

CBM  
Bible based  
Christianity (BBC)  
course notes (full)



**Christadelphian**  
Bible Mission

## **Bible-Based Christianity – A Course on how to become a Christian.**

### **Introduction**

God wants people to believe in Him and follow His ways. In the Bible we read His message to us,

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him"*  
John 3:16-17.

God showed His love and commitment to saving us by giving us His son!

God wants all men and women to turn to him and be saved. We read this in 1 Timothy 2:3-4,

*"This is good and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth".*

In order to be saved, there are certain things that a Christian needs to know and do. This is what this course is about. It tells you what you need to know and do to be a Christian. The information comes only from the Bible. Many references will be given to prove what is being said. The course does not assume any previous knowledge of the Bible.

### **What we need to know**

There are certain things that a Christian does need to know. We read of some of these in Acts 8:12,

*"But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women."*

Christians need to know about the Kingdom of God and about Jesus Christ. And they need to know about baptism. Baptism is the starting point of being a Christian, and it comes after someone had learnt what it means to be a Christian.

Christians need to know about the Kingdom of God and Jesus Christ. These are main headings of what we need to know, but there are other teachings under these headings. The teaching about Jesus Christ includes other things such as those mentioned in the book of Hebrews. Here the writer helped the readers remember what they had learnt about Jesus,

*"Therefore, let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about cleansing rites, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment" (Hebrews 6:1-2).*

The writer did not want to 'lay again' – that is, teach again - the basic teachings they had learnt about Jesus. This was because they were already Christians and should remember them. The passage tells us some of these basic teachings – repentance,

faith, baptism, the laying-on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

This course teaches the basic teachings of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God. These are the fundamental teachings that a Christian needs to know.

### **What we need to do**

Learning knowledge is not enough to be a Christian. Consider the case of someone who knows all the teachings but continues to blaspheme, steal, and hate everyone. That person is not a real Christian.

A real Christian is one who lives by the teachings they have learnt. They put into practice the behaviours expected from being a Christian.

Being a Christian is like being a carpenter. It is not enough to know what a carpenter should know and how to make things from wood. A carpenter is only a carpenter if they do make things from wood. In the same way, a Christian is not a Christian just by knowing what a Christian should know. They are a Christian only if they behave like a Christian.

Christianity is a practical subject. It must be lived. James says,

*"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says"*  
(James 1:22).

A true Christian lives like one,

*"Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions in truth"* (1 John 3:18).

Here, the title 'children' means 'children of God,' who are adult believers who follow the words of God. It is no good being able to teach others if we cannot live by the teaching ourselves.

### **The Bible Based Christianity Course**

This course has 30 lessons. It was designed originally as a video course, with 30 videos of about 15 minutes each. These that can be found on [cbmmedia.org](http://cbmmedia.org) and you can follow these if you prefer. Some people prefer to have a written manual. Others may not be able to access the videos and can only see written material. This manual is for these people.

A written manual allows us to include more material than is in the video series. These will help explain the teachings in a bit more detail. A written course is also written in a slightly different style to a spoken course, so the material has been slightly amended.

The course starts with a lesson on the Bible, which is the source of information. It is followed by two lessons about the general contents of the Bible, so that those who are new to the Bible can gain a general understanding. There follows a series on the original gospel message as taught by Jesus and the disciples. Then there are the topics of man, God, and Jesus. The course ends with practical matters and advice on the next steps.

The titles of the 30 lessons are given below:

*The Bible*

1. The Bible
2. Patterns in the Bible
3. God's Plan

*The Gospel Message*

4. Are you ready for the Kingdom of God? Part 1
5. Are you ready for the Kingdom of God? Part 2
6. Are you ready for the Kingdom of God? Part 3
7. Are you ready for the Kingdom of God? Part 4
8. Are you ready for the Kingdom of God? Part 5
9. Are you ready for the Kingdom of God? Part 6

*Man*

10. Temptation
11. Sin
12. Life and Death (Lessons 12-14 are combined)
13. Where do you go when you die?
14. Is there such a place as Hell?
15. What is meant by 'devil' and 'satan'?
16. What is meant by 'demons'?

*God*

17. God
18. Is God a trinity?
19. The Holy Spirit
20. Holy Spirit gifts
21. Angels

*Jesus*

22. Promises to Abraham and David
23. The life of Jesus
24. Resurrection and Judgment

*Practical Matters*

25. Holiness
26. Fellowship
27. Prayer
28. The Family
29. Politics, voting and joining the army or police.
30. Godliness

You will find a summary of the main points learnt at the end of each lesson, as well as questions to help you check your understanding. If you have a tutor, then the tutor will be able to check your answers. They will be able to answer any of your own questions.

If you are reading this alone, you have the advantage that you can go through the lessons at your own pace. Asking questions and receiving answers is a good way to learn.

Doing the course alone has the disadvantage of not being able to ask someone your questions. In this case, we suggest you write down any questions you have, so that these can be answered later.

The main Bible references have been written out in full and come from the New International Version of the Bible. This enables you to follow the lessons without a Bible. However, it is important that you understand that the information comes from the Bible.

Reading the Bible and learning its message is what God wants us to do. We recommend that you make this the priority in your life, because Jesus told us,

*"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well"* (Matthew 6:33).

If we put the right things first, then God will look after us in our lives.

## Lesson 1: The Bible

The Bible is the most read book in the world. And it is not hard to see why. It says that it comes from God Himself. We read this in 2 Timothy 3:15-17:

*"and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."*

All Scripture is "God-breathed". That is, God breathed out the words. The words of the Bible come from God Himself. It is where God tells us what He wants us to know. From the Bible,

- We can get our teaching – what to believe.
- It can rebuke us – it can tell us when we are wrong.
- It can correct us – it can put us right.
- It can train us to be righteous, which means we can be right with God.

By doing this, it can make us "*wise for salvation*". That is, it can give us wisdom that can save our life. Now that makes listening to the Bible very important!

If a doctor told us to follow certain instructions to save us from death, we would be very careful to make sure we followed the instructions. It is the same with the Bible. We must be very careful to follow its instructions so that we can be saved.

### How was the Bible written?

The words of the Bible were breathed out by God. God gave His words to the writers, and they wrote down God's words. Peter explained what happened,

*"Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20-21).*

This is supported by the words of Hebrews,

*"In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways" (Hebrews 1:1).*

God's message in the Old Testament was written by the prophets who wrote down God's words. God's message in the New Testament was written by apostles and prophets.

It is important that we understand that the Bible is God's message. We read this in 1 Thessalonians 2:13,

*"And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe".*

When we read the Bible we should not think it is the word of the human person who wrote down the words. The words are from God. The letters of Peter come from God. The letters of Paul to the Thessalonians come from God. The Book of Genesis comes from God.

No other book in the world is like the Bible. We cannot find God's message to mankind anywhere else.

## **Faith**

When we read a book, we learn about the author. We learn whether they are talking sense. If they do not, we stop reading. We learn about what is important to them. If we are not interested in this, then we also stop reading.

As you read the Bible, you will learn that the Bible makes sense. You will learn that it is so wise and deep that the Bible cannot have been written by man. You will learn to trust it and you will put your faith in it. As it says,

*"Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ" (Romans 10:17).*

Reading the Bible helps us develop faith in it. If we already have faith, then reading will strengthen our faith. The Bible was written to help us have faith,

*"But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).*

The Bible was written over 1500 years, by 40 different writers, in 3 languages and in different countries. If it was written by men, then there would be confusion as the different writers expressed different opinions on difficult topics. But the Bible is consistent and harmonious because it was written by one author – God.

There is historical evidence to show that the Bible is old and accurate. There is archaeological evidence to show that the names, places and events in the Bible really happened.

Faith is important. We are told,

*"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).*

Faith is essential if we want to be a Christian. If we do not have faith, then we must start reading the Bible and develop a faith.

## **What the Bible do for us**

The Bible can save our lives. But it can do more than that. We are told,

*"The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul.*

*The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.*

*The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart.*

*The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes."*

(Psalm 19:7-8)

The Bible can revive us. It can make us wise. It can give us joy. It can give us light. Given that it can do all those things, we should read the Bible regularly.

If you do not have a Bible, you should get one and read it daily. We should protect our Bible in a bag or box, so that it lasts a long time. If you know of someone who cannot read but wants to hear God's message, then you should consider reading it to them.

It is good to use a pencil to underline the important verses and make a note of other relevant Bible passages. This will help us remember the important points.

### **The content of the Bible**

The Bible is like a library with 2 parts:

- 1) The Old Testament has 39 books.
- 2) The New Testament has 27 books.

About 77% of the Bible is Old Testament and 23% is New Testament.

The Old Testament covers the God's relationship with His people, the Jews. It covers the time from creation to the last book Malachi. It includes the following:

1. The first 5 books of Moses. This contains creation, the origin of God's people and the Law of Moses.
2. History from Joshua (who succeeded Moses) to the end of the Old Testament. This is the time of Judges and Kings. It covers the exile of Israel and the regathering at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.
3. The books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. These are the books of wisdom.
4. The prophets. These contain God's message to Israel at particular times.

The New Testament covers the life of Jesus and his followers. It is how the gospel message went from Jerusalem to all nations. The gospel went from being a faith that was Jewish to one that was for all nations.

The centre of God's plan with mankind is Jesus. Jesus was predicted throughout the Old Testament. As Jesus said,

*"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).*

Unfortunately, many Christians today do not read the Old Testament. There are a number of problems with this:

- 1) They miss out on so much detail about Jesus.
- 2) The Bible used by Jesus was only the Old Testament, as the New Testament had not been written. Jesus based his life and teaching on the Old Testament.
- 3) The New Testament is based on the Old Testament. We cannot fully understand the New Testament unless we understand the Old.
- 4) The teaching of the Old Testament confirms the teaching of the New. We can check that the two are consistent. We can use this to check that our teaching is based on the whole Bible.

### **The Language of the Bible**

The Bible was not written in a modern day language. The Old Testament was written in old Hebrew and some Aramaic. The New Testament was written in old Greek. Since these languages are not understood by most people today, we must rely on translations.



No translation is perfect. Part of this is because all languages express ideas differently. Part is also because the translation may not translate accurately. All translations lose some of the original meaning when they translate.

We need to be careful in our choice of Bible translation. If there is a choice, then we need to choose one that is the most accurate that we are able to read.

In most cases, the translation does not affect our understanding on important points. But where the point is important, we need to check with the original text. This has been done in compiling this course.

There are many teachers who teach different things. Not all teachers can be right. How do we make sure that we learn what is true teaching rather than the opinion of men? The answer is that we need to check with Scripture. In Acts 17:11 we read:

*"Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."*

The people at Berea did not believe the words of even the apostle Paul until they first checked what he said with the Bible. We must do the same. We must check the words of teachers with the Bible. This is why we give many quotations from the Bible to prove what we are saying. It enables readers to check whether what we are saying is true.

### **Reading the Bible**

God expects us to feed on the Bible as if it is our food. Just as we make sure we eat regularly, so we should make sure we feed regularly on the Bible. The Bible is likened to food in Hebrews 5:12-13:

*"In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness."*

The basic truths of God's word are like milk. Those who are new to the Bible are those who feed on milk. As they learn the basic teachings of the Bible, they grow spiritually on this milk.

Once they have grown on the milk, then they are able to learn the solid food of God's word. The solid food is the other teachings. Whether we are on milk or solid food, we need to feed on the Bible. We need to read the Bible, as this is the only way we will grow.

It is difficult to read the Bible as like a story from beginning to end. This is because there are complex parts that need explanation in order to learn from them. For example, the details of the Tabernacle will occur at the end of the second book, Exodus. This is hard to understand and needs explanation. Then at the start of the third book, Leviticus, it speaks about animal sacrifices under the Law of Moses. This is also hard to understand and it too needs explanation. It is recommended that you start reading the Bible with a Bible reading plan for new readers which you can get from your tutor.

The Bible has God's wisdom which we can learn from. If we use it to direct our lives, then we will be blessed in this life and in the future life.

We read this in Proverbs 1:2-6 the benefits of God's word,

*"for gaining wisdom and instruction;  
For understanding words of insight;  
For receiving instruction in prudent behaviour,  
Doing what is right and just and fair;  
For giving prudence to those who are simple,  
Knowledge and discretion to the young-  
Let the wise listen and add to their learning,  
And let the discerning get guidance –  
For understanding proverbs and parables,  
The sayings and riddles of the wise."*

### **Doing what the Bible says**

It is not enough to get a good knowledge of the Bible. This will not save us from death. We must do what it says.

Jesus gave a parable to explain this. This is the parable of the house on the rock and the house on the sand found in Matthew 7:24-27:

*"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."*

Those who read the Bible are like builders who build a house.

We are all builders. The question is where are we going to build our house? If we just learn God's teaching but do not do it, we are like a foolish man whose life will crash around him. If we learn God's teaching and put it into practice, then our life will stand the test and it will save us from death.

### **Content of Lesson 1: The Bible**

- 1 How was the Bible written.
- 2 Who was the real author of the Bible?
- 3 What are the benefits from reading it.
- 4 The importance of reading the Old Testament as well as the New.
- 5 How to make sure we learn God's teaching rather than man's.

### **Revision Questions on Lesson 1: The Bible**

- 1 What can the Bible do for us?
- 2 Where does the Bible come from?
- 3 What is the Bible useful for?
- 4 What are the benefits of reading the Bible?
- 5 Are you able to see or hear a Bible at home?
- 6 Why should we read the Old Testament as well as the New Testament?

- 7 What was the original language that the Bible was written in? How can we read the Bible in our own language?
- 8 How do we know if someone is teaching the right things from the Bible?
- 9 How often should we read the Bible?
- 10 Is it enough to learn the Bible message in order to be saved?

## Lesson 2: Patterns from the Bible

Now we have understood the importance of reading the Bible, we will start to understand it. The Bible is a large book and it is hard to read it all. What we will do is look at the beginning and the ending. This will help us understand the overall story. We will look at one pattern in the Bible and see how it repeats. As we go, we will learn about some of the main events.

### The Beginning

The Bible begins with the words,

*"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the spirit of God was hovering over the waters"* (Genesis 1:1-2).

When God made the earth, it was originally formless, empty and dark. It had water over its surface and there was no land visible. This changed by the end of the first week. Instead of being formless, there was land. Instead of emptiness, there were creatures filling it. Instead of darkness, there was light.

In the first week, God made the environment suitable for life and then He filled it with life. This took 6 days. God rested on the 7<sup>th</sup> day.

We can look at what God has made and we see how well made it is. This is evidence that there is a God. Mankind should think about these things,

*"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse"* (Romans 1:20).

God is invisible. But we can see evidence of Him in the things around us. We can have faith in God because we see what He has made. We can then respond like David did,

*"How many are your works, Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures"* (Psalm 104:24).

### Mankind

Mankind was the last thing that God made,

*"Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God blessed mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them"* (Genesis 1:26-27).

Of all things made by God, only man was made in the image of God.

God made man first and then He made woman from the side of man. The first man was called Adam and the first woman was called Eve.

God gave mankind a special position,

*"God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground. Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has*

*fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground – everything that has the breath of life in it – I give every green plant for food.” And it was so” (Genesis 1:28-30).*

Mankind was to rule over God’s creation. The word ‘rule’ often makes people think of ruling selfishly and harshly. But God never intended rulers to rule like this. Man was to be more like a shepherd, caring for God’s creatures. He was to be more like a gardener, caring for the plants.

God made a garden and put mankind in it. We read,

*“Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:8-9).*

God gave mankind a job to do in this garden. Like all jobs, there were certain conditions,

*“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.” (Genesis 2:15-17).*

God gave man a command not to eat of one tree. All was well for a while, but then it went wrong,

*“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.” (Genesis 3:6).*

Man and woman ate the fruit they had been commanded not to eat of it. They broke the command of God. As a result they were banished from the garden and punished with the sentence of death. Mankind could no longer live with God.

This was the end of the beginning. The story of man and His God had started with great blessings. But man disobeyed his Maker and this created a barrier between them.

### **The end**

We will now go to the end of the Bible and see how it ends. We find some of the features that were there at the beginning. For example, we read of trees and a river,

*“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month” (Revelation 22:1-2).*

These remind us of the trees and river in the Garden of Eden. We also read about features of the creation story, such as light and sea.

But there are also differences:

- Instead of just one couple, there is a whole city of people.

- Instead of disobedience and death, we have a people who obey God and do not die.
- Instead of man living with God based on a condition of obedience, man lives with God permanently without these conditions.

The difference between the beginning and the end is what God has achieved during the Bible. He does achieve His purpose of living with man. He has reversed the problem of disobedience which happened in the Garden of Eden.

The original creation has been replaced by a 'new creation'. This new creation is a better than the old because it has obedient people in it. It is this new creation that God has planned from the beginning. As we read,

*"what counts is the new creation"* (Galatians 6:15).

### **A Repeating Pattern**

Let us now go back to Adam and Eve and see what happened next. In Genesis chapter 4, we learn that they had a family. They had two sons – Cain and Abel. Abel followed God's ways but Cain did not. Cain killed Abel. God punished Cain and he was banished.

Here is the same pattern which we saw with Adam and Eve,

- God gave man a command.
- Man chose to disobey.
- God punished man and banished him.

