithful people will never die
(c) We can also be raised (d) Faithful people before Jesus have been raised and are in heaven
5. Why was Jesus raised?
(a) Because he had not sinned, and so did not deserve death
(b) So that baptism would be a symbol of Jesus' death and resurrection
(c) He wasn't – he is still dead (d) He wasn't – he did not die
6. Which three of the following can look forward to a future reward upon the earth? (see 1 Kings 14v16 for Jeroboam)
(a) Abraham (b) David (c) Daniel (d) Jeroboam
7. Will everyone be raised from the dead?
(a) No (b) Yes (c) Probably (d) We don't know
8. When will the dead be raised?
(a) They live on after death (b) The Bible contains no promise
(c) When Jesus returns to set up the Kingdom (d) We don't know
9. What will happen after people are raised?
(a) They will be baptised (b) There will be a judgment
(c) They will study the Bible (d) Everyone will sing praise
10. Who will be accepted by Jesus at the last day?
(a) Those who understand his message, believe in him, and obey him
(b) Everyone who does good and helps people
(c) Those who were unbelieving and died (d) Those who are alive

Study 9 – The Return of Jesus Christ

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an historical fact on which the hope of all mankind depends. Just as we can be confident that Jesus was raised from the dead, we can have confidence in God’s promise that His Son will return to the earth. After Christ was raised from the dead he ascended to heaven, and angels gave his disciples this promise: “*This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.*” (Acts 1v11). Just as he was literally taken up into heaven, so he will return.

What does Jesus’ return involve?

Some have claimed that Jesus has already returned, that he will return in secret, or that his ‘return’ is figurative – a reign in the heart of believers. However, this is not what the Bible teaches. We are told that “*every eye will see him*” (Revelation 1v7). Jesus will return literally, physically to earth, and everyone will know that he has returned.

“So, if they say to you, “Look, he is in the wilderness,” do not go out. If they say, “Look, he is in the inner rooms,” do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man... Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” (Matthew 24v26-27,30)

But why is Jesus going to return?

The purpose of Jesus’ return

In the Lord’s prayer Jesus taught his followers to pray for the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth: “*Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*” (Matthew 6v10).

At this time the words of David will be fulfilled: “*The righteous shall inherit the land and dwell upon it forever*” (Psalm 37v29).

Jesus Christ is to return to the earth to establish God's kingdom by overthrowing the present human governments. He will rid the world of wickedness and fill the earth with God's glory, which will be the divine solution to all its present problems.

For this reason, the apostle Paul, in the first century AD, encouraged Titus to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and rather to *“live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ”* (Titus 2v12-13, ASV).

When will Christ return?

From the beginning, God appointed a particular day when Christ would return to judge the earth. Paul spoke of this: *“he (God) has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead”* (Acts 17v31).

While on earth, Christ in his preaching made it quite clear that, although God's plan was made, and events would follow a set pattern, not even he knew the exact time of his return. In Mark 13, Christ told his hearers of his return, and gave them some indications as to the events which must precede it, after which he said,

“And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory” (Mark 13v26).

“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mark 13v32).

Christ to return unexpectedly like a thief

Most people today do not believe that Christ will return to the earth. They do not consider it seriously in view of the apparent permanence of our existence. The apostle Peter warned that men would think like this: *“knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days*

with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, 'Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation'... The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3v3-4,9).

So we are given the assurance that God is not slow in fulfilling His promises, but that this world-shattering event will take place at the time that He has appointed for it: *"the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night"* (1 Thessalonians 5v2).

The precise hour of Jesus' coming is not known to anyone except God, and cannot be worked out from the scriptures. Jesus said, *"Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."* (Matthew 24v44)

This teaches us that believers need to have faith in Christ's return, and to be ready for it, because only God knows the specific day when this will happen. To those who are not looking for this event, his appearance will be as unexpected as that of a thief in the night.

Signs of Christ's return

The disciples wanted to know how they could tell when Jesus was about to return. When they were sitting on the Mount of Olives, they asked him privately, *"Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?"* (Matthew 24v3).

Jesus' reply to this question describes the conditions that will exist in the world at the time when he returns. Many other passages of Bible prophecy also give "signs of the times" to encourage Christ's followers, and to help them to be ready for him.

1. The sign of Noah

In his answer, Jesus reminded his disciples of the Biblical account of the days before the flood, because there would be a similar situation

in the days just before his return: “*As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.*” (Matthew 24v37-39).

For the background to the times of Noah, read Genesis chapter 6, where it shows plainly why God destroyed mankind, and saved only eight people. There was great wickedness in the thoughts and deeds of men, and God saw that “*the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence*” (Genesis 6v11).

The press, internet, radio and television daily reflect the similarity between the violent, godless world of Noah’s days and the violent, godless world of our times. They are very similar in many ways to the apostle Paul’s description of men in the last days prior to Christ’s return: “*in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power*” (2 Timothy 3v1-5).

A careful consideration of each descriptive word of this prophecy will show that this description fits our age more than any before.

2. The lesson of the fig tree

Jesus also gave a short parable as an additional sign to tell his disciples when his return was near: “*From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates*” (Matthew 24v32-33).

When the signs in the earlier verses of the prophecy in Matthew 24 are fulfilled, we know that the return of Jesus Christ is very near.

Some people believe that this parable speaks of Israel in figurative language. When Israel was brought back into their land, as promised by God, they were a young nation sprouting like a budding tree. This regathering of Israel happened in 1948, when the state of Israel was declared after almost 2,000 years of being scattered among the nations. What follows this regathering?

“I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore.” (Ezekiel 37v26)

The Jews are in their land now, but God's sanctuary has not yet been set up in Israel. The return of the Jews to Israel heralds the establishment of God's kingdom when this prophecy will be completely fulfilled.

We must remember: *“So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates”* (Matthew 24v33).

2.1 Jesus' prophecy concerning Israel

Jesus made very clear predictions about both the immediate future of the nation and its long-term destiny. The leaders of the nation failed to see God's plan. He had sent them His only son as their Messiah (Savior), and they had killed him. Just prior to his arrest and crucifixion, Jesus and his disciples stood on the mountain overlooking Jerusalem. Seeing the beauty of the temple, the disciples exclaimed in wonder; but Jesus saw only the punishment to be meted out to his people: *“As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down... They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”* (Luke 21v6,24).

This prophecy began to be fulfilled in AD 70 when the Roman

Empire sent an army, under Titus, to put down a rebellion. The city of Jerusalem was destroyed and the ground was actually ploughed over. Deuteronomy 28 was further fulfilled, and the scattering of the nation was complete. No Jew was permitted to remain in the land. In AD 135 a decree was issued expelling the surviving Jews from Judaea, and the name of Jerusalem was changed to Aelia Capitolina.

There followed centuries of persecution for the Jews. The Jewish prisoners captured in the various wars were scattered over the world as slaves. Those fortunate enough to escape this fate became merchants and traders. Settlements were to be found throughout the world, but persecution and anti-Semitism became part of their way of life. Finally the miracle that was needed to regather Israel and return Jerusalem to their control came about. In 1967 the Israelis captured Jerusalem, and for the first time in nearly 2,000 years, Jerusalem came under Israeli control.

2.2 Israel reborn

Nothing could be clearer than the prophecy spoken through Jeremiah: *“Behold, I will gather them from all the countries to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation. I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in safety”* (Jeremiah 32v37).

After nearly 2,000 years of being scattered throughout the nations, when the time came for the prophecies to be fulfilled, the Jews returned to the land of Israel and became a nation in 1948. Just as in Biblical times, God led His people to victory. Thus what the prophets had declared would happen came to pass.

Ezekiel 36-37 contains a most remarkable prophecy, which shows the overriding control of God in the affairs of nations. The prophet was given a vision in which God foretold the regathering of the nation to their land, there to become a great army: *“I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land... And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you... You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your*

fathers” (Ezekiel 36v24,26,28).

Then, in the vision of the valley full of dry bones that became a valley filled with a mighty army, God gave further reassurance:

“they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army... I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all around, and bring them to their own land” (Ezekiel 37v10,21).

Since 1948, nearly six million Jews have returned to Israel; the next major event may be Christ’s return to establish his kingdom in Israel and throughout the whole world.

3. The sign of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream

Study 3 dealt fully with this dream. The interpretation Daniel gave showed the course of world history. We find ourselves today represented by the feet of the image, with some strong nations (iron) and some weak nations (clay), not able to join firmly together. Daniel continued, *“And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed”* (Daniel 2v44).

This shows that there will be no further world empire, until the return of Jesus, which will complete the fulfilment of Daniel’s prophecy. Paul the apostle, confident in the absolute fulfilment of the prophecy up to his time, was able to encourage the believers at Colosse, because he knew of the certainty of Christ’s return: *“When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory”* (Colossians 3v4).