The family of Adam multiplied and filled the earth. But history repeated itself. The descendants of Adam became violent like Cain. So God punished the world by sending the flood and destroying them.

God started again with Noah and his family by saving them and the animals with a boat. The same problems started to recur after the flood. By Genesis 11, the people had rebelled against God and built the tower of Babel. This was an attempt to break away from God. God punished mankind by giving them different languages so they were no longer united against God. They were banished throughout the world.

We have a repeated pattern throughout the Bible.

- God gave mankind His commands to see if they would keep them.
- Man chose not to.
- God punished man and banished him.

It is a sad story. But God did not make mankind so He could punish them. He wanted to bless them. We learn this with the life of a man called Abraham.

### **Abraham**

From Genesis 12, the Bible concentrates on one man and his family - Abraham (formerly called Abram),

*"The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you""* (Genesis 12:1-3).

God wanted to bless mankind through Abraham and his family.

The family of Abraham continued through his son Isaac and grandson Jacob. Jacob's name was changed to 'Israel' and his family were called Israelites. The Israelites went down to live in Egypt to avoid famine. After many years they were made slaves.

God saved the Israelites by a man called Moses. God said to the Israelites through Moses,

*"You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:4-6).*

Israel was to be God's special nation in God's special land. God wanted them to obey His commands, and if they did so, God would bless them.

Unfortunately, the Israelites generally did not follow God's commands. The pattern of disobedience and punishment continued. God sent prophets to get them to warn them of punishment so that they changed their ways. This was ultimately unsuccessful. Israel was banished from God's land. They were taken away by the Assyrians and the Babylonians.

## **Jesus**

This brings us to the time of Jesus. When Jesus came, he taught the people of Israel about future blessings of God. God still wanted to bless His people. The time of this blessing was the 'kingdom of God.' Jesus taught this,

*"Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:14-15).*

Jesus tried to get the people of Israel to keep the commands of God, but they did not listen. They killed Jesus. Within a generation, God punished and banished from the land again. This time they were banished by the Romans. The pattern of disobedience had continued. It looked like nothing had changed with Jesus.

But it had changed.

Unlike all other men, Jesus fully obeyed God's commands. He never once disobeyed. His obedience led to blessing.

- Jesus did die. But God raised him from the dead and gave him eternal life.
- Jesus was not banished from God but went to live with Him in heaven.

Jesus was the only one who was fit to rule over creation. The pattern of testing, disobedience and punishment had come to an end with Jesus.

What is surprising and wonderful is that the benefits of this are not only for Jesus. All those who come to Jesus can benefit from his life and death! We read,

*"For just as through the disobedience of the one man (Adam) the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of one man (Jesus) the many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:19).*

*"For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22).*

Christians will die. But any disobedience can be forgiven if they come to Jesus and follow him.

This means that,

- True Christians too will be raised from the dead and given eternal life.
- True Christians will be gathered to be with Jesus - not banished.
- True Christians will be brought to God's land and blessed through the work of Jesus. They are the ones to rule over creation.

God has a plan that has broken the pattern of disobedience by man. It is a plan of saving - not punishing. It all depends on Jesus. It is wonderful.

### **Summary of Lesson 2**

- 1 God created the world and life in the beginning.
- 2 God tests people to see whether they will obey Him.
- 3 People generally disobey God's commands.
- 4 God uses special people to bring about His desire to bless His people.
- 5 God will achieve His purpose and make everything new and right in the end.

### **Revision Questions on Lesson 2: Patterns in the Bible**

- 1 Where did life come from?
- 2 How was man made?
- 3 How was man tested to see if he would obey God.
- 4 What was the punishment of man for his sin?
- 5 Were Adam and Eve the only people to disobey God?
- 6 Who did God choose to give His promises to?
- 7 Who became God's chosen people?
- 8 Did Israel obey God's commands or rebel?
- 9 How can Israel and God's people be saved from their sins?
- 10 What is the great pattern of the Bible?



## **Lesson 3: God's Plan**

### **The problem with man's world**

God had a plan from the beginning to correct the problem of man's disobedience. We started to learn about this in lesson 2.

God also has a plan to correct the problems of our world today. In this lesson, we learn about God's plan to improve the world.

There are many problems with man's world. Most of them are to do with man himself.

These are the problems of corruption, immorality, violence, theft, murder, war, oppression, etc. Jesus described the problems of man like this,

*"For out of the heart come evil thoughts – murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matthew 15:19).*

These problems are all found inside of man. As James says,

*"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" (James 4:1).*

The real problems with our world is with the way man thinks and acts.

Man cannot solve this problem. He needs help from God. God's plan is to save man from himself!

### **A New Age**

God's plan is to bring about a new age where the problems of man have been solved. This new age is called the 'Kingdom of God.'

Jesus will be king of this kingdom. We learn this from the angel who appeared to the future mother of Jesus,

*"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:32-33).*

Jesus is to be a king. Jesus is the perfect man to be king. He was obedient, selfless, incorruptible, loving, gracious, and just. His rule will be like no existing human rulership.

This kingdom will be centred around Jerusalem, which was where the throne of David was. We read,

*"At that time they will call Jerusalem 'The Throne of the Lord', and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honour the name of the Lord. No longer will they follow the stubbornness of their evil hearts" (Jeremiah 3:17).*

Jesus is not just to be over the Jews. He is to rule over all nations. We read,

*"May all kings bow down to him and all nations serve him" (Psalm 72:11).*

Jesus will be over the nations and will judge them,

*"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the*

*King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world' (Matthew 25:31-34).*

Those who are judged as faithful believers will enter the kingdom of God. They will live in a time of great blessing.

### **The Millenium**

Jesus will be helped in his rulership over the nations. The faithful believers will join him in ruling in the kingdom of God. We read about them,

*"They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years" (Revelation 20:4).*

This 1000 years period is called the 'Millenium.' During this period, the problems of man will be removed. Jesus will ensure that all enemies of God are 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 15:25-26).*

The last enemy to be destroyed is death. This means that even death itself will be removed! If death is destroyed, it means that people can live for ever.

At the end of the Millenium, Jesus will hand the kingdom over to God,

*"When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28).*

Here is a summary of God's plan, which will put right the problems of world:

- Jesus will become king of the world.
- Jesus will judge the world and reward faithful believers.
- Jesus and faithful will rule for 1000 years. This rule will be a new age where the problems of the world are solved.
- At the end, Jesus will hand over the kingdom to God.

### **A Summary of God's Plan**

Now let us put this information with what we learnt in the last two lessons.

- 1) God has a plan to bring the kingdom of God. This will make the world a much better place to live in. It will happen when He sends Jesus.
- 2) God will save faithful believers from death through Jesus. God will forgive them of their sins through Jesus.

This is God's plan of saving. He will save faithful believers and He will save the world.

The Bible is about God's plan of saving mankind. We read,

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

*"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him" (1 John 4:9).*

God gave this plan because man was not able to save himself. God did this because of His love.

God has a plan to save us. We should trust God to do this. Whatever happens in our lives, we should trust in God because He knows what He is doing. As God tells us,

*"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all you ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight"*  
(Proverbs 3:5-6).

### **Summary Content of Lesson 3: God's Plan**

- 1 The world's problems are caused by man's evil.
- 2 God's solution is to send Jesus to set up the kingdom of God.
- 3 The problem of man's evil and sin will be solved through Jesus.
- 4 There will be a 1000 year period when Jesus rules.
- 5 At the end, Jesus will hand over the kingdom to God.

### **Revision Questions on Lesson 3: God's Plan**

- 1 What things are wrong with the world?
- 2 What is God's answer to these problems?
- 3 Why is Jesus a good choice of future king?
- 4 Where will be the centre of this future world?
- 5 What will God do to death?
- 6 Will God judge who is righteous and who is wicked?
- 7 How long will the first part of the Kingdom last?
- 8 What happens at the end of this time?
- 9 Do you want to live for ever in God's new world?
- 10 How is the end of the Bible like the beginning of the Bible?

## **Lesson 4: Are you ready for the Kingdom of God?**

### ***Part 1 – The original Gospel Message***

Lesson 3 introduced us God's plan to bring about the Kingdom of God. Here we look at the kingdom of God in more detail.

The coming of the kingdom of God was the original gospel message! It was taught by John the Baptist,

*"In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near'"* (Matthew 3:1-2).

Jesus taught the same,

*"Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and illness among the people"* (Matthew 4:23).

The message of John and Jesus was that the kingdom of God was coming. It was good news for the people. The people needed to be ready for it.

Jesus told his 12 disciples to teach the same message,

*"As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near'"* (Matthew 10:7).

When Jesus rose from the dead, he gave this as his final message,

*"After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about the kingdom of God"* (Acts 1:3).

The teaching of the kingdom of God is important to those who follow Jesus. The kingdom was the message of Jesus. He taught that the kingdom of God is coming and this requires a response from the people. The question for us all is, "Are you ready for the kingdom of God?"

Before we answer this question, we will learn more about the kingdom.

### **Today's World**

Our world has big problems. We looked at some of these in the last lesson. Now consider the following list:

- Extreme poverty
- Crime
- Famine and changing weather patterns
- Disease and disability
- Injustice
- War
- Oppression
- Ignorance

No man can solve these problems. They can help reduce them, but they cannot remove them.

God has a solution for all these problems. The solution is the kingdom of God. This is why it is good news for people.

God tells us what the kingdom will be like in the Bible and especially in the Old Testament.

### **Pictures of the Kingdom of God**

The Bible gives us pictures of what the kingdom of God will be like.

1. Isaiah 2:2-4

*"In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.' The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more".*

This teaches:

- There will be a temple in Jerusalem.
- People from all nations will visit this temple.
- God's word and law will be given from this temple.
- He will judge between the nations and solve disputes.
- The result will be peace among the nations. There will be no war, no armies and no weapons. They will not learn how to fight.

2. Isaiah 11:3-9

*"He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash round his waist. The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. They will not harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea".*

This teaches:

- There will be true justice, especially for the poor.
- The wicked will be punished.
- It will be a time of righteousness and faithfulness.

- There will be peace even among the animals.
- The earth will be full of the knowledge of God.

3. Isaiah 35:5-10

*"Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow. And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness; it will be for those who walk on that Way. The unclean will not journey on it; wicked fools will not go about on it. No lion will be there, nor any ravenous beast; they will not be found there. Only the redeemed of the Lord will walk there and those the Lord has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away".*

This teaches:

- There will be healing for the sick and disabled.
- The deserts will have water.
- There is a road for the holy people to travel to Zion (Jerusalem).
- The unclean and wicked will not go to Jerusalem.
- At Jerusalem there will be joy and happiness and singing.
- There will be no more sorrow for the righteous.

4. Isaiah 65:17-25

*"See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice for ever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice for ever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child; the one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands. They will not labour in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the Lord, they and their descendants with them. Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain. Says the Lord".*

This teaches:

- There will be a new heaven and a new earth.
- The sadness of the old heaven and earth will not be remembered.
- There will be joy based around Jerusalem.
- The people will be blessed with long life and own their own houses and land.
- God will answer their prayers before they are asked.
- There will be peace among the animals.
- There will be no destruction on God's holy mountain (ie Jerusalem).

The fact that there will be a new heaven and new earth does not mean that the current physical heaven and earth will be replaced. What it does mean that the order of human rulership (the heavens) and people ruled (the earth) will be replaced. The fact that people are called 'heaven and earth' in the Bible is found in Deuteronomy 32:1 and Isaiah 1:2. The heaven and earth were replaced previously at the time of Noah when *"the world of that time was deluged and destroyed"* (2 Pet 3:6). The world itself was not destroyed, but the people on it were.

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

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

The kingdom of God is the answer to our own personal problems and to the problems of the world. If we sometimes despair over the world today, then cheer up, because God has a solution for the problems. If you despair over the difficulties of your own life, then cheer up, because God has a solution to your own personal problems. This is why the Kingdom of God is 'good news'. It is good news for us and good news for the world.

The picture we have of the kingdom is the first part of the kingdom. This is the first thousand years which we know as the Millenium.

### **Then the Kingdom of God gets even better**

*"Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that to be destroyed is death. For he 'has put everything under his feet'. Now when it says that 'everything' has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all" (1 Cor 15:24-28).*

This takes us to the final stage of God's kingdom. In the final stage, all the problems of the world have been solved. Death is no more. The wicked are no more. This second stage is described in Revelation:

*"Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth', for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling-place is now among the people, and God himself will be with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death" or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away"* Revelation 21:1-4.

This teaches:

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

In the end, Jesus will have removed all sin and death from the earth. This means that God and man can live together at last.

What a wonderful hope! That is what the good news of the kingdom of God is.

We started with the question, Are you ready for the kingdom of God? Now we understand what the kingdom of God is, we will learn what it means to be ready in the next lesson.

#### **Summary Content of Lesson 4: Are you ready for the Kingdom of God?**

- 1 The gospel message was the good news of the kingdom of God.
- 2 The kingdom of God is the answer to all of man's problems.
- 3 The message of the kingdom was from the Old Testament.
- 4 The kingdom of God has two stages.
- 5 At the end death is removed and there will be no more suffering.

#### **Revision Questions on Lesson 4: Are you ready for the Kingdom of God?**

- 1 What was the original gospel message of the New Testament?
- 2 What are the big problems that no politician or nations can solve?
- 3 Why is the kingdom of God better than the kingdoms of men?



- 4 How will peace achieved?
- 5 How will people know how to behave?
- 6 What does it mean when it says that the kingdom will be a time of justice?
- 7 What happens to the blind, deaf and lame in the Kingdom?
- 8 What will happen to the environment in the kingdom?
- 9 How can man live with God in this age?
- 10 Is the kingdom the answer to your problems?

## Lesson 5: Are you ready for the Kingdom of God?

### Part 2 – Repentance and Baptism

#### Repentance

There is no automatic entrance into the kingdom of God. Everyone is invited to prepare for this time in order to be ready for the kingdom.

John the Baptist taught the people that they must repent before the kingdom comes,

*"In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near'"* (Matthew 3:1-2).

Jesus confirmed the need for repentance,

*"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near"* (Matthew 4:17).

Repentance means to change of one's mind and to change one's ways. Put simply, repentance means to change. If one is doing evil, then repentance means to stop doing evil.

True repentance is always demonstrated by a change in behaviour.

When the Pharisees and Sadducees came to John the Baptist, John told them,

*"Produce fruit in keeping with repentance"* (Matthew 3:7-8).

The fruit that John was referring to was the deeds of the Pharisees and Sadducees. John was concerned that they would not change and so would not truly repent.

We all need to prove our repentance by showing that our behaviour has changed. As the apostle Paul said,

*"I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds"* (Acts 26:20).

True repentance comes with a blessing. If one really turns from the old ways and follows Christ, then God is willing to forgive us of **all our past mistakes and acts of disobedience**. No matter how bad, we can find forgiveness.

This is demonstrated by the forgiveness of prostitutes and tax collectors, some of whom became Jesus' closest disciples. This is such a wonderful and merciful offer that we would be foolish not to accept. However, if we do not change our ways and stop disobeying God, then God will not forgive us.

For those who do repent and turn from evil, there is joy in heaven, even if there is just one sinner who repents,

*"I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent"* (Luke 15:7).

God wants all people to come to repentance,

*"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance"* (2 Peter 3:9).

We cannot enter the kingdom of God as someone who disobeys God. The Kingdom of God is not a place where disobedience is welcome. It is not a place where evil can exist in fellowship with God. Jesus said,

*"The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil" (Matthew 13:41).*

Sinners must stop sinning if they are to be in the kingdom of God. We must all stop our evil ways if we are to enter the Kingdom.

The kingdom of God will be a place where evil doers and sinners have been removed. This is one reason why the kingdom will be such a good place.

## **Baptism**

In order to show our repentance, Jesus requires us to be baptized. Baptism is a demonstration that we have changed from our old ways and now follow the ways of God. Both John the Baptist and Jesus taught their disciples to be baptized.

Peter told the people at Pentecost, after speaking about the promise of the kingdom,

*"Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38).*

All of us are required to be baptized to show our repentance and to wash away our sins. Sin is the breaking of the commands of God.

Baptism is not an option. We will not have our sins forgiven if we do not get baptized.

We cannot enter the kingdom of God unless we are baptised. Jesus said,

*"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. 'How can someone be born when they are old?' Nicodemus asked; 'surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!' I tell you the truth, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the spirit" (John 3:3,5).*

When it speaks of being born of water, it refers to baptism in water. Baptism is a symbolic rebirth in water. We must no longer remain a child of the world, but we must be born as a child of God. If we are not baptized, then we are not reborn as a child of God.

Baptism occurs after someone is taught about the kingdom and Jesus Christ,

*"when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12).*

The apostle Paul also taught these things,

*"He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 28:31).*

Believers must believe in the message of the kingdom of God and about Jesus Christ.

In the examples of baptism, there was the teaching first. Then, when the message was believed, there was baptism. Baptism was a response to the teaching.

A good example of this is the response of the Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-39).

Baptism takes place where there is a lot of water because baptism requires full immersion in water (Acts 8:36, John 3:23).

In the description of the baptism of the Ethiopian, we are told that they went down into the water (Acts 8:38) and then came up out of the water (Acts 8:39). This indicates that the whole body was covered with water.