4. The sign of general world unrest

As well as these being literal happenings, Christ may also be speaking in figurative language of the ruling powers, with the sea and waves representing people (as in Isaiah 57v20). This would give a picture of the peoples of the earth exerting power over events and situations, and shaking the security of rulers, resulting in distress and fear among the nations.

Isn't this just like the current world situation?

Once again, Christ tells us that when world events are like those described by him, we must expect his return: "then shall they see the Son of man coming" (Luke 21v27).

The coming world conflict

Christ's warning to his followers was that they should watch and keep awake.

"Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming." (Matthew 24v42)

As we watch the world scene, what do we see? We see Israel, returned to their land in fulfilment of such prophecies as Ezekiel chapter 37. We see hostility towards Israel on every side. The Arab (Islamic) nations are gathered together against God's people, and have long tried to defeat them:

"They say, 'Come, let us wipe them out as a nation; let the name of Israel be remembered no more!'" (Psalm 83v4)

There are other prophecies, too, showing that war will come:

"For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle..." (Zechariah 14v2)

"Proclaim this among the nations: Consecrate for war; stir up the mighty men. Let all the men of war draw near; let them come up... Let the nations stir themselves up and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat..." (Joel 3v9,12).

This is the day when God will intervene in man's affairs once again and will cause His will to be done on earth.

"Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near..." (Joel 3v14).

“The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth quake. But the LORD is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel. “So you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who dwells in Zion, my holy mountain. And Jerusalem shall be holy, and strangers shall never again pass through it.” (Joel 3v16-17)

These times will lead to the return of Christ, who is to be the ruler of the earth. Many prophets, particularly Joel and Zechariah, together with the great prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, present to us God’s plan. In the end there will come a day of final conflict, known in the Bible as “Armageddon”. After this is over,

“...the LORD will be king over all the earth. On that day the LORD will be one and his name one.” (Zechariah 14v9).

Christ’s return a fact

When we see the signs of our times, we see God’s plan unfolding, and we believe that the coming of Jesus Christ is near – he is ready to take the world by surprise.

Seeing the signs and knowing their meaning, can we afford to remain unmoved by them? We can be like those who foolishly close their minds to these things and do nothing. The return of Christ will come to such people like a thief in the night.

Alternatively, we can regard the signs and act on the warning before it is too late. Jesus said, *“Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near”* (Luke 21v28). Instead of being downcast by present conditions, we can look up and see the need for redemption, through Christ our Redeemer, before the “great day of God Almighty” engulfs the wicked.

The Bible offers us the hope of eternal life and a place in God’s Kingdom – a Kingdom where Christ will reign in righteousness and peace; not a ‘reign of grace in the heart’, but a literal kingdom upon

earth. It is up to us to be ready.

The wise will conclude that:

- the coming of Christ is a vital matter;
- the warning from God's word should not be ignored;
- our present life gives no lasting satisfaction; and
- belief of the Gospel (good news) of the Kingdom of God and baptism into the saving name of Christ are imperative if we want eternal life.

Summary

- The return of Jesus Christ is a fact.
- This return was promised by the angels at his ascension.
- Jesus is to return to establish God's kingdom on earth.
- We do not know the exact day appointed for Christ's return.
- Clear signs indicate that Christ's return is imminent.
- The days of Noah are comparable to our own.
- The restoration of the Jews in Israel is a living sign.
- We live in the final phase of Nebuchadnezzar's vision.
- World unrest precedes Christ's return.

Passages for Bible reading

Daniel 2; Ezekiel 37; Matthew 24; Acts 1v1-12; Acts 3; 1 Thessalonians 4

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Study 9: Questions

Underline the correct answer and then mark the correct answer on the yellow 'Answer Summary Sheet' in the centre of this booklet.

1. What is Jesus' main purpose in returning to this earth?
(a) He is not going to return (b) To stop war
(c) To establish God's kingdom (d) To cure disease
2. What will Jesus' return be like?
(a) He has already returned (b) Everyone will see him
(c) His return is figurative – a reign in the hearts of believers
(d) He will return in secret, and only true believers will see him
3. Who did Jesus say knew the exact date when he would return?
(a) The angels (b) Jesus (c) God (d) Paul
4. Where can we find indications that Jesus will return soon?
(a) In the Bible (b) In the paper (c) In the stars (d) In the Law
5. What can we learn from the parable of the fig tree in Matthew 24v32-33?
(a) That we will grow fig trees (b) The signs show Jesus' return is near
(c) That Jesus has returned (d) Nothing
6. The vision of the valley of dried bones showed that:
(a) an army would destroy Israel (b) the time of the end was near
(c) the Jews would return to Israel (d) many will die at Armageddon
7. What was it like in the days of Noah?
(a) Peaceful (b) There were lots of boat building companies
(c) Everyone loved God (d) Riotous living and violence
8. How does this tell us that Jesus is near?
(a) The days of Noah will be like the days before Jesus' return
(b) The rainbow is a sign of Jesus' return
(c) It's not connected at all (d) There are floods today in places
9. What did Jesus tell his disciples they should be doing?
(a) Watching – preparing for him (b) Reading the newspapers daily
(c) Try to stop global warming (d) Nothing
10. Which of the following signs of Jesus' soon return can we see today?
(a) The Jews being back in Israel (b) World unrest
(c) A time of violence (d) Some nations strong, some weak

Study 10 – The Gospel

In this study we will be bringing together many of the facts which we have learnt in earlier studies. The word “gospel” simply means “good news”.

The centre of Christ’s teaching

Matthew, Mark and Luke all tell us that Jesus went throughout the land of Israel preaching the gospel – the good news – of the coming kingdom.

- *“And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.”* (Matthew 9v35)
- *“Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God.”* (Mark 1v14)
- *“He said to them, ‘I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.’”* (Luke 4v43)

When Jesus had taught the good news to the disciples, he sent them out to teach others too.

- *“‘And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”* (Matthew 10v7)
- *“So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent.”* (Mark 6v12)
- *“and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.”* (Luke 9v2)

After his death and resurrection, Jesus told the disciples to go on with the same work.

- *“‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.’”* (Matthew 28v19)
- *“‘Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.’”* (Mark 16v15-

16)

From these last words, we see that we need to know, believe and obey the gospel in order to receive salvation.

The power of the gospel

Because this gospel can bring life to us, the apostle Paul wrote, *“I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek”* (Romans 1v16).

We need to understand clearly the good news that Jesus and the apostles taught. Paul wrote again, *“even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed”* (Galatians 1v8).

What did the disciples understand by ‘the gospel’?

The disciples went out preaching the good news of the kingdom of God before the crucifixion of Jesus. What did this ‘good news’ mean to them? When two of them spoke to Jesus after his resurrection, they said, *“Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people... But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel”* (Luke 24v19,21).

Just before Jesus ascended to heaven, the disciples asked him, *“Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”* (Acts 1v6). They expected Jesus to set up the kingdom of God there and then. It was such good news that they wanted it immediately. Jesus told them that the time had not yet come.

“He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.’” (Acts 1v7)

God’s promises

As the disciples watched Jesus ascending, two angels stood by them

and told them,

“This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” (Acts 1v11)

This promise is the repeated theme of the apostles’ teaching as we read it in the Acts of the Apostles, and in their letters. They looked for the return of Jesus to fulfil all of the promises which God had made concerning His kingdom, because, although the word ‘gospel’ is only to be found in the New Testament, the good news of the coming kingdom of God is the basis of all God’s promises from the beginning.

“Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.” (Acts 3v19-21)

1. The gospel in Eden

In the beginning, after Adam and Eve had disobeyed God's commandment, His words to the serpent were, *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”* (Genesis 3v15)

This was the good news, that the power of sin and death would eventually be destroyed. This was the work that Jesus came to do. Look up Hebrews 2v14-15.

“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.” (Hebrews 2v14-15)

2. The gospel to Abraham

We have already studied God's promises to Abraham. The apostle Paul wrote, *"And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed'"* (Galatians 3v8).

When Jesus returns, he will raise Abraham from the dead, and all of God's promises to Abraham and his descendants will be fulfilled in every detail.

These promises were also given to Isaac and to Jacob, and they too will be raised from the dead at the return of Jesus, and will receive places of honour in God's kingdom (Matthew 8v11).

3. The gospel to David

The good news of God's kingdom was told to David through the prophet Nathan.

"When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever." (2 Samuel 7v12-16)

Although the Israelites later forsook God, He did not forget His promises. We find them over and over again in the Psalms, and in the writings of the prophets. God, through the prophet Ezekiel, spoke to Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, *"A ruin, ruin, ruin I will make it (Israel). This also shall not be, until he comes, the one to whom judgment belongs, and I will give it to him"* (Ezekiel 21v27).

When Jesus came, the angel renewed the promise to Mary, “*He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.*” (Luke 1v32-33)

4. The gospel to us

This is the good news of God’s coming kingdom that we know from the Bible. Jesus will soon be back on earth to set up God’s kingdom. Read Matthew 25. The three parables in this chapter teach us that if we want to have a part in God’s kingdom, we must be ready, work for God, and reflect the love of Christ.