Full immersion in water is required because baptism is a washing away of sins,

*"this water symbolises baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God" (1 Peter 3:21).*

One does not wash a body by only washing part of it. The whole body must be washed in order to make it clean.

Baptism symbolizes the death and resurrection of Jesus,

*"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Romans 6:3-4).*

When one goes into the water, one acts out the death of Jesus. And when one comes up out of the water, one acts out the resurrection of Jesus. Full immersion in water is required in order to symbolize the death and resurrection of Jesus. One does not partly bury a body at death – it needs to be fully covered.

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

It is important that we believe the right things before baptism. In Acts 19:1-7 we read of 12 men who had to be re-baptised because they had the insufficient knowledge about Jesus.

It is important that we respond to the message of the Kingdom of God and Jesus Christ in the right way.

- 1) We need the correct understanding and to believe it,
- 2) We need to repent and change our ways,
- 3) We need to be baptized,
- 4) We must live our life in the way Jesus lived his.

### **Summary Content of Lesson 5: Repentance and Baptism**

- 1 People need to repent before the Kingdom of God comes.
- 2 Repentance means changing our minds and behaviour.
- 3 People also need to be baptised.
- 4 Baptism is a full covering in water after learning God's message.
- 5 Repentance and baptism can remove all past sins.

## **Revision Questions on Lesson 5: Repentance and Baptism**

- 1 What did John and Jesus teach people to do before the kingdom of God comes?
- 2 What does repentance mean?
- 3 How do people show they are truly repentant?
- 4 What is God willing to do if we truly repent?
- 5 What must we do after we repent?
- 6 Is baptism optional? That is, do we have to get baptised?
- 7 What must we do before we are baptised?
- 8 Is christening Bible baptism?
- 9 Why is baptism a full immersion in water?
- 10 What does baptism particularly represent?

## **Lesson 6: Are you ready for the Kingdom of God?**

### ***Part 3 – The Teaching of the Kingdom in the New Testament***

#### **The Parables of the Kingdom**

We will now look at what the New Testament taught about the kingdom. When the disciples asked Jesus why he spoke in parables, Jesus said,

*"Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them"* (Matthew 13:11).

The parables of Jesus taught about the kingdom.

Parables are stories which teach a message. In order to understand the message, one needs to understand the story. Not everyone would understand the story. Some would understand and some would not. As Jesus explained, the message of the kingdom was not for everyone. Only for those who sought to understand the message who would find it.

The key parable was the parable of the Sower. In the parable, a sower sowed seed on different soils. The parable itself was about anyone who *"hears the message about the kingdom"* (Matthew 13:19). The seed that was sowed represented the message of the kingdom. The different soils represented the different responses to the message by the hearers.

The parable of the sower taught that not everyone would receive the kingdom message in the way God wanted. Only those who received the message, persevered and produced fruit (godly works) would be accepted into the kingdom.

On the other hand, there were those who did not believe (the seed on the path), those who believed but fell away because of persecution and trouble (the seed among rocks) and those who believed but fell away due to worries and wealth (the seed among thorns). The parable raises questions for all hearers:

- 1) Do you believe the kingdom message?
- 2) Do you persevere in your faith through troubles and the dangers of wealth?
- 3) Do you produce fruit (godly works)?

The parable is a challenge to all who hear it. What type of reaction do we have?

The parables of Matthew are taken as an example of the parables of Jesus. The main messages are given below:

- The parable of wheat and tares (Matthew 13:26-30, 36-43). There are good and bad believers living together. They will be separated at the judgement, when the bad will be destroyed and the good will enter the kingdom.
- The parable of mustard seed and yeast (Matthew 13:31-35). The kingdom starts small but then grows to fill the whole world.
- The parable of the hidden treasure and fine pearls (Matthew 13:44-45). The kingdom is so valuable that it is worth selling all we have in order to gain the kingdom.
- The parable of the net (Matthew 13:47-52). There will be a separation of good and bad people at the judgement.

- The parable of the unforgiving debtor (Matthew 18:21-35). We must forgive each other if we want God to forgive us.
- The parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-14). God is calling people to the gospel at different times. When the day of reward comes, they will receive the same reward.
- The parable of the wedding banquet (Matthew 22:1-14). Many people are offered an invitation to God's kingdom, but many people will refuse it.
- The parable of the 10 virgins (Matthew 25:1-13). Not everyone will be ready for the coming of Jesus. Those who are not ready will be excluded from the kingdom.
- The parable of the 10 talents (Matthew 25:14-30). Lazy believers will not enter the kingdom of God.
- The parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46). Only believers who are active in their faith will enter the kingdom. In the parable we have the examples of those who have fed the hungry, clothed the naked and visited those sick or in prison.

These parables describe how many are called to the gospel message but few respond in the way God wants. Only those who believe the message and live in the way God wants will be welcomed into the kingdom.

There are only two categories at the judgement day – acceptance or rejection. There will be no class of 'not decided yet'. We must all make sure we hear the message, believe it and live it. The kingdom is so great that it is worth us giving everything in order to gain it. If we do so, then we will be welcomed into the kingdom.

### **The Teaching of the Kingdom**

The greatest teaching of the kingdom comes in what is known as the 'Sermon on the Mount' in Matthew chapters 5 to 7. The teaching begins with saying that the kingdom is made for:

1. those who are 'poor in spirit' (Matthew 5:3). This means that those who are humble (see Isaiah 57:15, 66:2).
2. Those who are meek (Matthew 5:5).
3. Those who suffer and are insulted for doing what is right (Matthew 5:10,12).

The kingdom is not for the rich, comfortable and popular (Luke 6:24-26).

Jesus taught his disciples to pray for the kingdom,

*"Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"* (Matthew 6:10).

The kingdom was something that the disciples should be looking forward to and praying that it would come. Whenever the Lord's prayer is recited, it is an appeal to God for the kingdom to come.

The prime object of the disciple of Jesus is that they would seek to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus told them,

*"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well"* (Matthew 6:33).

The most important thing in the life of the believer is for them to seek the kingdom of God and the righteousness that comes from God. The words "his righteousness" means following God's teaching of what is right and wrong. In order to do this, we need to know the commands of God.

If we seek the kingdom, and do what is right, then God will bless us with the things we need in this life (Matthew 6:31-32). If we do not seek the kingdom first, we show that it is not the most important thing in our life. Wherever we are in our life, whatever stage we are in, we must seek FIRST the kingdom. Everything else is not as important.

Jesus puts this teaching a different way;

*"And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell"*  
(Matthew 9:47).

Obtaining the kingdom should be such a priority that it is even worth losing bodily wholeness. The reference to the word "hell" is the Greek word 'gehenna' meaning "Valley of Hinnon". This is a place outside Jerusalem where they used to discard the rubbish. We need to do all we can to get to the kingdom, otherwise we will be discarded with the rubbish.

The importance of the kingdom is put in another way by Jesus,

*"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys"* (Luke 12:33).

Obtaining the kingdom is worth more than the possessions we have in this life. It is worth more than money. Like the teaching of the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl, we should do our all to obtain the kingdom. If we do this, God will take pleasure in giving us a place in His kingdom.

### **Teaching of the Kingdom in the New Testament Letters**

The letters of the apostles pick up the teaching about the kingdom. In particular, they highlight the fact that evil doers will not be in the kingdom,

*"Do you not know that the wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men, nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God"* (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

*"The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God"* (Galatians 5:19-21).

*"But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person – such a man is an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God"* (Ephesians 5:3-5).



All these verses are consistent and clear. We know what is wrong and we should not do it. These things will exclude us from being in God's kingdom. God does not want His kingdom compromised by evil doers.

We must live as holy people if we are to be members of God's holy kingdom. We must make the kingdom the priority in our lives. We must give it our all.

### **Summary Content of Lesson 6: The teaching of the Kingdom of God in the New Testament**

- 1 Jesus taught about the Kingdom of God in his parables.
- 2 The parables teach that not everyone will be in the Kingdom of God.
- 3 Only those who accept the message and obey it will be in the kingdom.
- 4 Obtaining the kingdom should be the priority of our lives.
- 5 Those who do evil will not be in the kingdom.

### **Revision Questions on Lesson 6: The teaching of the Kingdom of God in the New Testament**

- 1 How did Jesus teach about the kingdom?
- 2 What is a key parable?
- 3 What does the parable of the sower teach us?
- 4 Give some other lessons that come from other parables?
- 5 Will everyone accept the gospel of the kingdom?
- 6 What priority should we make seeking the kingdom?
- 7 Is the kingdom of God more important than getting wealth?
- 8 Will the wicked be in the kingdom of God?
- 9 What examples of behaviour will stop us inheriting the kingdom of God?
- 10 Should we pray for the kingdom to come?

## **Lesson 7: Are you ready for the Kingdom of God?**

### ***Part 4 – Different responses to the kingdom message***

There were many different responses to the message of the kingdom at the time of Jesus. In general terms, the generation of Jesus' day did not believe the message. This is what is taught in Matthew,

*"To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: "We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn" (Matthew 11:16-17).*

Jesus had played and sung but the listeners had not responded. Jesus highlighted the towns of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum for special criticism. Jesus had performed many miracles there and yet they still did not believe (Matthew 11:21-23).

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law did not respond well. They claimed that the miracles Jesus did were the work of an evil god called Beelzebul rather than God Himself (Matthew 12:24). Not only did they not believe, but they responded in the worst possible way - they plotted to kill Jesus (Matthew 12:14). Towards the end of his ministry, Jesus said to them,

*"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to" (Matthew 23:13-14).*

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees and their followers will not be in the kingdom.

The chief priests and elders of the people did not respond well. Jesus said to them,

*"Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him" (Matthew 21:31-32).*

The chief priests and the elders will not be in the kingdom,

*"I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit" (Matthew 21:43).*

The kingdom will be given to those who produce the fruits of repentance. In other words, it will be given to repentant sinners who have truly changed from their ways of sin and produce spiritual fruit.

Surprisingly, it was the 'sinners' who did respond well to the message of the kingdom. It was the tax collectors like Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-9) and Levi (Luke 5:27-31). It was the prostitutes like the one who visited when Jesus was at the home of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50). It was like the Gentile centurion, to whom Jesus said,

*"I say to you that many will come from the east and west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 8:11-12).*

There is room in God's kingdom for repentant sinners from all around the world.

## Dangerous Views

God's people, the Jews, thought that they would be in God's kingdom because they were the children of Abraham and therefore heirs of the promises to him. However, Jesus makes it clear that this assumption was wrong,

*"There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from the east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God"* (Luke 13:28-29).

Jews will not get into the kingdom because of their descent from Abraham. In order to enter the kingdom with Abraham, they must show the faith and works of Abraham (John 8:39-40).

Even among those who respond positively to the kingdom message, there are dangers. A rich young man believed the message but had a problem with riches. His great wealth was a barrier to him. He was not prepared to give them up and follow Jesus. Jesus highlighted the problem of riches to his disciples,

*"Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God"* (Matthew 19:23-24).

Riches can take believers away from God. On the other hand, the poor will be in the kingdom. James tells us,

*"Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?"* (James 2:5).

Believers must also be on guard against the danger of pride. When the disciples argued over who would be the greatest in the kingdom, Jesus respond with the following lesson,

*"He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 18:2-4).

The proud will not be in the kingdom of God. They must change and become little in their own eyes if they are to enter the kingdom. The kingdom was made for the 'little children' of God.

Believers must be aware of the danger of putting their own family before the kingdom of God. Jesus says,

*"Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me"* (Matthew 10:37).

If our father or mother says we must not believe in the kingdom message, then we must not listen to them. If our husband or wife or brother or sister says we must not believe in the kingdom message, we must not listen to them. If our whole family is against us believing in the kingdom, we must not listen to them. Those who put the kingdom first, despite family pressure against it, will be blessed,

*"everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life" (Matthew 19:29).*

## **Overall Response**

Overall the response of the people to the kingdom message was not as expected. Those who should know better did not respond well. These people were those who were educated on Bible teaching – the Pharisees, teachers of the law, Sadducees, scribes, chief priests and elders. They did not believe. These groups were the rich, the comfortable and the popular that were mentioned in Luke 6:24-26 as not being in the kingdom. We must not be like them,

*"For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20).*

Even a teacher of the kingdom is not guaranteed a place in the kingdom. As Jesus said,

*"Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?" Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" (Matthew 7:21-23).*

Knowledge of the kingdom is not enough to get us into the kingdom. Performing miracles in the name of Jesus does not guarantee a place. Teachers are known by what they do - their fruits – rather than by what they teach (Matthew 7:15-20). Teachers must produce spiritual fruits as well as teach.

There were exceptions among the educated people who did receive the message of the kingdom - Nicodemus (John 19:39) and Joseph of Arimathea who was *"waiting for the kingdom of God"* (Luke 23:51). The fact that we only know of these two, out of all the educated and spiritual elite, should serve as a warning. Not many of the world's spiritual leadership will be in the kingdom (Matthew 11:25, 1 Corinthians 1:36).

It was the sinners who rejoiced at the message of the kingdom. They were not happy with their own lives. The kingdom offered them hope of a better life and a fresh start. These sinners repented and changed. There are two great examples of this.

Firstly, the thief on the cross. Although a thief, he accepted that he deserved to die. On the cross, he changed and showed such great faith that he is a lesson to us. As he saw Jesus dying, he declared his belief in the kingdom,

*"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Luke 23:42).*

For him to believe that Jesus would be king, he had to believe that the dying Jesus would be resurrected. He believed that Jesus would come as the king of God's kingdom.

The question that the thief had asked Jesus was for Jesus to remember him when Jesus came to set up the kingdom. Jesus's reply was that the thief did not have to wait until the kingdom to find out. Jesus told him there and then that the thief would be with him in the kingdom. He said, *"Truly I tell you today you will be with me in paradise"* (Luke 23:43). The thief will be in the kingdom of God.

The second example is the apostle Paul. Previously he had persecuted the believers and helped put them to death (Acts 26:9-11). He later repented after he had a revelation of Jesus on the road to Damascus. When he looked back on the sins of his previous life (1 Timothy 1:13), he told us that if God can be merciful to him, then God can be merciful to us; *"Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst"* (1 Timothy 1 :15).

It is important that we accept the message of the Kingdom of God in the right way. As Jesus said, *"For many are invited, but few are chosen"* (Matthew 22:14).

### **Summary Content of Lesson 7: The Different Responses to the Kingdom message**

- 1 There were many different responses to the message of the Kingdom of God.
- 2 Most people did not accept the message.
- 3 The rich, educated and leaders did not accept the message.
- 4 The poor and the sinners did accept the message.
- 5 Many are invited but few are chosen.

### **Revision Questions on Lesson 7: The Different Responses to the Kingdom message**

- 1 Did the people believe the message of Jesus?
- 2 Which type of people did not believe?
- 3 Give examples of people who did believe the message.
- 4 Who will join Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God?
- 5 What things are dangerous to a person's faith?
- 6 If our family tells us not to believe in the gospel, should we do what they tell us?
- 7 Will teachers of the kingdom be in the kingdom?
- 8 Did any educated and rich people believe in Jesus?
- 9 Name two people who are examples to us that sinners can be forgiven.
- 10 What warning should we take from the responses of people to Jesus?

## **Lesson 8: Are you ready for the Kingdom of God?**

### **Part 5 – Where will the Kingdom of God be?**

#### **Where will the Kingdom of God be?**

In Lesson 3 we learnt that Jesus was to sit on the throne of David. The throne of David was in Jerusalem. This means that the throne of Jesus will also be in Jerusalem. This kingdom be on earth.

Before David, God made a promise to Abraham, which also teaches that the kingdom will be on earth. The promise God made to Abraham included the promise of land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants,

*"The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, 'Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. All the land that you see I will give it to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that is anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you'" (Genesis 13:14-17).*

Although Abraham was promised this land, he never received it. The Book of Hebrews makes it clear that Abraham did not receive the promise. After speaking about Abraham it says,

*"All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth" (Hebrews 11:13).*

Abraham has not received the land promised to him yet. We are told that Abraham will be in the kingdom of God (Luke 13:28-29). Abraham will receive the promised land in the kingdom of God. This means that the kingdom is on earth.

The fact that the kingdom of God will be on earth is famously taught by the Lord's prayer, it says,

*"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9-10).*

The kingdom will come to the earth and God's will is done on earth. The kingdom will be on earth.

The teaching of the return of Jesus to the earth means that Jesus is coming to the earth rather than remaining in heaven. As the angels told the disciples;

*"This same Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way as you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).*

Jesus is coming from heaven back to the earth to set up the kingdom.

#### **Other Passages which teach that the kingdom will be on earth.**

Here are a number of other passages which teach that the kingdom of God will be on earth. Some of these teach that the kingdom of God will replace the kingdoms of man on earth.

*"You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth" (Revelation 5:10).*

*"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever"* (Revelation 11:15).

*"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth"* (Matthew 5:5).

*"Those the Lord blesses will inherit the land, but those he curses will be destroyed"* (Psalm 37:22).

*"The highest heaven belong to the Lord, but the earth he has given to mankind"* (Psalm 115:16).

*"In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure for ever"* (Daniel 2:44).

*"Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him"* (Daniel 7:27).