4.1 Parable of the ten virgins (v1-13)

Those who prepared themselves and were ready were invited into the marriage feast but those whose oil had run out found the door closed. We are also told that we must keep watch, because we do not know when Jesus will return (Matthew 24v42,44).

4.2 Parable of the talents (v14-30)

The use of our God-given abilities will be recognized by Jesus, and he will reward those who have used their knowledge and opportunities while they could.

4.3 Parable of shepherd dividing the sheep (v31-46)

The good shepherd recognizes his sheep and understands their efforts (see also John 10v1-16). He knows those who have tried to help those round them, and accepts such assistance as being done to him.

What must we do?

We have to repent, which means changing our ways.

“*the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel*” (Mark 1v15).

“Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus.” (Acts 3v19-20)

“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” (Acts 17v30-31)

We need to follow Jesus, to change our hearts and minds. We must also be reborn through baptism, as our next study will discuss.

“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ... And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.” (Galatians 3v27,29)

This is the gospel, the good news of the kingdom of God. We, like the disciples, long for it to be fulfilled soon. This is why we pray, as Jesus taught his followers, *“Your kingdom come”*.

“And he said to them, ‘When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.”’” (Luke 11v2-4)

Summary

- The word ‘gospel’ means ‘good news’.
- The good news of the coming kingdom of God was the main theme of the teachings of Jesus and his disciples.
- Knowledge of, belief in, and obedience to, the gospel are necessary for salvation.
- The gospel is taught throughout the scriptures, in both the Old and New Testaments.
- The good news is still preached to us today.
- We can gain a place in God’s kingdom if we hear, understand and obey the gospel message.
- We have to make a positive response to the call of the gospel, just as Abraham and all the faithful servants of God in the past did.

Passages for Bible reading

2 Samuel 7; Psalm 96; Isaiah 55; Matthew 25; Mark 16; Acts 9; Galatians 3

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Study 10: Questions

Underline the correct answer and then mark the correct answer on the yellow 'Answer Summary Sheet' in the centre of this booklet.

1. The word 'gospel' means:
(a) News (b) Good news (c) Kingdom (d) Message
2. Which of the following verses tell us that Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom?
(a) Mark 1v14 (b) Luke 3v16 (c) Mark 4v18 (d) Matthew 9v35
3. In addition to Jesus, who also preached the gospel?
(a) The Jewish priests (b) The disciples
(c) The Roman ruler (d) The wise men (see Matthew 2)
4. When will the kingdom of God be set up on this earth?
(a) We do not know (b) When Jesus comes back to the earth
(c) It already has been (d) It will not be set up
5. Who told the disciples as they watched Jesus going to heaven that he would return?
(a) God (b) An angel (c) Jesus (d) Two angels
6. How can you receive the promise of salvation offered in the Bible?
(a) Do good to our friends (b) Share all our goods
(c) Obey the laws of the country (d) Know, believe and obey the gospel
7. Which of the promises God made foretold that the power of sin and death would be overcome?
(a) The promise in Eden (b) The promise to Abraham
(c) The promise to Noah (d) The promise to David
8. Which verse in the New Testament tells us that the gospel was preached to Abraham?
(a) Romans 3v8 (b) Romans 8v3 (c) Galatians 3v8 (d) Galatians 8v3
9. Which prophet of God told David the good news of God's kingdom?
(a) Daniel (b) Isaiah (c) Elijah (d) Nathan
10. What were the disciples to go out and preach?
(a) Immortality of the soul (b) The instant healing of all diseases
(c) Jesus as the king of Israel at that time
(d) Repentance and the coming kingdom of God on earth

Study 11 – Baptism

In the last study we saw Jesus commanding his disciples to “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*” (Matthew 28v19). So what is this baptism, and what is it for?

What is baptism?

The English word ‘baptise’ has been taken directly from the Greek word ‘baptizo’, which means to dip, plunge, or completely immerse in liquid. It is used in Greek referring to the art of dyeing. In order to dye material, it has to be completely dipped into the dye, so that the colour of the material is completely changed.

The use of this word throughout the New Testament makes it clear that sprinkling or pouring water on a person is not sufficient. Scriptural baptism requires a complete immersion in water. So we read of Philip when he baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, “*they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him*” (Acts 8v38).

We also read that John the Baptist baptized in Aenon near Salim “*because water was plentiful there*” (John 3v23).

Conditions for salvation

In the last study we saw that a belief and understanding of the gospel, followed by obedience to God’s commands, were essential to salvation. We read the words of Jesus after his resurrection: “*Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned*” (Mark 16v15-16).

We see at once, then, that true baptism can only take place when a man or a woman is able to understand and obey the word of God. It is also an essential condition of our acceptance by God.

We can look at the example of Cornelius, a Roman centurion, who was a ‘good’ man by any standard (see Acts 10v2), and yet God told him to send for Peter. “*“He will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household”*” (Acts 11v14). Peter came, and taught Cornelius about Jesus.

“And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” (Acts 10v42-43)

However, one thing was still necessary.

“And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.” (Acts 10v48)

From this and the other records in the Acts of the Apostles, it is plain that God has laid down three essential conditions for salvation: knowledge, belief and baptism (though of course there is also the need to continue to live life God’s way). Read Acts 2v37-38,41; Acts 8v35-38; Acts 16v25-33.

“But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” (Acts 8v12)

The significance of baptism

If we read the New Testament carefully, we will see that there are four aspects to the significance of baptism.

1. Washing away, cleansing

“And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.” (Acts 22v16)

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? And such were some of you... But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus

Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Corinthians 6v9,11)

We find the same symbol used in the Old Testament, together with the figure of a change of colour. *“Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good... though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1v16-18).*

2. Association with the death and resurrection of Christ

When we are completely covered by water in the act of baptism, we symbolically die, and when we rise again from the water, we symbolically rise to a new life. In this way we associate ourselves with the death and resurrection of Jesus. The apostle Paul writes about this to the Romans.

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” (Romans 6v3-5)

In baptism we undergo a figurative death and resurrection to newness of life, a change of outlook which is an essential part of our obedience to God.

Jesus said, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3v5).*

Paul also wrote to the believers at Colosse about baptism.

“having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses” (Colossians 2v12-13)

3. We are united by baptism into Christ

We are united by baptism into Christ and so become heirs with Christ to the promises which God made through him.

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 12v12-13)

“Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham... Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ... for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.” (Galatians 3v7,16,26-29)

Paul writes again to the Ephesians of the change which takes place at baptism.

“you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ... So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” (Ephesians 2v12-13, 19)

4. A change of masters – a call to separation

Read 2 Corinthians 6v14-18; 1 John 2v15-17.

“Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says

the Lord.” (2 Corinthians 6v17)

God is not pleased with the idolatry of the world. By nature men and women are the servants of sin. When we are baptized we change our service.

“...so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin... So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions... Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.” (Romans 6v6-7,11-12,16-18)

In baptism we begin a new life of obedience to God which makes us heirs to the promised gift of God.

“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6v22-23)

When we are baptised, we completely reject man’s way, the way of the world. In baptism we choose to turn to God’s way, obeying the gospel, which we are told is *“the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes”*.

The example of Noah

This is what Noah did. The world of his day was filled with violence and wickedness. Noah built an ark, and when the rest of the world was destroyed by the water of the flood, Noah and his family entered the ark and were saved.

“...in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 3v20-21)

The judgment of the wicked when Christ returns will be as sudden and final as it was in the days of Noah. As Noah was saved in the ark, so we will be saved, if we are ‘in Christ’. We have seen that the way to be ‘in Christ’ is through knowledge, belief, baptism and continued obedience.

How important is baptism?

Many feel that as long as they change their way of life for the better, there is no need to submit to this act. Sadly, they are wrong, and all their efforts to do right are ineffective. Consider the case of Naaman the Syrian (2 Kings 5). Elisha the prophet, a man of God, told him to wash in the river Jordan to cure his leprosy. At first he refused, but when his servants persuaded him to obey the specific instructions given by God, he was cured at once.

“And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, ‘Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean.’ But Naaman was angry and went away... But his servants came near and said to him, ‘My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you; will you not do it?...’ So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.” 2 Kings 5v10-14

If we obey the word of God as closely as we can, we too can be cured and start afresh. But what about subsequent mistakes and sins, that is, those committed after baptism? As we have seen earlier, through baptism we are associated with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; this event was a once-and-for-all-sacrifice for sin, and those things which we do wrong in our new life in Christ can be forgiven by prayer through our new-found Saviour. When we repent

and ask for God's forgiveness, all our sins and errors are removed from the record, and therefore we can go forward each day, confident that if we try to do right, God has promised to mercifully forgive us if we ask him.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1v9)

God has offered us this wonderful opportunity through His word. Do you feel the need to start your life again? With your experience of the mistakes you have made and your desire to erase some of the dark patches of your previous life, we have been offered a unique opportunity to start again, but this time not on a path that leads to the grave but rather on the road to immortality and the glorious kingdom of God. God’s way is the only way in which you can be reconciled to your Maker.