The earth has always been part of God's plan for the people of God. It was *"formed it to be inhabited"* (Isaiah 45:18). His ultimate plan with the earth is spoken of by the prophets,

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

The earth has not yet been filled with the knowledge of God, but it will do when the kingdom has been fully established.

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

There are some passages that have confused people about the location of the kingdom of God. This has resulted in many people believing that the kingdom of God will be in heaven. These misunderstandings are discussed below.

1. The kingdom of God is called the 'kingdom of heaven' in the gospel of Matthew. We note that the kingdom is never called the 'kingdom **in** heaven'. It is the kingdom '**of** heaven - that is, the kingdom '**from**' heaven.

It is called the kingdom 'of heaven' because it is 'of God'. This is how the language is used in Matthew's gospel when speaking about the baptism of John,

*"John's baptism - where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?"* (Matthew 21:25).

It was from God and not from man so it was called 'heavenly' rather than 'earthly'. The 'kingdom of heaven' is from God and not from man.

The kingdom of God is not like man's kingdoms. It is fundamentally different. It is a kingdom designed by God. This is what is meant when the faithful people; *"were longing for a better country - a heavenly one"* (Hebrews 11:16). They were looking forward to a godly kingdom rather than a worldly kingdom.

2. John 14:2 is said to teach us that Jesus is preparing a place for us in heaven, *"My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?"* (John 14:2).

However, the next verse explains this verse,

*"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:3).*

Jesus is preparing a place for us but is coming back in order to be with us. He will be with us when he comes back to the earth. The reward is being prepared in heaven (Matthew 5:12) but will be given when Christ comes to set up the kingdom on earth,

*"For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done" (Matthew 16:27).*

3. The prophet Enoch is supposed to have gone to heaven without dying. We read,

*"By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: He could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God" (Hebrews 11:5).*

However, we are told that Enoch died. In a verse which refers to all the people in the chapter before it, including Enoch, it says,

*"All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised" (Hebrews 11:13).*

Enoch died and has not yet received the blessings of the righteous. It is a Bible teaching that man dies because of sin and so all men die (1 Corinthians 15:22).

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

4. The prophet Elijah is supposed to have gone to heaven without dying. The description of Elijah going to heaven is given in 2 Kings 2:11,

*"As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind".*

Elijah went to heaven. However, heaven can mean the heaven of the birds (Genesis 1:20), the heaven of the stars (Genesis 1:15:16) or the heaven where God lives.

We can work out that Elijah went to the heaven of the birds. God often took Elijah from one place to another through the air, as Obadiah says,

*"I don't know where the Spirit of the Lord may carry you when I leave. If I go and tell Ahab and he doesn't find you, he will kill me" (1 Kings 18:12).*

After the events Elijah was found alive and wrote a letter to Jehoram (2 Chronicles 21:12). God had picked him up from one place with the chariot of fire and taken him to another place.

Elijah is included in the reference to "prophets" mentioned in Hebrews 11:32. These died without receiving the promises (Hebrews 11:39).



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

5. It is said that the thief on the cross went to heaven when he died. But this is not the case. Jesus said that the thief would be with Jesus in paradise (Luke 23:43). Jesus went to the tomb that day and so the thief did not go to paradise. The thief died on the cross and awaits the return of Jesus to set up the kingdom.

We are told that no one has gone to heaven except Jesus,

*"No one has ever gone to heaven except the one who came heaven – the Son of Man" (John 3:13).*

This confirms that Enoch, Elijah and the thief did not go to heaven. And we are told specifically that David did not go to heaven,

*"For David did not ascend to heaven" (Acts 2:34).*

### **Summary Content of Lesson 8: Where will the Kingdom of God be?**

- 1 The kingdom of God will be set up when Jesus returns to the earth.
- 2 We do not know when the kingdom of God will come.
- 3 We must be ready all the time.
- 4 God has invited us to be in His kingdom.
- 5 We must respond and be ready for the kingdom of God.

### **Revision Questions on Lesson 8: Where will the Kingdom of God be?**

- 1 When will the kingdom of God come?
- 2 What will happen before the kingdom of God comes?
- 3 Since we do not know when the kingdom of God will come, what should we do?
- 4 What parable teaches us that we should be ready all the time?
- 5 What will happen to people who are not ready for the kingdom of God?
- 6 Who is invited to come into the kingdom of God?
- 7 What parable teaches us that all are invited to the kingdom of God?
- 8 What must we do to be ready for the kingdom of God?
- 9 Can anything stop the kingdom of God coming?
- 10 Are you ready for the kingdom of God?

## **Lesson 9: Are you ready for the Kingdom of God?**

### ***Part 6 – When will the kingdom come?***

This is the big question. The disciples asked Jesus this before Jesus went to heaven,

*"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).*

In reply, Jesus said,

*"It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority" (Acts 1:7).*

We are not to know the time or date when the kingdom will be established. In fact, only the Father has this information,

*"But about the day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matthew 24:36).*

If anyone claims to have this knowledge, then do not believe them.

Following the question about when the kingdom will be set up, Jesus was taken up into heaven. As the disciples witnessed this, two angels said,

*"Men of Galilee, they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven'" (Acts 1:11).*

Jesus will return. He will set up the kingdom when he returns,

*"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne" (Matthew 25:31).*

Because we do not know when Jesus will return, we must be ready all the time. The parable of the 10 virgins teaches this. They were waiting for the bridegroom, but the *"bridegroom was a very long time coming"* (Matthew 25:5). When the bridegroom arrived, 5 virgins were not ready. Jesus told the lesson of the parable; *"Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour"* (Matthew 25:13). We must learn the lesson and be ready for the return of Jesus.

The parable of the 10 talents (Matthew 25:14-30) was given because people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately. The parable teaches that the master went away for a long time and that the servants need to be ready for his return. In the parable, the master returned and found a lazy servant. Lazy servants are of no use to a master. He was thrown out. We must ensure that we are active in our faith, otherwise we will also be thrown out.

### **God's Final Invitation**

God is inviting us to be in his kingdom. It is like receiving an invitation to a wedding. We have received an invitation to a time of joy and happiness. The parable of the wedding banquet speaks about this (Matthew 22:1-14). However, we cannot attend this wedding unless we have prepared for it. Anyone not prepared will be thrown out (Matthew 22:11-13).

In the parable of the 10 virgins all went to the wedding, but some were not prepared for it (Matthew 25:1-13). They did not have their lamps burning with oil, so they were

excluded from the wedding (Matthew 25:10-12). In the same way, everyone is invited into the wedding but not everyone will be allowed to go in.

Jesus invites us to be in the kingdom,

*"And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father has conferred on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom"* (Luke 22:29).

Jesus will eat and drink with his true disciples in the kingdom.

We have been invited to the wedding feast of the kingdom of God. It is now for us to respond to this invitation by repentance, baptism and living like Jesus. The kingdom will contain many people from all over the world,

*"I say to you that many will come from east and west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 8:11).

We can all have hope of being there. The kingdom is such a time of joy and peace that we should do all we can to be there. Getting there should be the priority in our lives.

The kingdom will come because God will make it happen. Nothing can stop it. We need to make sure we are ready for it.

### **Summary Content of Lesson 9: When will the Kingdom of God be?**

- 1 The kingdom of God will be set up when Jesus returns to the earth.
- 2 We do not know when the kingdom of God will come.
- 3 We must be ready all the time.
- 4 God has invited us to be in His kingdom.
- 5 We must respond and be ready for the kingdom of God.

### **Revision Questions on Lesson 9: When will the Kingdom of God be?**

- 1 When will the kingdom of God come?
- 2 What will happen before the kingdom of God comes?
- 3 Since we do not know when the kingdom of God will come, what should we do?
- 4 What parable teaches us that we should be ready all the time?
- 5 What will happen to people who are not ready for the kingdom of God?
- 6 Who is invited to come into the kingdom of God?
- 7 What parable teaches us that are all invited to the kingdom of God?
- 8 What must we do to be ready for the kingdom of God?
- 9 Can anything stop the kingdom of God coming?
- 10 Are you ready for the kingdom of God?

## Lesson 10: Temptation

### What is Temptation?

We learnt about the problem of disobedience in Lesson 2. This is called 'sin' in the Bible. Sin means disobedience to God's commands. In order to understand the topic of sin we need to understand temptation.

Temptation is a huge problem for mankind. If man gives in to temptation, it results in sin. And sin leads ultimately to death. This means that temptation leads to our death. Now that is definitely a problem for us.

We are told about this process of temptation leading to death in James 1:13-15:

*"When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me". For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."*

It starts with man's evil desires. We read, *"Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire"*. These desires only become a problem when there is a state of temptation. If a person gives in to these temptations, then he commits sin.

Temptation on its own is not sin. But it is a state where sin can easily occur.

It is true that God made us the way we are. But it is not God's fault if we give in to our own temptation.

We will all face temptations in our life,

*"No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."* (1 Corinthians 10:13)

We all face similar temptations. None of us are different from anyone else in this.

God does not want us to give into these temptations. He will provide a way out. But while we are in the state of temptation, we must endure it patiently.

### The Purpose of Temptation

What is the purpose of temptation? If it only has potential to lead to sin, why are we tempted?

Let us read from James again,

*"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."* (James 1:2-4)

The word here for 'trials' is the word for 'temptations.' If we endure temptations, then it shows we have perseverance. And enables us to become complete Christians. We need temptations in order to help us develop to spiritual maturity. And this has a definite benefit for us. James 1:12 says:

*"Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him."*

Those who stand the test of temptation will receive the reward of life eternal.

We will be tested by temptations, but if we stand the test there is a great reward. Peter puts it this way in 1 Peter 1:6-7:

*"In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed."*

The word for 'trials' is again the word for 'temptations.' We will suffer with our temptations. But if we stand the test, then we are better than gold.

There are many types of gold. We only find out whether it is true gold by testing it. In the same way, God only finds out if we are really valuable if we stand the test.

Adam and Eve were tested. They were given the test of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. They were not to eat from it. We know what happened. They failed the test and gave into their temptation. They sinned, and later they died.

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

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

Eve was tempted by her own evil desires. She wanted good food. She liked the look of it. She wanted wisdom. She deliberately ate because she thought about the advantages to her.

It is true that the snake gave Eve the idea. But an idea is only an idea. The temptation was Eve's when she thought about eating the fruit. And the sin was Eve's.

We cannot blame our temptation on other people or things. Our temptations are ours alone. We must stand strong in the face of temptation and not give in to them.

Proverbs 1:10 advises us:

*"My son, if sinful men entice you, do not give in to them."*

Others will tempt us. We may find these temptations appealing. However, we must not give into them.

One of the 10 commandments tells us not to desire what does not belong to us, Deuteronomy 5:21

*"You shall not covet your neighbour's wife. You shall not set your desire on your neighbour's house or land, his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour."*

Adam and Eve should not have taken something that did not belong to them. Neither must we. We may desire something, but we should not give in to the temptation. Better still, don't think about it at all.

## **Jesus**

There is only one person who managed to resist all temptation and never give into sin. This is Jesus. Jesus faced the same temptations as we do. We read this in Hebrews 4:15,

*"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin."*

Jesus was *"tempted in every way, just as we are"*. He was tempted like us because he was a man. He really knew what temptation was like. But unlike other people, just stood the test.

The purpose of testing is to learn about the character of someone or something by submitting it to testing. This is why Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Spirit of God - to be tested. God wanted to know about the character of His son. Only under a state of testing does one find out the quality of a man. When life is easy, one learns nothing about the character of a person.

We are told that Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by the devil. Matthew 4:3 says,

*"The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.""*

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

The temptation was inside Jesus. Jesus recognized this himself. He spoke about where evil comes from in Matthew 15:18-19,

*"But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts – murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander."*

The source of evil is the human heart inside a man. It does not come from outside. Even if someone else is giving us the idea, the actual temptation is inside a person's heart.

## **Our Battle against Temptation**

We all face a battle inside ourselves. Our evil desires are fighting our desire to do what is right. James 4:1 speaks of this,

*"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?"*

It is a battle. In 1 Peter 2:11 we read that Peter calls it a war,

*"Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul."*

Like all battles, it is hard. We need to know our enemy. We need to avoid situations where our enemy can gain the upper hand. We must avoid situations where we are severely tempted. We must be on our guard at all times because our enemy can surprise us.

When Jesus was being tempted severely, he told his disciples, in Matthew 26:41:

*"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."*

Disciples needed to be alert to temptation and pray for help. Jesus taught us how to use prayer to help us in Matthew 6:13:

*"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."*

Jesus resisted his temptations by constantly being alert and through the power of prayer. Let us follow his example, so that we may resist our own temptations.

We may not do this perfectly but with the help of God we can win our battle and obtain the victory. As is says in 1 Corinthians 15:57,

*"But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

### **Summary Content of Lesson 10: Temptation**

- 1 Temptation leads to sin and death.
- 2 Temptation is caused by our own evil desires.
- 3 Adam and Eve were tempted by their own evil desires.
- 4 Jesus was tempted but never gave in to the temptations.
- 5 Temptation tests our character and leads to perseverance and maturity.

### **Revision Questions on Lesson 10: Temptation**

- 1 Why is temptation a problem to us?
- 2 Is temptation sin?
- 3 What is the purpose of temptation?
- 4 Will we be tested by temptations?
- 5 Describe the temptation of Eve and what happened.
- 6 Was the snake the responsible for Eve's temptation or was Eve?
- 7 When Jesus was tempted, did he commit sin?
- 8 What was the cause of Jesus' own temptations?
- 9 What is the cause of our temptations?
- 10 How should we avoid temptation?

## **Lesson 11: Sin**

### **The Problem of Sin**

Sin is a problem for everyone. The greatest problem is that it leads to death. In Romans 6:23 we read,

*"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord".*

This is the ultimate cause of death. Yes, death may occur through disease or disaster, but the reason for death is sin.

The Bible is clear that all people sin, with the single exception of Jesus. It is because of our sin that we will die.

This makes this talk on sin a life or death subject. It is important we know what it is and what to do about it.

When Adam and Eve sinned, it led to their death. It also led to their removal from the Garden of Eden and away from the presence of God. They lived outside the Garden and suffered pain from the curses God gave them. This is what sin does. It curses us. It denies us of blessings. It separates us from God.

In Psalm 5:4-5 we read,

*"For you are not a God who is pleased with wickedness; with you, evil people are not welcome. The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; you hate all who do wrong".*

Those who sin cannot live in the presence of God. Neither do they get the blessings that come from closeness to God.

Sinners will not live in the kingdom of God, because God does not live with sin.

Sinners will not be given eternal life, because God does not want sinners sinning for ever.

Sin must be removed before man can live with God and before man can be given eternal life. Before we speak about the solution, let us first understand what sin is.

### **What is sin?**

Sin is the breaking of the commands of God. We read in 1 John 3:4:

*"Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness".*

The law of God consists of a number of commands. When these are broken, then it is sin. When Adam and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they broke God's command and sinned.

It is important that we know the commands of God, so that we avoid breaking the commands. If we are unaware of certain commands and break the command, it is still sin. We need to know the standard is that God requires us to live to, so that we avoid sin and live in the way that He wants.

This means that learning this from the Bible is essential for God's people. As we read in Psalms 119:11:



*"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."*

Jesus did this when he was tempted in the wilderness. He was able to remember the commands of God correctly so that he avoided sin.

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

There is also another word for sin which is much worse. This is the word 'rebellion'. This is where the person deliberately avoids keeping the commands of God. He has rebelled against the ways of God and turned to a different path. He does not respect God or His laws and makes no attempt to be part of God's people. This is like rebels today who rebel against the leadership of a country. In the same way, rebels rebel against the leadership of God. Of course, they will have no place in the kingdom of God.

### **Removing Sin**

Man, left to himself, sins and then he dies. He cannot solve this problem.

But God can. God proposed a way for man's sins to be forgiven. In the Old Testament, the greatest demonstration of this was on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). The priest confessed the sins of the people and symbolically placed them on a goat. The goat was then taken away into the wilderness. It was a symbol of the removal of the sins away from the people. God provided a visual demonstration of how He will remove the sins from His people.

The Day of Atonement could only achieve the forgiveness of sins through a sacrifice. The High Priest, stripped of his normal clothes, went alone to offer the sacrifice for sins. All this taught the Jews about the future work of Jesus. It is through the sacrifice of Jesus that sins can be forgiven. As Jesus said, speaking of his sacrifice in Matthew 26:28,

*"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sin."*

We cannot solve the problem of our own sin. But God did through Jesus. We need to come to Jesus. We need to follow him and live like him, if we are to have our sins forgiven. And if our sin is forgiven, then the problem of death is solved too.

### **So how do we do that?**

We cannot undo our sins. They have already been committed. We cannot change the past. Our past sins must be removed from God's record by God wiping them out. Peter tells us how to do this. In the first Christian speech, when speaking to the crowd who had been involved in Christ's death, Peter said in Acts 2:38:

*"Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins"".*

This teaches us that forgiveness of sins can be found with Jesus Christ. It also tells us we must do something in order to obtain it. We must firstly, repent. Secondly, we must be baptized.

Baptism is a full immersion in water that is a symbolic washing away of sins.