“‘And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.’” (Acts 4v12)

This is the importance of baptism. It is an essential act of obedience, a critical part of God's way of salvation.

Summary

- Baptism should follow a full understanding and belief of the gospel.
- Baptism requires a complete immersion in water.
- In the act of baptism:
 - our sins are symbolically washed away
 - we are associated with the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ
 - we are united in Christ, and so can receive God's promises through Christ
 - we change masters, serving God instead of serving sin, and separate ourselves from the world.
- As Noah was saved by entering the ark, we must enter Christ through baptism in order to be saved from the coming judgment.
- Baptism is essential for salvation.

Passages for Bible reading

Genesis 6-8; Mark 16; Acts 8, 10 and 22; Romans 6

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Study 11: Questions

Underline the correct answer and then mark the correct answer on the yellow 'Answer Summary Sheet' in the centre of this booklet.

1. The word 'baptize' means:
(a) Sprinkling (b) Pouring (c) Immersing (d) Soaking
2. Who baptized the Ethiopian eunuch?
(a) Stephen (b) Paul (c) Philip (d) Barnabas
3. Which verses in the Bible tell us of the instructions to the disciples regarding the preaching of the Gospel?
(a) Mark 15v15-16 (b) Mark 16v15-16
(c) Mark 5v15-16 (d) Mark 6v15-16
4. Which three of the following were baptized?
(a) Pilate (b) Paul (c) The Philippian jailer (d) Lydia
5. When can true baptism take place?
(a) At birth (b) At death (c) On leaving school
(d) On gaining a full understanding and belief of God's plan of salvation
6. What does the act of baptism represent?
(a) The literal death of the person (b) The gift of God
(c) The death and resurrection of Jesus (d) Noah's ark
7. Which chapter in the Bible explains the meaning of baptism?
(a) Romans 6 (b) Ruth 4 (c) Revelation 6 (d) Colossians 4
8. Which event is used by Peter as a parallel with the act of baptism?
(a) The passing through the Red Sea at the Exodus
(b) The crossing of the River Jordan into the Promised Land
(c) The provision of water in the desert
(d) The provision of an ark by Noah at the time of the flood
9. What act of obedience does God require of you so that you may gain a place in His coming kingdom?
(a) Love (b) Belief and baptism (c) Faith (d) Honesty
10. Why should we be baptised?
(a) We should not be baptised (b) Because the pastor says so
(c) Because the Bible tells us to so that our sins can be forgiven
(d) Because it looks good

Study 12 – The Kingdom of God

When Christ returns – and an earlier study has shown that all the signs suggest that this will be soon – his first work will be to raise the dead.

“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake...”
(Daniel 12v2)

“For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.” (1 Thessalonians 4v15-16)

Following this resurrection will be the judgment, when the reward of everlasting life will be given to the righteous who will then help with the government of the kingdom of God. The Bible promises that the reign of Christ will see the end of the evils which at present corrupt the world.

Conditions in the kingdom

- There will be no oppression (Zephaniah 3v19) and no war.

“He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” (Isaiah 2v4)

- The king’s reign will be righteous and just.

“And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.”
(Isaiah 11v3-4)

- All kinds of sickness and related problems will be removed.

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.” (Isaiah 35v5-6)

- Many countries today suffer famine and thousands of people are dying daily from hunger. In that day there will be no famine. Springs of water in the desert will enable crops to grow where they cannot today.

“The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing... For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down, the grass shall become reeds and rushes.” (Isaiah 35v6-7)

“the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it.” (Amos 9v13)

- Finally, death itself will be destroyed.

“Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” (1 Corinthians 15v24-26)

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21v4)

It is clear why this teaching about the kingdom of God is called the gospel, since, as we have learnt, ‘gospel’ means ‘good news’.

The way to salvation

After his resurrection, Jesus sent his disciples out with these instructions, *“Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but*

whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16v15-16).

It will be seen that baptism must follow a belief of the gospel. However, we must remember the end of the verse too: “*whoever does not believe will be condemned.*”

On the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter spoke about the resurrection of Jesus and the hope of his second coming. Many of the people who heard the address were moved by what they heard, and asked what they should do. They were told to repent and be baptized. To repent means to change what you are doing – to make a fresh start.

“So those who received his word were baptized... And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” (Acts 2v41-42)

Notice the same order: understanding and belief (that is, faith), followed by obedience through baptism. Then follows a continued effort on the part of the believer to live his life in a way that pleases God. The baptized Christian, who is spoken of as “*raised with Christ*” (Colossians 3v1), can then wait confidently for the coming of the Lord. “*If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*” (Colossians 3v1-4)

Forgiveness

If, during the time of this waiting for Christ, the Christian does wrong, he knows God will forgive him if he asks, and that Jesus is a sympathetic High Priest for him with God, because he knows what temptation is like. In the letter to the Hebrews, we are reminded that our High Priest was tempted in the same way as we are, although he was able to resist and did not sin (Hebrews 4v15). The Christian can be confident that his prayers will be heard (Matthew 21v22; 1 John 3v22, 5v14).

“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”
(Hebrews 4v16)

The gift of God

We cannot live life God’s way by our own effort. It is only by the love and the mercy of God that we can obtain salvation through Christ. So the apostle Paul wrote, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God”* (Ephesians 2v8).

“The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
(Romans 6v23)

The next step

You have now completed the twelve studies of this stage of instruction. These studies have given a brief outline of what the Bible teaches about God and His purpose with the earth.

You may be like some of the people of Athens, who listened to Paul and *“when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked”* (Acts 17v32). In other words, they had listened, but were not very interested in continuing their studies.

On the other hand, you may be like the people of Berea that the apostle visited, who *“received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so”* (Acts 17v11). To whichever group of people you belong, the purpose of God will still be fulfilled. Peter wrote that in the last days people would scoff at the idea of the return of Christ. Peter said that they mocked at the preaching of Noah, but when the appointed day came, the rain began. In the same way, whether people take notice or not, *“the day of the Lord will come”* (2 Peter 3v10).

A special message for you

The apostle concludes this letter by reminding us that *“The Lord is*

not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Peter 3v9). God will send Jesus back and establish his kingdom, but he does not want anyone to miss out. We all must make a choice as to whether we want to be in that kingdom or not, and if we do, we must obey Jesus’ call: “Follow me” (Matthew 9v9). This choice must be left to each individual student to make. We trust that you will “be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace” (2 Peter 3v14).

Summary

- Jesus will return, raise the dead, and set up God’s kingdom.
- It will be an amazing kingdom:
 - The king will rule in justice and righteousness.
 - There will be no disease, and no more war.
 - There will be an abundance of food.
 - Water will spring forth in the deserts.
 - Death will be destroyed.
- The way to salvation is by belief, baptism and obedience.
- After baptism we can have forgiveness of our sins through prayer.
- God wants each of us to be in his kingdom, but it is up to us to choose to follow and obey him.

Passages for Bible reading

Isaiah 65v17-25; Isaiah 66v1-2; Ephesians 2, 5; Colossians 3; Hebrews 11; 2 Peter 3

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Study 12: Questions

Underline the correct answer and then mark the correct answer on the yellow 'Answer Summary Sheet' in the centre of this booklet.

1. What will the first work of Jesus be when he returns to the earth?
(a) To tell everybody he has come (b) To raise the dead
(c) To give happiness to all (d) To destroy the wicked
2. Which of the following conditions will exist in the kingdom of God?
(a) No more war or disease (b) No more famine or drought
(c) A corrupt government (d) Abundant food
3. What did Peter tell the people on the day of Pentecost that they should do to be saved?
(a) Feel sorry for their sins (b) Nothing – God will save everyone
(c) We can do nothing to be saved (d) Repent and be baptised
4. How should a baptized believer live his life?
(a) In a monastery (b) In isolation
(c) In a way that pleases God (d) In an important job
5. How can a Christian seek forgiveness?
(a) By tithes (b) By sacrifices (c) By offerings (d) By prayer
6. What is the gift of God referred to in Romans 6?
(a) Eternal life through Jesus (b) The creation (c) The Bible
(d) The seasons
7. What did some of the people at Athens do when they heard Paul preach?
(a) Said 'We will hear more some other time' (b) Stoned Paul
(c) Praised Paul (d) Honoured Paul
8. What did the people at Berea do when they heard Paul preach?
(a) Sang praise (b) Searched the scriptures daily
(c) Preached (d) Sold all their belongings
9. Which of the following passages tell us about the kingdom of God?
(a) Isaiah 65v17-25 (b) Matthew 9v9
(c) Acts 2 (d) Revelation 21v4
10. Which apostle told us to try to be blameless in our life before God?
(a) Paul (b) Philip (c) John (d) Peter