Saul was a sinner who helped kill believers. Jesus stopped Paul on a journey to capture believers and said to him,

*"And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16).*

If someone really turns from the old ways of sin and is baptised, then God is willing to forgive us of all our past sins. No matter how bad. This is demonstrated by the forgiveness of prostitutes and tax collectors. Only a fool would ignore such a fantastic and merciful offer.

The unfortunate thing is that baptism does not prevent us sinning in the future. Despite our best endeavours, we still sin. We are not rebels against God's commands, but we will sin.

In this case, we must call on God and use the name of Jesus. This is what Jesus taught us to do when he taught us how to pray to God,

*"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors".*

When we sin after we are baptised, we must pray for forgiveness in the name of Jesus.

We note that there is a condition on our forgiveness. We must forgive those who are in debt to us – that is, those who have sinned against us. If we forgive them, then we will be forgiven. If we do not forgive, then we will not be forgiven. This is fair.

Putting this altogether, we have learnt that the forgiveness of our sins requires us to change from the bad ways of sin and be baptised. Baptism washes away our sins. Then we must live a life like Christ, including forgiving one another. When we do sin as Christians, then we must pray for forgiveness in the name of Jesus.

It is important that we do not cover up our sin. Sin is not hidden from God. Sin leads to problems in our lives. Sin can only be forgiven if it is admitted to, and forgiveness is sought. We read this in Psalm 32:5-6,

*"Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." And you forgave the guilt of my sin". Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found".*

If we are to help sinners, the first thing we must do is make sure sin is acknowledged. Then we need to make sure they turn from their way of sin and seek the forgiveness that is available.

We started pointing out that sin causes death. It separates man from God and it brings a curse on the life of the sinner.

The opposite is true if sin is removed. It causes life. It binds man back to God. It results in a blessing on the life of the repentant sinner.

God wants all of us to change and obtain life,

*"But if a wicked man turns away from all the sins he has committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, that person will surely live; they will not die. None of the offences they have committed will be remembered against them. Because of the righteous things they have done, they will live. Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?" (Ezekiel 18:21-23)*

May we listen to God's appeal, turn from our own ways to the ways of God, be baptised and forgiven and live.

### **Summary Content of Lesson 11: Sin**

- 1 Sin causes problems for us and it causes our death.
- 2 Sin is the breaking of God's commands.
- 3 Sin can be removed through the sacrifice of Jesus.
- 4 Repentance and baptism can remove all past sins.
- 5 After baptism, we must pray for forgiveness, and forgive other people's sins.

### **Revision Questions on Lesson 11: Sin**

- 1 What is the cause of death?
- 2 What else does sin do for us?
- 3 What is sin?
- 4 Who has sinned?
- 5 Have you sinned?
- 6 How can our sins be forgiven?
- 7 Does baptism stop us committing sins in future?
- 8 How can our sins be forgiven after baptism?
- 9 Can we hide our sins from God?
- 10 Do we need to forgive others who sin against us?

## Lessons 12 to 14: Life and Death

### Life and Death

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

God made the first man, Adam, and gave him life. This was a two-step process. First, God made Adam. Then God made him live. We read this in Genesis 2:7:

*"Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."*

God made man from the dust. Man lay in the dust, but he did not live until God breathed into him the breath of life. Only then did man start to live and get up.

It is important to understand the origin of man, because we need to understand what man is, what life is and what death is. God makes it clear what man is in Genesis 3:19,

*"By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."*

"For dust you are". Man is dust. That is all he is. He was made from it. At death he will return to it. He only has life because God gave him His breath.

In this respect, man is like the animals. Animals were made from the ground (Genesis 1:12). And they had the breath from God giving them life (Genesis 1:30). They also die in the same way. Ecclesiastes 3:19-20 tell us this,

*"Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath, humans have no advantage over animals. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from the dust, and to dust all return."*

Both man and animals were made from the dust. They both live because of the breath of God. When they die both go back to the dust. Man lives and dies like the animals.

If God were to take away His breath from either man or animals, then they would die. Psalm 104:29 says:

*"When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust."*

There is another term used to describe the breath of God. This is the 'spirit of God'. We see this in Job 33:4 where breath and spirit are used for the same thing,

*"The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life."*

The same terms are also used in Job 34:14-15;

*"If it were his intention and he withdrew his spirit and breath, all humanity would perish together and mankind would return to the dust."*

It is the breath or the spirit that keeps man alive. If God takes this away then man dies.

Ecclesiastes 12:7 speaks about what happens at the death of man:

*"and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it."*

The spirit was God's spirit. At the end of man's life, God takes His spirit back. Man returns back to dust.

Let us summarise the process of life and death.

God made man from the dust. But man was not living until God breathed into him the breath of life.

Man lives because God gives man breath to live with.

When man dies, the breath leaves man and returns to God. Then the dead body returns to the dust.

### **The State of Death**

No part of man survives death. Death is the end of man's existence. He does not continue living after death.

Many parts of the Bible describe the life of man as only lasting a short time. He is like a mist that comes and goes (James 4:14). He is like the grass which grows up and then withers (James 1:10). He is like a shadow that goes down and disappears (Psalm 144:4), a cloud that is there one moment and gone the next (Job 7:9), a breeze that comes and goes (Psalm 78:39). Man does not have a continuing existence. He is only a temporary actor on the stage of life.

The Bible is clear that when man is dead that is the end,

*"Anyone who is among the living has hope – even a live dog is better off than a dead lion! For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even their name is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 9:4-6)*

The dead "know nothing"! They are not loving or enjoying. They have ceased all life functions. They are dead.

So, verse 10 of the same chapter has some advice for the living,

*"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom" (Ecclesiastes 9:10)*

You cannot do anything when you are dead. So, make the most of your life now.

The dead cannot even praise God,

*"For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness" (Isaiah 38:18).*

The dead are not praising God on clouds. They are dead. They are silent,

*"It is not the dead who praise the Lord, those who go down to the place of silence" Psalm 115:17*

Only those who are alive can praise God.

## **Our Destiny**

The destiny of the all the living is death. It does not matter if one is good or bad. We all go to the same place.

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

All have a common destiny - death. All die. David knew this. When he was close to dying, he said,

*"I am about to go the way of all the earth" (1 Kings 2:2).*

## **The misunderstanding of hell**

There is a misunderstanding about what happens to the wicked when they die. Some people teach that the wicked are burnt for ever in a place call 'hell.' This teaching developed from Greek Philosophy where they thought the wicked would be burnt forever.

In old versions of the Bible, they often translated the word 'grave' by the word 'hell.' This was incorrect and led to confusion. Modern versions of the Bible do not do this.

In most modern versions of the Bible, the only mention of 'hell' comes from a translations of the word 'gehenna' (12 times) and 'tartarus' (1 time). These words only occur in the New Testament.

The word 'gehenna' means the 'valley of Hinnon'. It was a literal place outside Jerusalem first mentioned at the time of Joshua (Joshua 15:8, 18:16). It was linked to idol worship and child sacrifice (Jeremiah 7:31). By the time of Jesus, it was thought to be the city rubbish tip. Like all rubbish tips, there was always a flame there and always worms (Mark 9:43-48).

This does not mean there was an eternal flame where the wicked are burnt forever. It does mean that worthless people like criminals would be thrown outside the city and burnt. The fire would not be put out until the bodies were completely burnt (Mark 9:43).

The wicked will not suffer pain forever in torment because of a short life of sin. God does not remain angry forever (Psalm 103:8-10). The punishment of the wicked is not pain for ever but death,

*"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord" (Romans 6:23).*

## **Is death the end of the righteous and the wicked?**

All this teaching leads us to the obvious question. Is death the final end? Is there nothing else?

For the faithful, death is not the end. God has given them the glorious hope of a future life through the resurrection of the dead. Just like Jesus was raised from the dead, so the faithful will be raised from the dead. This is covered in the Lesson 24 on "Resurrection and Judgment".

The Bible teaches us that we can have eternal life. We can have life where we do not die,

*"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).*

Eternal life is a gift from God. It is given to the righteous through the work of Jesus.

John tells us that God has given Jesus the authority to give eternal life to others,

*"For you have granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him" (John 17:2).*

Jesus is able to give eternal life. But not everyone will have it,

*"To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger" Romans 2:7-8*

Eternal life is for those who do good. Evil doers will not be given eternal life. God does not want evil doers doing evil for ever.

For those people who will be raised from the dead, death is like a sleep. It is a temporary period of unconsciousness, like sleeping. Daniel 12:2 is an example of this,

*"Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt."*

Only those who live in the way God wants will be given eternal life. This should make us think very carefully about how we live our life.

Many of our quotations have come from Ecclesiastes, which focuses on the destiny of man. It concludes in Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 with:

*"Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil."*

### **Is there an immortal soul?**

There is an incorrect teaching about what happens at death. This comes from people who teach that there is an immortal soul. This is not a teaching that is taught in the Bible. It came from the ideas of Greek philosophers such as Plato (428-348 BC).

When the Bible uses the word 'soul,' it means the 'life' of a person or 'person' itself. There is nothing in the word that means it is immortal. Where the word is used, it has emotions like a person. It grieves (Job 30:25). It suffers (Isaiah 53:11). It rejoices (Psalm 35:9). It sins (Micah 6:7). It dies (Ezekiel 18:4, 20). These are all features of a 'person' or a 'life'. The teaching of part of man continuing to live after death is not a Bible teaching.

### **Summary Content of Lesson 12 to 14: Life and Death**

- 1 God made man from the dust and then gave him the breath of life.
- 2 When man dies, he returns to the dust and takes back his own breath.
- 3 Man dies in the same way as the animals.

- 4 No part of man continues living when man dies.
- 5 Eternal life is a gift from God only given to some people.

**Revision Questions on Lesson 12 to 14: Life and Death**

- 1 Where does life come from?
- 2 How did God make man?
- 3 What will happen to man when he dies?
- 4 Does man die like the animals?
- 5 What is it that keeps man alive?
- 6 Does any part of man continue living after death?
- 7 Do the dead know anything?
- 8 Do the wicked die in the same way as the good?
- 9 What is the Christian hope when they die?
- 10 What does God offer the righteous as their hope beyond the grave?



## **Lesson 15: The Source of Evil (with an explanation of 'Devil' and 'Satan')**

### **The Source of Evil**

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

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

The human heart was the source of the problem. His heart was evil from a child,

*"every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood"* (Genesis 8:21).

The real source of evil in this world comes from the human heart, which means the human mind. Even God's chosen people Israel had the same problem,

*"But these people have stubborn and rebellious hearts; they have turned aside and gone away"* (Jeremiah 5:23).

God summarised His understanding of the human heart:

*"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure"* (Jeremiah 17:9).

Jesus agrees,

*"But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts - murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person"* (Matthew 15:18-20).

The evil human heart is an enemy of God,

*"The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's laws, nor can it do so"* (Romans 8:7).

The evil mind of the flesh (human thinking) is against the mind of the spirit (godly thinking). The mind of the spirit (godly thinking) is the mind that submits to God's ways.

The human mind can choose whether to follow the way of the flesh or the spirit,

*"Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation"* (Colossians 1:21-22).

People do not automatically have to follow evil. They can choose what to do. As Jesus said,

*"The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him"* (Matthew 12:35).

### **Bible Names given to Human Nature – 'Satan.'**

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

An example of this is Peter. Peter tried to stop Jesus going to the cross, so,

*"Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns" (Matthew 16:23).*

The problem with Peter was his human thinking like a man. He was not thinking in the way God would have on this occasion.

Another example was Judas,

*"Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve" (Luke 22:3).*

The mind of Judas entered a state of being an enemy of Jesus, which led to the betrayal of Jesus. A state of mind 'entering' someone occurs elsewhere. For example,

*"And there entered a reasoning among them, this, Who may be greatest of them?" (Luke 9:46, Youngs Literal Version).*

This is a Bible way of saying someone changed their mind.

Believers can become enemies of God if they take on attitudes that are against God,

*"don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God. Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God" (James 4:4).*

The fact that the word 'satan' means 'adversary' or 'enemy' is shown by comparing 1 Chronicles 21:1 and 2 Samuel 24:1. Here the adversary to David and Israel is God Himself! Clearly, God is not his own enemy called 'satan'. What it means is that that God was against David and Israel at this time.

God also cause adversaries (the Hebrew word is 'satans') to occur such as those against Solomon (1 Kings 11:14, 11:23, 25). God can do this because God alone has all power and authority. He is the one who can be your enemy or friend.

### **Bible Names given to Human Nature – 'Devil.'**

Another name given to the evil side of human nature is 'devil'. Many languages do not distinguish between 'devil' and 'satan', but they are different in the original Greek New Testament. 'Devil' means 'false accuser' or 'slanderer'. It means someone who makes false accusations or charges against someone else.

Here are some examples of where the 'devil' word is in the original Greek:

There will be a time when *"People will be... slanderers"* (2 Timothy 3:2-3).

That *"the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers (Greek word for 'slanderers)"* (1 Timothy 3:11).

And *"teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine"* (Titus 2:3).

Believers can become 'devils' or 'false accusers' if they are not careful. Judas was one (John 6:70). Paul writes,

*"In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold"* (Ephesians 4:26-27).

Paul is saying 'do not falsely accuse the one you are angry with'. If you resist this temptation, then you will avoid the problem,

*"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you"* (James 4:7).

The word for 'he' should be translated as 'it', because 'it' refers to the state of mind to be avoided.

The word 'slanderer' is often used of those who falsely accuse God's people (1 Timothy 3:6-7, 1 Peter 5:8).

### **Bible Names given to Human Nature – 'Sin.'**

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

### **The False Teaching about Satan and the Devil**

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

1. If a monster called 'Devil/Satan' causes wickedness, then why are wicked people punished? If the Devil/Satan is the cause of wickedness then people are not to blame. God does what is just (Deuteronomy 32:4), so He would not punish us if it were not our fault.
2. If the Devil/Satan is an immortal being in opposition to God, then this makes it an evil god. The Bible says there is only one God who causes good and evil (Isaiah 45:5-6). God is unopposed (Deuteronomy 32:39, Isaiah 43:13). There is no other god.
3. If the Devil/Satan is a fallen angel, it cannot be killed because angels are immortal (Luke 20:36). But Devil/Satan has been destroyed (Hebrews 2:14).

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

We will look at the main confusion passages here.

#### ***The Temptations of Jesus***

Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days. In Matthew 4:10 we read,

*"Jesus said to him, "Away from me, satan (adversary)!"*

Jesus was not talking to anyone else. The Greek words for "him" can also mean "himself". A literal translation of the passage is, *"Jesus said to himself, "Go, adversary"*. Jesus rebuked his own thoughts. This is like other places where the phrase "said to himself" occurs. It is often used of people who are thinking evil (Genesis 27:41, 1 Samuel 18:17, 1 Samuel 20:3, 1 Samuel 27:12, 2 Kings 5:20, Luke 7:39, 16:3, 18:4). Jesus used this 'self-talk' to fight the evil thoughts from his own heart.

According to Matthew and Luke's gospels, a slanderer or 'devil' tempted Jesus. Who was the slanderer? To answer this question, we will look at the options:

- 1) It cannot be God because He does not tempt anyone (James 1:13).
- 2) It cannot be an angel because angels do not slander (2 Peter 2:11). They help believers to get to the kingdom rather than hinder them (Hebrews 1:14).
- 3) It cannot be another man. A temptation would not have been a temptation unless it was possible. No man had the ability to give Jesus the kingdoms of the world. No man could take Jesus to the top of the temple.
- 4) It cannot be a supernatural evil being. They do not own the kingdoms of men. God owns the world (Job 41:11, Psalm 105:7, Daniel 4:17).

There remains only one other option that fits.

- 5) The slanderer was the temptation of Jesus's own mind.

The first temptation was to turn stones into bread. Jesus had just received the power of the Holy Spirit and was tempted to misuse this power for personal needs. He had been fasting 40 days and was hungry. We can understand the human mind, saying; "you're the son of God, why don't you use the power God gave you".

The second temptation was to put on a public display and show he really was God's son. He could jump off the top of the temple and the angels would be forced to catch him. At least, that was the reasoning that came from Psalm 91. But forcing God to act would be putting God to the test and that was wrong (Deuteronomy 6:18). Jesus had a good knowledge of Scripture, and so it makes sense if this temptation came from his own knowledge of Scripture.

The third temptation was about taking all the world as his own. Jesus knew God had promised him the kingdom (Psalm 2:7-8) and that God was able to give them to him. There is no place where all the kingdoms of the world can be seen at once, so this temptation only makes sense if it took place in Jesus' mind.

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

By fighting the temptations, Jesus caused the evil thoughts to flee. Temptations are described as like a separate person in Thessalonians,

*"I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labours had been in vain"* (1 Thessalonians 3:5).

The tempter here is a state of mind of the believers.

### ***The Devil and Satan in Revelation 12***

In Revelation 12, a pregnant woman is clothed with the sun, stands on the moon, and has a crown of 12 stars. She is not a literal woman but a symbolic one. We can work out what she represents. The sun, moon and stars represent the house of Israel (Genesis 37:9-10). The woman gives birth to a son who is taken up to heaven (Revelation 12:5). This child would rule the nations with an iron sceptre (Psalm 2:9). This is Jesus. We have a picture of the woman (Israel) giving birth to a son (Jesus) who is taken up into heaven.

Revelation 12 then introduces us to a 'dragon' who tries to eat the child. Michael and his angels appear and fight against the dragon and his angels. We can work out what the

dragon represents. In Daniel, we read of one other occasion when Michael and angels were fighting (Daniel 10:13). Here they are fighting the nation of Persia who was fighting against the purpose of God. It makes sense that the dragon of Revelation 12 also represents a nation that is fighting against the purpose of God. We know that this is the nation of Rome, who tried to kill the young Jesus soon after birth and later did put Jesus to death.

Jesus was raised from the dead and later caught up to heaven. This fits in with the description in Revelation 12.

The Bible often uses unusual beasts to represent nations in other places (Daniel 7).

The dragon of Revelation 12 is called three things:

1) 'The Adversary' (or 'Satan'). It became God's adversary by fighting the purpose of God,

2) "Slanderer" (or 'Devil'). It slandered God's people; *"For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down"* (v10).

3) "Ancient Serpent". Like the serpent in the Garden of Eden, it opposed truth and lied.

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

### **Satan at the Time of Job**

Job was tested to see what was in his heart. The trouble came from someone called an 'adversary' or 'satan', who questioned whether Job was really very good. The adversary was an adversary because he was against Job.

Job's adversary was someone who went into the presence of God and was able to speak directly to God. He had no power of his own and was not able to do anything unless he was given the ability by God (Job 1:12).

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

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

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

## Summary

Evil comes from the human heart. The terms 'satan' and 'devil' usually describe evil people or nations.

In the next lesson, we will look at a topic that is often considered with evil – demons.

### Summary Content of Lesson 15: The Source of Evil

- 1 There is no power apart from God.
- 2 It is the human heart that is the source of evil and sin.
- 3 The word 'Satan' means 'adversary' and it refers to people.
- 4 The word 'Devil' means 'slanderer' or 'false accuser' and it refers to people.
- 5 It is Jesus that can remove our own problem of sin and the world's sin.

### Revision Questions on Lesson 15: The Source of Evil

- 1 Is there any power in the world apart from God?
- 2 Where does evil come from?
- 3 What was the problem with the world at the time of Noah?
- 4 Where does James 1:13-15 say temptation comes from?
- 5 Why does the Bible use the term Devil or Satan?
- 6 What has the power of death (Hebrews 2:14)?
- 7 What does the word 'satan' mean?
- 8 What does the word 'devil' mean?
- 9 Who is to blame for man's sin?
- 10 Did Jesus die to save us from our own sin or to save us from the devil or satan?

## Lesson 16: Demons

Demons are a much-misunderstood topic. This has resulted in many strange thoughts which are poorly supported by the Bible. We must use the Bible to teach us on this topic, because God wrote the Bible and He knows about all things. He wrote about demons in the Bible.

### What are demons?

Demons are only mentioned twice in the Old Testament. The first occasion is in Deuteronomy,

*"They made him jealous with their foreign gods and angered him with their detestable idols. They sacrificed to false gods (Hebrew: demons), which are not God – gods they had not known, gods that recently appeared, gods your fathers did not fear" (Deuteronomy 32:16-17).*

This translation has already changed the word 'demons' into 'false gods.' This passage teaches that demons are idols. God predicted that Israel would turn from worshipping Him and turn to idols. We read that this is exactly what happened,

*"They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to false gods (Hebrew: demons)" (Psalm 106:37).*

In both Old Testament passages "demons" are idols or false gods.

The New Testament confirms that demons are idols,

*"Do I mean then that a sacrifice sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifice of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; You cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?" (1 Corinthians 10:19-22)*

Pagans sacrificed, fellowshiped and feasted with idols or demons. But God does not want His people to have anything to do with them.

The book of Revelation confirms that demons are idols,

*"The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshipping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood – idols that cannot see or hear or walk" (Revelation 9:20).*

The consistent message of the Bible is that demons are idols. God does not want His people to worship other false gods or idols.

### Are demons real?

The fact that God speaks about other gods does not mean that they are real. We are told they are nothing,

*"Do I mean then that a sacrifice sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No" (1 Corinthians 10:19-20).*

The prophet Jeremiah speaks about idols,

*"For the practices of the peoples are worthless; they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel. They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so that it will not totter. Like a scarecrow in a melon patch, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk. Do not fear them; they can do no harm nor can they do any good"* (Jeremiah 10:2-5).

Idols or demons are nothing. They cannot harm you. They cannot do anything, so do not worry about them.

God makes this clear that no other god is real,

*"I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God"* (Isaiah 45:5).

There is only one God: the God of Israel. Every other god is a human invention and does not really exist.

### **Why are demons linked to sickness?**

Those who worshipped idols believed that idols had the power to cause sickness. That is where the phrase 'demon-possessed' came from. The phrase "demon-possessed" was used for certain types of sicknesses.

The sicknesses that were called 'demon-possession' were those where the cause was not obvious and was not visually seen. A paralyzed man has bad legs so that everyone could see why he was sick. A leper has discoloured skin which can be seen. There is no mystery as to what the problem was for these sicknesses.

But for someone who has ears but cannot hear, it was not clear why they were deaf. Nor is it easy-to-see why someone is mad. 'Demon-possession' was the general term used for conditions where there was no obvious easy-to-see cause. It was used because of the limited medical knowledge of the people at that time.

Here are a number of examples. The demon-possessed person in Matthew 9:32 was a man who was dumb,

*"While they were going out, a man who was demon-possessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus."*

The man had a mouth, but it was not clear why he could not talk. So, the condition was called 'demon-possessed'. It did not mean that a demon really existed, but it meant that there was a medical condition that had no clear cause.

The demon-possessed men in Matthew 12:22 was a man who was blind and dumb,

*"Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see".*

The man had eyes and mouth, but there was no obvious reason why they did not function. It did not mean that a demon really existed but that his medical condition had no known cause.

God gave Jesus the authority to heal the sicknesses described as demon-possession. This healing was evidence of the truth of Jesus' message,

*"Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the*



*people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralysed, and he healed them”*  
(Matthew 4:23-24).

In this passage, we have a list of sicknesses. ‘Demon-possession’ is just one of these sicknesses.

The same can be found in the other passages,

*“When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed the sick. This is was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah, “He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases””* (Matthew 8:16-17).

The demon-possessed was a sick person. The healing of the demon-possessed was a fulfilment of the prophecy of the healing of diseases. We see again that the Bible speaks of demons as being diseases.

### **Where do sicknesses come from?**

The first occurrence of sickness in the Bible is with Pharaoh. What may surprise us is that the disease came from God,

*“But the Lord inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram’s wife Sarai”* (Genesis 12:17).

God gave diseases to Pharaoh because Pharaoh took Abraham’s wife as his own. God gave it as a punishment on Pharaoh for taking a believer’s wife.

The second occurrence of sickness in the Bible is similar. Abimelech King of Gerar had also taken Abraham’s wife. So, God prevented his household from having children. When Abimelech released Sarah, then God healed them (Genesis 20:17-18). The cause of this disease was a sin against God’s people, as was the case with Pharaoh. God was able to give disease when people sinned and then He took it away when they repented.

The pattern of sickness continues in Exodus. God brought 10 plagues on Egypt, which included the plague of boils (Exodus 9:8-12) and the plague of the death of the firstborn (Exodus 11). In these examples, God plagued other peoples for their treatment on God’s own people, just like the examples in Genesis. God also ended these plagues. God was later to plague His own people when they sinned.

It is clear that the one who gives sickness to man is God Himself. The rest of the Bible follows this pattern.

But we must be careful. We cannot conclude that every sickness of man is the result of sin.

There are a number of reasons why God may bring sickness on a person. For example, Job’s sickness in the Book of Job was not because of sin. It was for the proof of his faith and the saving of his friends. Paul’s ‘thorn in the flesh’ sickness was to stop him being proud (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

God tests people in various ways to see what is in their heart (Deuteronomy 8:2) and one way He does this is through sickness. God works in many ways to bring about the salvation of His people. Sickness is one of the tools God uses to both punish and refine His people.

God can and does give sickness. He has all power and can do all things. God summarizes how He works,

*"See now that I myself am he! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no-one can deliver out of my hand" (Deuteronomy 32:39).*

Hannah understood this when she said,

*"The Lord brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up" (1 Samuel 2:6).*

God helps man live and He helps man die. God inflicts wounds and He heals. He does it all. There is nothing no one else who can do this.

The Bible teaches us that God alone rules. There is no other power or god or evil force. God does everything in this world.

We need to learn from this information. When we are sick, it is to God that we must go for health and well-being. God will bring healing to His people. It is God,

*"who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases" (Psalm 103:3).*

### **Summary Content of Lesson 16: Demons**

- 1 Demons were idols that people incorrectly thought to have powers to make people sick.
- 2 The Bible says that idols have no power. They cannot make people sick.
- 3 The word 'Demon-possession' is a name given to certain types of sickness.
- 4 Jesus healed the demon-possessed just like he healed other sicknesses.
- 5 God brings sicknesses on people and God heals people. God has all power.

### **Revision Questions on Lesson 16: Demons**

- 1 What does the Bible say demons are?
- 2 Do idols have any life or power?
- 3 Is there any power in this world apart from God?
- 4 Do idols have the ability to actually cause sickness?
- 5 What was meant by the term 'demon-possession'?
- 6 In Matthew 4:23-24, it uses the term 'demon-possessed' in a list of sicknesses. What does this tell us about 'demon-possession'?
- 7 Is the sickness of 'demon-possession' healed like other sicknesses?
- 8 Where do sicknesses in the Bible come from?
- 9 If sicknesses come from God, what should we do when we are sick?
- 10 Does God have to answer our prayers for healing?

## Lesson 17: God

We know there is a God from the things around us. Everything we see is evidence of the design by God. Psalm 8:3-4 says:

*"When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?"*

The world, in its vastness and beauty, shows us how great and wise God is. When we look at the things around us, we should be humbled. Who are we compared to God?

Although we see His works, we cannot see God. We must have faith in Him. As it says,

*"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).*

God has given us the Bible as further evidence of Him and to teach us what God wants us to know.

### One God

There is only one God. There is no other. In Isaiah 45:5-7 He says:

*"I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting people may know that there is none besides me. I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things."*

There are no other gods apart from God. There is no power or authority apart from God. God alone is to be honoured and thanked.

There is no evil god in opposition to the true God. God is the only power in this universe. If there is a disaster, then it is God who has done it. If there is something good, then it is God who has done it. These two aspects of God are repeated in many different places,

*"See now that I myself am he! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand" (Deuteronomy 32:39).*

If God decides to kill or wound, then He does it. If God decides to heal and give life, then He does it. God does it all. There is no other god doing these things. God brought the flood on the world for wickedness in Noah's day and He also blessed Noah. God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah for wickedness in the days of Lot and He also blessed Lot.

Knowing this should prompt us to respond in a number of ways:

- 1) we should fear God because God can bring disaster and sickness on us, *"the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 111:10).*
- 2) there is no evil god or spirits causing these problems. We should not believe in them.
- 3) we should pray to God, because God can heal us, bless us and save us.

When we pray, we need to be patient. God is immortal. A thousand years are like one day to Him. Things seem to take a long time to us, but to God it is only minutes. When it comes to the things of God, we need to be patient.

### **God knows us and gives us what we have.**

God knows everything. He knows everything about us,

*"You have searched me, LORD, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely. You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?" (Psalm 139:1-7)*

God knows our thoughts. We cannot hide any secret thought or motive from Him!

Everything we have comes from God. He has given us life. He has given us our abilities and skills. We may think we are clever, and we may boast about ourselves. But really everything comes from God. We read in Romans 11:35-36,

*"Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?" For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be glory forever! Amen."*

It is more appropriate to thank God for what we have. If we give anything to God, we are only giving back what we received from Him in the first place,

*"Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand" (1 Chronicles 29:14).*

### **God's Character**

God tells us what He is like as a person in Exodus 34:6-7,

*"And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.""*

This list of qualities is wonderful. God is basically a God of love.

God does have a sense of right and wrong and He will punish the guilty. This is what justice is. Justice is knowing right from wrong and making sure people receive what is fair. Justice is a good thing because it means (eg) that murderers do not get away with murder.

Many people think God is like themselves. This is not true. God is holy, which means He is different.

Consider the topic of forgiveness. God asks people to repent, which means He is willing to forgive and forget whatever they have done. This is hard for man to do.

Consider the attitude to enemies. God loves His enemies. God wants His enemies to turn to the right way and be saved,

*"But if a wicked person turns away from all the sins they have committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, that person will surely live; they will not die. None of the offenses they have committed will be remembered against them. Because of the righteous things they have done, they will live. Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?"*  
(Ezekiel 18:21-23).

God is not pleased when the wicked die. This is quite different from man.

God is so much higher and better in His thinking than man,

*"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts"* (Isaiah 55:8-9).

God's way of working is higher than ours. We should not question God what God is doing in our lives. He does what is right,

*"He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he"* (Deuteronomy 32:4).

God always does what is right. He does no wrong. What is happening in our lives is not wrong. We need to humbly accept that the Creator of the Universe knows what He is doing. We will not always understand what He is doing.

### **Godliness**

God made man in His image. We are designed to look like God.

God wants us to not just look like Him but to behave like Him and be godly,

*"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness"* (Ephesians 4:22-24).

If we behave like God, then we become children of God and God is truly our Father. The quality of god-like-ness is godliness. We should be godly,

*"You ought to live holy and godly lives"* (2 Peter 3:11).

God has done everything for us. We would have no hope if God were not forgiving and loving. God has a plan to remove our sin and save us through the work of Jesus. We are told of the final stage of His plan for us in Revelation 22:3-5:

*"No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever."*

We will see God! This should cause us to praise and thank God for everything He has done. We will end with the words of Jude 1:24-25,

*"To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Saviour*

*be glory, majesty, power and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and for evermore! Amen."*

### **Summary Content of Lesson 17: God**

- 1 When we see the world around us, we see evidence of God.
- 2 There is no other power apart from God, who causes life and death.
- 3 God's character is one of love, justice, and forgiveness.
- 4 Man is made in God's image, but man must also behave like God.
- 5 God is not like man and has much higher and better thoughts.

### **Revision Questions on Lesson 18: God**

- 1 How do we know there is a God?
- 2 Is there any other power in this world apart from God?
- 3 Is there an evil god in opposition to God?
- 4 Who gives all life and brings all death?
- 5 Can we hide our thoughts from God?
- 6 Where do our abilities and skills come from?
- 7 What is God like?
- 8 Does God think and behave in the same way as man?
- 9 What does it mean when we are told to be godly?
- 10 Is the devil or satan really a supernatural being that causes all problems in the world? What are they?

## Lesson 18: Is God a Trinity?

The Trinity is not taught in the Bible. The Trinity is a false teaching where it is believed that God is really three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It says that these three are one God, co-equal and co-eternal. This means that God is not really only one God but three. The Trinity is so confusing that people say they cannot understand it because it is a mystery.

The Trinity was developed by the churches in the first four centuries after Jesus. Prior to that the Jews believed in only one God. The key teaching of the Jews is this verse,

*"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one"* (Deuteronomy 6:4).

Israel believed in only one God. So, of course, did Jesus and the apostles.

So where did the teaching of the Trinity come from? The churches mixed Greek and Roman philosophy with Bible teaching. They turned Jesus into 'God' at the Council of Nicea in AD325. For 56 years, there were only two Gods believed by the churches. Then at the Council of Constantinople in AD381, the churches made the Holy Spirit another 'God.' The churches adopted the false teaching of the Trinity from then.

### Is Jesus God?

A key question is whether Jesus is God or man? The simple answer is that Jesus was a man. We read,

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

This verse speaks about God and men, but it says that Jesus is a man.

Jesus was a man like Adam,

*"For since death came through a **man** (that is, Adam), the resurrection of the dead comes also through a **man** (that is, Jesus). For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive"* (1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

Peter introduced Jesus to the people as a man,

*"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a **man** accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know"* (Acts 2:22-23).

Jesus was a man, who was given special powers by God.

It was necessary that Jesus was a man because he had to help mankind,

*"Since the children (that is, people of God) have flesh and blood, he (that is, Jesus) **too shared in their humanity**...For this reason he had to be **made like his brothers in every way**, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God"* (Hebrews 2:14, 17).

Jesus was human like other people. When we read of the life of Jesus, we read of his birth, growth, manhood and death. These are all aspects of being human. When Jesus died, he did not exist for three days when he was in the tomb. Then God raised him from the dead and gave him eternal life. Without God, Jesus would be nothing.

Jesus is never called 'God the Son.' He is only ever called 'Son of God.' Just as a son is different from a father, so Jesus is different from God.

## Differences between Jesus and God

The false teaching of the Trinity teaches that Jesus and God are equal. But this is not what the Bible says. Jesus said,

*"I am going to the Father, for my Father is greater than I"* (John 14:28).

God is greater than Jesus. See also,

*"The head of every man is Christ ... and the head of Christ is God"*  
(1 Corinthians 11:3).

Jesus is limited compared to God. Jesus was limited in his knowledge. When asked about the time of the return of Jesus, Jesus said:

*"But about that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father"* (Mark 13:32).

Jesus was different from God because Jesus was tempted. In speaking about Jesus we read,

*"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin"* (Hebrews 4:15).

But God cannot be tempted,

*"When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone"* (James 1:13).

Jesus was mortal and died. This was unlike God who cannot die,

*"God, the blessed and only ruler, the king of Kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see"* (1 Timothy 6:15-16).

These verses also teach that Jesus was seen. This is unlike God who cannot be seen.

Jesus did not exist until he was born. There are some verses which are misunderstood and are used to say that Jesus did exist before he was born. We will explain this misunderstanding in more detail when we get to the lessons about Jesus.

Like other men, God was the God of Jesus,

*"The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (2 Corinthians 11:31).

*"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Peter 1:3).

If Jesus is not God, he is not part of a 'Trinity.'

## Conclusion

There is only one God and Jesus is different from God,

*"Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, through whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live"* (1 Corinthians 8:6).

In this verse, Jesus and God are mentioned, but there is only one God. Jesus is separate from God. Jesus is our Lord because he was sent by God and obeyed God his Father,



*"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him"*  
John 3:16-17.

### **Summary Content of Lesson 18: Is God a Trinity?**

- 1 The Bible does not teach the Trinity or that God and Jesus are equal.
- 2 Just as a father is different from his son, so God is different from Jesus.
- 3 Jesus did not exist until he was born. But he was planned from the beginning by God.
- 4 There are many reasons why Jesus is not God.
- 5 The Holy Spirit is God's power and is not different from God.

### **Revision Questions on Lesson 18: Is God a Trinity?**

- 1 What do people mean by the Trinity?
- 2 When we normally speak of a Father and son, do we speak of them as one person or two?
- 3 Are God and Jesus equal?
- 4 Was God the God of Jesus?
- 5 Does Jesus know the same things as the father?
- 6 How many Gods are there?
- 7 Do the names of Jesus teach us that Jesus is God?
- 8 Can God be tempted with evil?
- 9 Can God die?
- 10 Who raised Jesus from the dead?

## Lesson 19: The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is often misunderstood. It is known by other terms in the Bible. When Jesus was baptised, Jesus received the Holy Spirit in Luke 3:22. In the account of the same event in the gospel of Matthew in Matthew 3:16, the Holy Spirit is called the "*Spirit of God*".

And when Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit in Acts 5:3, it is later called the "*Spirit of the Lord*" in verse 9. Another term for the Holy Spirit is the 'Spirit of the Lord.'

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit **of** God and the Spirit **of** the Lord. We notice in both these terms that it is **of** God. It is not separate from God. It is part of Him.

In John 4:24 we read:

*"God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."*

The spirit is God. The spirit is part of Him.

The word "Holy" means 'separate'. The Spirit of God is separate from the world. This is why it is called the "Holy Spirit".

### Not a Different Person

The Holy Spirit is not the third part of the Trinity. It is not a different person from God.

In Luke 11:13 we read:

*"If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask!"*

It is the Father who sends the Holy Spirit. The Father is able to do this because the Holy Spirit is part of Him. If the Father and the Holy Spirit were equal, how could one send the other? In the Bible, the Holy Spirit is always sent by the Father. For example, when speaking to Mary about the birth of Jesus,

*"The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).*

It was the Holy Spirit sent from God that caused the birth of Jesus. If the Holy Spirit was a person separate from God, then Jesus would have been called the son of the Holy Spirit.

In Matthew 12:32 we read about the importance of the Holy Spirit,

*"Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come."*

We are told that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable. However, the passage says nothing about blasphemy against God. The reason for this is that God and the Holy Spirit are the same thing. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is blasphemy against God. We know that blasphemy against God is a big problem, because it is one of the 10 commandments.

These are examples which show that the Holy Spirit is part of God and not a separate person.

## **How does God use His Holy Spirit**

God uses His Holy Spirit in many ways. One way is that He uses it to give His message to people,

*"For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit"*  
(2 Peter 1:21).

God sent His Holy Spirit with the message of prophecy to His prophets. The prophet Isaiah received the Holy Spirit when he wrote the book of Isaiah and David received the Holy Spirit when he wrote the Psalms. The Bible comes from God. God passed His message to chosen people through the Holy Spirit. This is like Acts 4:31,

*"After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly."*

The Holy Spirit was given to the disciples, so they were able to speak the word of God. God uses the Holy Spirit to pass on His message to different people at different times.

The Holy Spirit is not only the word of God. It can be an action. When Gabriel went to Mary, he gave her a message in Luke 1:35:

*"The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God".*

Here the Holy Spirit is described as the 'power' of the Most High. It is the power from God.

God's word and His action are closely linked. When God gives His word, the action is carried out,

*"so is my word that goes from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it"*  
(Isaiah 55:11).

For example, when God said, "Let there be light" there was light. With God, the actions follow the words. The words of God bring about actions. We can understand the Holy Spirit as the 'words and actions of God'.

## **Do we follow God's words and actions?**

With a topic like this, we need to stop and question whether our words and actions are like those of God? Or are our words and actions like that of the people of the world? To put it another way, are we godly or are we worldly?

If we speak and act like God does, then we follow the spirit of God.

If we speak and act like the world does, then we are people of the world. Sometimes the ways of the people of the world are called the ways of the 'flesh.' We read this in Romans 8:9:

*"You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you."*

This passage says "if" the Spirit of God lives in us. We decide whether we live by the Spirit of God.

If we follow the words and actions of God, then we live by the Spirit of God. If we do this, then we are children of God:

*"For those who are led by the spirit of God are the children of God"*  
(Romans 8:14).

Let us live and speak in the way God wants us. Then we are truly children of God.

### **Summary Content of Lesson 19: The Holy Spirit**

- 1 The Holy Spirit is the same as the Spirit of God and the Spirit of the Lord.
- 2 The Holy Spirit is not different from God but is part of God.
- 3 Holy means separate. The Holy Spirit is holy because it is separate from the world.
- 4 The Holy Spirit is the words and actions of God.
- 5 The Holy Spirit is not the third part of the Trinity.

### **Revision Questions on Lesson 19: The Holy Spirit**

- 1 By what names is the Holy Spirit also known as in the Bible?
- 2 Is the Holy Spirit separate from God?
- 3 What does the word 'Holy' mean?
- 4 Is the Holy Spirit really the third part of the Trinity?
- 5 Give two ways that God uses His Holy Spirit.
- 6 How did God's prophets write the Bible?
- 7 Is the Holy Spirit the power of God?
- 8 Is the Holy Spirit the words of God?
- 9 Does God give His Holy Spirit to people?
- 10 Can we understand the Holy Spirit as being the words and actions of God?

## **Lesson 20: The Holy Spirit Gifts**

At times, God gave some of His Holy Spirit to men or women. He did this so that His message and actions were carried out.

In the New Testament, these were called the 'gifts of the Holy Spirit'. In the Old Testament, they were called the 'spirit of God' coming on people. These are slightly different terms for the same thing. God gives instructions and abilities to people to help them follow the ways of God.

### **Holy Spirit Gifts in the Old Testament**

God gave Moses the ability to perform miraculous signs and He gave him the Law of God. These were God's instructions on how the people of God were to live. God's people would not have known how to live if God had not given them this knowledge.

These instructions included how to build a house. In order to build this house, God gave certain people the knowledge and ability. We read in Exodus 31:2-6:

*"See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills – to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts. Moreover, I have appointed Oholiab son of Ahisamak, of the tribe of Dan, to help him. Also I have given ability to all the skilled workers to make everything I have commanded you."*

God gave His spirit to Moses and others for the purpose of establishing His people as a new nation with God at its centre.

God gave His spirit gifts to others in the Old Testament at different times. It was always a rare event. Its purpose was to keep God's people following God's ways. The prophets Elijah and Elisha were examples of this.

### **Holy Spirit Gifts in the New Testament**

The New Testament times was a time where God particularly gave His Holy Spirit to His people. It was the coming of the Messiah and a new age. The people needed to understand this message.

Jesus received the spirit at his baptism. This enabled him to teach God's message and perform miracles. We read this in Luke 3:21-22:

*"When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.""*

During his ministry, his 12 disciples were given the ability to do the same and they were sent on a preaching mission in Matthew 10. What we are not told is when this ability ended. However, we know that it did end because they had to be given the ability again at Pentecost. God gives His spirit for a purpose and when the purpose is complete, the spirit gift ends.

At Pentecost, the disciples of Jesus were given the spirit gifts. They were able to speak in tongues, so that visitors to Jerusalem were able to hear the message in their home languages. This was a new gift that had not occurred before. The reason for this new

gift is clear. It was to enable the message of God to go to other nations. The gospel needed to be preached in different languages.

The gift of speaking in tongues was one of a number of gifts that God gave to Christians. 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 describes them:

*"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines."*

There were many different types of gifts, but it was all from God who determined who had what gift.

Ephesians 4:11-13 tells us the purpose of these gifts:

*"So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for the works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."*

The gifts were given because the new believers had to be given the right instructions and the right abilities. The new church had to be built. It had to be united in faith and knowledge. It had to be like Christ.

The giving of the spirit gifts in the New Testament was similar to the giving of the gifts at the time of Moses. Both were to build up the people of God into a godly community. Both needed the instructions and abilities from God in order to do this effectively.

### **Were the Holy Spirit Gifts given for ever?**

At the time of Moses, once the people of God were established in their faith and way of life, we have no further mention of these gifts of the spirit. Only Joshua of the next generation had the spirit. The previous generation of Bezalel and Oholiab died in the wilderness. By the time they arrived in the Promised Land, the Law of Moses had been completed and the people had to follow the written instructions.

The same is true of the spirit gifts in the New Testament. Once the people of God had been established in the faith and way of life, the gifts of the spirit were no longer required. The New Testament was written down with God's instructions on the Christian way of life.

1 Corinthians 13:8-10 tells us a time would come when the miraculous gifts would cease:

*"Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears."*

A time would come when prophecies, tongues, knowledge and other gifts would end. This would be when 'completeness' comes. The completeness was when the New

Testament instructions were completed. The New Testament has everything we need to enable us to live as Christians. Now they had the instructions written down, the gifts were no longer needed.

The apostle Peter spoke about a limited time for the giving of spirit gifts. He said (Acts 2:38-39):

*"Peter replied, "Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God would call."*

It was for them and their children – two generations. And it was those who were afar off, which means the Gentiles in other lands.

But this is not the end of the spirit gifts. Hebrews 6:4-6 calls the spirit gifts as "the powers of the coming age". We read,

*"It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and **the powers of the coming age** and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance"*.

Given that these spirit gifts are gifts of a future age, it follows that the time before this age would also be a time without gifts.

We do not have these miraculous gifts now, but they will be part of the future age when Jesus comes back. Just as the spirit gifts were used to establish the people of God at the time of Moses and at the time of Jesus, so there will be another time when the spirit gifts are needed to establish the people of God.

There is now an obvious question we must address. What about the many churches today who claim to have the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit? Are these really the work of the Holy Spirit?

The short answer is "no". Those who claim to speak in tongues are not speaking in foreign languages, as occurred in the New Testament. Rather they are in a state of spiritual excitement where they speak repetitive nonsense. This same state is found among other non-Christian groups.

Those who claim to heal the sick have difficulty proving that they have really healed someone. There is little medical proof that miracles really happen. What is important is that we are careful in what we believe. We are not to believe everything we hear. As we read in Proverbs 14:15:

*"The simple believe anything, but the prudent give thought to their steps."*

The New Testament gives the same advice but in a different way. Reading from 1 John 4:1:

*"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."*

There were many false prophets in the times of the Old Testament and in the times of the New Testament. It is the same today.

We must be careful and base all our instruction and actions on the word of God found in the Bible. We know that the Bible comes from God. As for any teacher who claims to have God's gifts, we do not know if they are speaking the truth.

God has already done everything for us to have the right instructions so we can be His people. We have the written truth of Scripture. As we read in 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

*"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."*

Let us use Scripture to be our instructor to bring us to spiritual maturity and to enable us to be united in Christ with God's people.

### **Summary Content of Lesson 20: Holy Spirit Gifts**

- 1 The Holy Spirit gifts are abilities that God has given to certain people.
- 2 God gave the Holy Spirit gifts to people in the Old Testament to help build the Tabernacle.
- 3 God gave the Holy Spirit gifts to people in the New Testament to help build the church.
- 4 Holy Spirit gifts were for a limited time and ended when the purpose was achieved.
- 5 The churches today do not have the true Holy Spirit gifts, although they claim to.

### **Revision Questions on Lesson 20: Holy Spirit Gifts**

- 1 What are the Holy Spirit gifts?
- 2 Give an example of the Holy Spirit gifts in the Old Testament?
- 3 Give examples of the Holy Spirit gifts in the New Testament.
- 4 Why did God give the Holy Spirit gifts to people?
- 5 Do Holy Spirit gifts last for ever?
- 6 Will there be Holy Spirit gifts in the future kingdom of God?
- 7 Are the true Holy Spirit gifts around today?
- 8 Is the speaking in tongues in the churches today really the gifts of the spirit? If not, why not?
- 9 What should we do when we come across people who claim to have the spirit?
- 10 How do we build each other up today, learn to do spiritual works and learn to become mature Christians (which was the purpose of the Holy Spirit gifts)?



## Lesson 21: Angels

The word for 'angel' means 'messenger'. They are the message bearers of God. The first time the word occurs is with Sarah's handmaid Hagar,

*"Then the angel of the Lord told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her"" (Genesis 16:9).*

The angel was sent by God to deliver a message and change events in the way God wanted.

God uses angels to direct the affairs of man. The angels go between God in heaven and man on earth in order to do this.

Angels go into the presence of God. From this we know that angels are only good. Evil people cannot go into God's presence. We read this in Psalm 5:4-5,

*"For you are not a God who is pleased with wickedness; with you, evil people are not welcome. The arrogant cannot stand in your presence. You hate all who do wrong."*

There are thousands and thousands of angels who approach the throne of God in heaven and serve God.

### What do angels do?

The angels are the servants or ministers of God. Not only do they deliver messages, but they perform the tasks which God wants them to do,

*"Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will" (Psalm 103:20-21).*

Angels obey God and do what God wants carried out.

One way God uses angels is to look after faithful believers,

*"The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them" (Psalm 34:7).*

The believers can trust in God to protect them in their lives, and God does this through his angels. This is such a comfort to believers. All of us have many troubles in our lives, but God sends his angels to help us with them.

*"Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14).*

Angels are sent by God to look after his people and assist them in their life. Angels were sent to help people like Jacob, David, Daniel and Jesus. This passage also tells us that angels are spirits. They are not flesh but have a difference nature – spirit nature. This means they do not die.

But angels are also used by God to bring about punishments. The best example of this is Isaiah 37:36:

*"Then the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning – there were all the dead bodies".*

God destroyed the enemy of his people in a very dramatic way. God's people were surrounded by the enemy army of Assyria. They were going to lose, until God saved them.

God intervenes in the affairs of earth by sending his angels. They ensure that God's will is done, helping his people and punishing others as appropriate.

### **Representing God**

The angels represent God. When Moses saw the burning bush, there was an angel causing the bush to burn. We are told this in Exodus 3:2:

*"There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in the flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up."*

In versus 4 of the same chapter, instead of the word 'angel' it says that "the Lord" and "God" called him,

*"When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses!, Moses!". And Moses said, "Here I am.""*

It was an angel of God that was there, but he represented God. God saw and spoke, although it was through an angel. The same happens throughout Genesis 19 when angels appeared to Abraham. They were called "the Lord" because they spoke on behalf of God.

God speaks through his angels and the angels are called "God". This does not mean they were God. It means that were ministers acting on his behalf. Just as the king of a country sends messages and performs tasks through his ministers, so God does through His angels.

### **Divine Messengers and Human Messengers**

When angels appear to people, they look like men. People like Abraham and Lot welcomed visitors who were actually angels. So we are warned in Hebrews 13:2:

*"Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it."*

We mentioned that the word 'angel' means messenger. 'Messenger' is used in the Bible to mean any type of messenger - whether God's divine messenger or a human messenger. We see this most clearly in 2 Kings 1:3 where divine and human messengers are used in the same verse,

*"But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, "Go up and meet the messengers of the king of Samaria and ask them, 'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going off to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?""*

The Hebrew word for 'angel' of the Lord is the same word as 'messenger' of the King. They are both messengers. The only difference is that the translators have translated the first word as 'angel' and the second word as 'messenger'. The translators have done this throughout the Bible in every passage where they believe the messenger of God is meant. The question is whether the translators have always done this correctly.

There is at least one place where the translators have incorrectly translated 'messenger' as 'angel' and where the mistranslation is important. This is the occasion in 2 Peter 2:4,

*"For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment"*

The whole chapter in 2 Peter 2 is about false human teachers. We see this in the chapter heading in most Bibles. In verse 1 we read that it is about people,

*"But there were also false prophets among the **people**, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Sovereign Lord who bought them – bringing swift destruction on themselves."*

The chapter describes some of the false prophets from among the people. In verse 17 we read that these are again described as people,

*"These **people** are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them."*

This means that the 'angels who sinned' were really human 'messengers who sinned'. In fact, there are good reasons to understand that this verse is about the false messengers of Korah, Dathan and Abiram in Numbers 16 who fell into a deep pit.

The translation of the passage in Peter is incorrectly used to teach that there is a fallen angel. This verse does not teach this. As we have learnt, angels are always good.

### **Summary**

Angels are God's ministers who carry God's messages and carry out God's instructions. They are sent by God to bring about His plan and purpose. They help God's people but will punish if necessary.

They speak on God's behalf and are often the means by which God speaks to people. When they appear to God's people, they appear as men.

There are many thousands of angels, who minister before God's throne in heaven and come to earth to carry out His orders. They exist to serve God and bring honour to Him.

We have much to learn about serving God from angels. We should learn what God wants from the Bible, carry His message to other people and do what God wants us to do. We should not take glory to ourselves but give glory to God alone.

In fact, people who serve God are called God's messengers. For example, prophets were called God's messengers in Haggai 1:13,

*"Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, gave this message of the Lord to the people: "I am with you," declares the Lord."*

We can learn from the example of angels and try to be like them ourselves.

### **Summary Content of Lesson 21: Angels**

- 1 The word 'angel' means 'messenger'. They can be divine or human.
- 2 Sometimes the Bible translators incorrectly translate the messenger is divine when it is human.
- 3 2 Peter 2:4 incorrectly translates the word 'messenger' as angel when it should be a human messenger.
- 4 Divine angels deliver the message of God and do His will. They are always good.

5 God uses His angels to look after believers.

**Revision Questions on Lesson 21: Angels**

1 What does the word 'angel' mean?

2 What do angels do?

3 Are there evil angels or are there only good angels?

4 What particular things does God use angels for?

5 Does God only use angels to do good things?

6 Do angels represent God?

7 What do angels look like?

8 The origin Bible words for 'angel' in the Bible means 'messenger'. Does this only refer to divine messengers?

9 Does 2 Peter 2:4 refer to divine messengers or human messengers?

10 In what way are angels an example to us?

## Lesson 22: The Promises to Abraham and David

God made two promises in the Old Testament with everlasting consequences. This means that they applied during the time of the New Testament and continue to apply today. Both are mentioned frequently in the New Testament as being important. Both affect Christians. Both explain the role of Jesus. We need to understand these promises in order to understand the work of Jesus. These are promises that God made to Abraham and to King David.

### The Promise to Abraham

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

- 1) Abraham would have many children (17v2)
- 2) Abraham would be a father of many nations, including kings (17v3)
- 3) God would be his God (17v3)
- 4) Abraham and his children would be given the land of Canaan for ever (17v8)
- 5) All nations will be blessed through him (22:18)

The fact that all nations will be blessed means that everyone can benefit, including you and me.

These blessings were passed on to Abraham's son Isaac and his grandson Jacob. Finally, they passed to all of Jacob's descendants, who we know as the Israelites.

The Promise started to be fulfilled. The Israelites did inherit the land of Canaan, which we know as the land of Israel. But it did not last for ever. Instead of keeping faith with the God of Israel, the people of Israel turned to other gods. They lacked faith in God. So God turned away from them and removed from the land.

Even though Israel was not faithful, God is faithful. He had made a promise and He will keep it. God bring about the made a promise through Jesus. Peter explained this to his fellow Israelites when speaking about Jesus,

*"And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways" (Acts 3:25-26).*

The promise to Abraham spoke of a blessing to all nations. It is through Jesus that people can be blessed. This blessing would not automatically come on everyone, but people had to turn from wickedness to Jesus.

This is the key. Israel thought that they would get the blessings of Abraham by just being children of Abraham. But this is not true.

Abraham was blessed because he had faith. Isaac and Jacob were blessed because they had faith. In the same way, only those with faith will be blessed. Jesus made this clear to those who relied on their ancestry in John 8:39,

*"Abraham is our father, they answered. "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do what Abraham did."*

So far it seems that the promise to Abraham does not affect those of us who are non-Jews. But we are in for a surprise,

*"So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:26-29).*

If we have faith, like Abraham, and are baptised into Christ, then we become Abraham's children. The promises made to Abraham also belong to us.

This means that we will be blessed and as Abraham's children we will inherit the Promised Land for ever.

In order to remain in this state, we do need to behave like we are children of Abraham. We need to do what Abraham did and live by faith. As Galatians 3:9 says:

*"So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith".*

### **The Promise to David**

Now let us consider the promise God made to King David. We can read of this in:

*"When your days are over and you go to be with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. I will never take my love away from him, as I took it away from your predecessor. I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever; his throne will be established forever." (1 Chronicles 17:11-14).*

This teaches the following,

- 1) One of David's sons would be king.
- 2) This son would build a house for God.
- 3) The kingdom and throne of this son would last forever.
- 4) God would be his father.

When the angel Gabriel announced the birth of Jesus to Mary, Gabriel said that Jesus would fulfil the promise to David,

*"But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:30-33).*

The kingdom that Jesus sets up will be one based on the previous kingdom of David. Jesus will actually sit on the throne of David. Since the throne of David was in Jerusalem, it means that the throne Jesus will sit on will be in Jerusalem.

Unlike all worldly kingdoms, the kingdom of Jesus will last for ever. We understand that this will happen because Jesus has been made immortal and reign as king forever.

### **Combining the Two Promises**

Let us now put the two promises together. They teach the following:

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

These promises are about Jesus and the future role of Jesus with the earth. He will set up a kingdom that includes the land of Canaan, which we also know as Israel. His throne and capital will be Jerusalem. It is a kingdom based on earth.

We are taught to pray for this kingdom. Reading from Matthew 6:10,

*"your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven".*

### **Will we be in the Kingdom?**

The kingdom of God is coming. It will be set up because God has promised it. But will we be in it?

Jesus told a parable about the door to the kingdom and how many wanted to get into it. In Luke 13:22-30, we read,

*"The Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?"*

*He said to them, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading. 'Sir, open the door to us.'*

*"But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.'*

*"Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.'*

*"But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!"*

*"There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last."*

Jesus teaches us that many will try and get into the kingdom and will not make it. These people are those who knew of Jesus. They knew how to find the door and knock. But they were not faithful.

If we want to receive the promises, we must be people of faith. We need to show our faith by being baptised and living a life of faith.

### **Summary Content of Lesson 22: The Promises to Abraham and David**

- 1 The Promises of God to Abraham and David are important for Christians.
- 2 Both Promises predict Jesus and the kingdom of God.
- 3 They refer to the land we know today as Israel and to the city of Jerusalem.
- 4 We can enjoy what is predicted in the promises by being baptised.
- 5 Only those who are faithful (like Abraham) will be in this future kingdom.

### **Revision Questions on Lesson 22: The Promises to Abraham and David**

- 1 Name the two most important promises of God.
- 2 Can you list the main elements of the Promise of God to Abraham?
- 3 Was the Promise to Abraham fulfilled in the lifetime of Abraham?
- 4 How will the Promise to Abraham be fulfilled?
- 5 How can we enjoy the blessings of the Promise to Abraham?
- 6 Can you list the main elements of the Promise of God to David?
- 7 How will the Promise to David be fulfilled?
- 8 How will Jesus fulfill the promises to Abraham and David?
- 9 Who will be in the kingdom of God?
- 10 What must we do to be in the kingdom of God?



## Lesson 23: The Life of Jesus

Jesus Christ is the most important part of God's creation. He is the centre of God's Plan. He is the reason for the future life of those who choose to follow God.

God planned Jesus from the beginning. Just like an architect has a plan for building a house, so God had a plan to build His house.

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

All this was planned from the beginning. Even the believers have been chosen from the beginning as part of God's plan. We read this in Ephesians 1:4-5:

*"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will."*

God's plan from the beginning included us and Jesus. His plan is to adopt us as sons through the work of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is critical to our hope and life.

### Predicting Jesus

God's plan means that God was able to tell different people at different times what He was going to do. An example of this is Abraham,

*"Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56).*

Another example is David,

*"David said about him: "I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope" (Acts 2:25-26).*

Both Abraham and David understood God's plan with Jesus, long before Jesus existed. They knew this because of the promises that God gave them. They did not know that his name would be called Jesus, but they knew there would be a special man from their lineage. Jesus was to be the Son of Abraham and the Son of David. When they understood God's plan, both were glad.

The first verse of the New Testament teaches us that Jesus was the son of Abraham and son of David,

*"This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1).*

He was the one promised. He was the promised Messiah.

Much of Jesus' life had already been foretold in the Old Testament. He was to be born in Bethlehem. He was to be born of a virgin. There are many, many examples of this. Jesus himself was aware of this. We read this in Luke 24:27,

*"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."*

### The Life of Jesus

We will now briefly describe the life of Jesus. Jesus had a beginning. He did not exist before he was born. We can read of the events in the early chapters of Luke. His conception was miraculous. There was no human father because God was his father. The pregnancy and birth of Jesus were normal. The shepherds were able to see a normal baby. The baby grew in a normal way,

*"And the child grew and became strong: he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him" (Luke 2:40).*

Matthew chapter 2 tells us that Jesus was taken down to Egypt for several years for his safety, before returning to Nazareth. When Jesus was 12 years old, he went to the temple at Jerusalem and amazed the teachers by his understanding. We are then not told anything until Jesus was 30 when he was baptised.

The baptism of Jesus was significant and was the start of his ministry. He was baptised in the Jordan river by full immersion in water,

*"When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was baptised too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased"" (Luke 3:21-24).*

This event was a witness that Jesus was the Son of God and that God approved of him and provided His spirit to help him.

These blessings were also temptations. Jesus could be tempted to misuse the spirit. Jesus could be tempted to misuse the fact that God was his father. His knowledge of the plan of God was also a temptation to misuse this knowledge and bring about God's plan quickly. These temptations were with Jesus in the wilderness. Yet Jesus resisted. He was tempted throughout his life, but he resisted,

*"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin." (Hebrews 4:15).*

Here was the great battle – the battle for the mind. Jesus did not give into his temptations and so he did not sin. Every other human has. Jesus battled with the greatest enemy – his own mind – and won.

We battle with our greatest enemy – our own minds – and have lost because we sin. But we do not despair, because Jesus won his battle. If we unite ourselves with Jesus, he can help us win our own battle.

This is the good news for us. Jesus was not going to keep the benefits of his victory to himself but to share it with others.

Jesus spent his ministry telling others of this good news,

*"From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near"" (Matthew 4:17).*

In order to benefit from the work of Jesus, people need to repent. That is, they needed to change from their old ways. Matthew 4:23 expands on this:

*"Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people."*

The good news Jesus spoke about was the kingdom of God. The kingdom was coming and the people could be part of it. As evidence of his message being from God, he was able to heal the sick and raise the dead. Healing and raising the dead are among the blessings that will come when the Kingdom of God comes.

Jesus only did what was good and right. It was strange that he was betrayed by a friend, falsely accused by the leaders and killed by the Jewish people with the help of the Romans. God tells us that even this was part of His plan through Peter (Acts 2:22-23):

*"Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross."*

Jesus died. He was killed by professional killers who knew how to do their job. Jesus died like any man. He stopped breathing.

Jesus was dead for 3 days. He did not exist for 3 days. Just as he was born as a human, so he died as a human. He needed God to raise him. Peter continued his teaching (Acts 2:24):

*"But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was not possible for death to keep its hold on him."*

God raised Jesus to life again and gave him immortal life.

We are told what Jesus did after he was raised from the dead in Acts 1:3:

*"After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God."*

The disciples needed to be convinced about his resurrection and they needed to understand about the kingdom of God. These are the two parts to the gospel message.

Jesus did not stay with his disciples. He went to heaven in a cloud. We read in Acts 1:9-11:

*"After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."*

Jesus remains in heaven to this day. But he will return to the earth to set up the kingdom of God. He is the king of the Jews who will be the king of this kingdom.

When Jesus returns, Jesus will recognise his true disciples and separate them from those who are false. Jesus warns us about this in his final message in Revelation 22:12.

*"Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done."*

**Did Jesus exist before he was born?**

Why would a man exist before he was born? This does not make sense. The problem only comes with those who say that Jesus is God. If Jesus is God, then they say that Jesus existed from the beginning of Creation. These people misunderstand the teaching of the Bible.

God has a plan and purpose with the earth from the beginning, like an architect. An architect knows what he going to build. He plans the different stages of the building and who will construct them at the different times.

It is the same with God. God is the master architect. He is not just planning a building. He is planning a city and a kingdom. We read about Abraham,

*"he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."* (Hebrews 11:10).

God worked out what everything would look like before it happened. Isaiah 46:9-10 tells us of this plan from the beginning:

*"Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please'".*

God knew from the beginning how the things on earth were going to end up because God planned it. He invites us to be part of this plan,

*"Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world"* (Matthew 25:34).

The kingdom of God had been planned by God from the beginning. We are still waiting for this part of God's plan.

Because God planned everything from the beginning, He can tell us what is about to happen. Reading from Isaiah 37:26,

*"Have you not heard? Long ago I ordained it. In days of old I planned it; now I have brought it to pass, that you have turned fortified cities into piles of stone."*

In the case of Isaiah 37, God planned the events of king Hezekiah's time, where all the cities of Israel except Jerusalem were destroyed. God planned this from long ago. When the right time came, God made it happen.

Another example of God's plan is the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. In this case, God predicted He would use a king called Cyrus,

*"who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please'; he will say of Jerusalem, 'Let it be rebuilt,' and of the temple, 'Let its foundations be laid'"* (Isaiah 44:28).

What is interesting here is that king Cyrus had not yet been born. God was telling Isaiah that He would bring into the world a king called Cyrus who would help rebuild Jerusalem. God had planned this from the beginning. He was now telling one of his prophets a small part of this plan.

God plans events and then He makes them happen.

There are many other examples of God telling man what He is going to do before it happens. God did this through His prophets. As Amos 3:7 says,

*"Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets."*

### **Jesus was planned from the Beginning.**

God planned many things from the beginning. The greatest part of God's plan is His plan with Jesus. God planned Jesus from the beginning too. Peter speaks about this in the first Christian speech in Acts 2:22-23,

*"Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross."*

It was part of God's plan for Jesus to be killed on the cross. God had planned this from the beginning. Revelation also refers to this when it says in chapter 13:18 that Jesus was, *"the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world."* It did not mean that Jesus was killed at the beginning. It meant that God planned the death of Jesus from the beginning.

It was not just Jesus, Cyrus and others Bible characters were planned from the beginning. Believers also were. That includes us if we are believers. We were planned from the beginning. This is the teaching of 2 Timothy 1:9-10,

*"He has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."*

We had grace before the beginning of time! We were not there at the beginning of time, but we were part of God's plan from the beginning.

Ephesians 1:4-5 says a similar thing. Speaking about believers, it says,

*"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for the adoption of sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will."*

We were chosen by God before the creation of the world. That is, we were in God's plan.

Just like Jesus, believers were chosen from the beginning. Of course, we did not exist then. We only existed after our birth. The same is true of Jesus. He did not exist in the beginning. He only existed after his birth.

Now we can understand why some people get confused on verses about Jesus in the beginning. These verses are not saying that Jesus physically existed in the beginning. What they are saying is that Jesus was part of God's plan from the beginning.

For example, John 17:5, *"And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began."*

The glory that Jesus had in the beginning was only in the plan of God. Jesus was praying that he could soon have the glory that had been planned. This would occur after he died on the cross and after God raised him from the dead.

Jesus went on to pray in John 17:24, *"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."*

God loved the thought of Jesus from the beginning because Jesus was in His plan from the beginning. When he was raised from the dead, the disciples of Jesus were able to see his glory that had been planned from the start.

### **The birth of Jesus**

Now let us look at the actual birth of Jesus. Was the birth of Jesus like the birth of a man or like the birth of a God?

Mary was told that she would give birth to a child. It took 9 months of pregnancy for the baby Jesus to be formed. If Jesus was a God, then why did it take this time? The normal pregnancy of Mary teaches us that Jesus was formed naturally like any other baby.

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

Now think about his childhood. Jesus grew like any child. He was not full-grown as if he had come from heaven and taken on a man's body. We are told in Luke 2:40,

*"And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him."*

The words "the child grew" for Jesus are the same words used of the growth of John the Baptist. Jesus learned obedience and obeyed his earthly parents just like any other child should do.

The birth and growth of Jesus only makes sense if Jesus had a normal human beginning.

### **Summary Content of Lesson 23: The Life of Jesus**

- 1 God planned Jesus from the beginning, long before Jesus existed.
- 2 Jesus was born and grew like any other human child.
- 3 Jesus died without sinning and so was raised from the dead by God.
- 4 Jesus did not exist for the 3 days he was in the tomb.
- 5 Jesus went to heaven where he is now, but he will return to the earth.

### **Revision Questions on Lesson 23: The Life of Jesus**

- 1 Who is the most important part of God's plan?
- 2 Was Jesus planned from the beginning of the Bible?
- 3 Did Abraham and David know about Jesus?
- 4 Was Jesus alive before he was born?
- 5 Did Jesus have a childhood like any other human?
- 6 What happened at the baptism of Jesus?

- 7 Describe what happened with the temptations in the wilderness.
- 8 Was Jesus alive when he was in the tomb?
- 9 Where is Jesus now?
- 10 Will Jesus stay in heaven always?

## **Lesson 24: Resurrection and Judgment**

### **Humans do not live for ever.**

It is essential to understand that we humans do not have eternal life. We live and we die. Our life is described in the Bible as something that is temporary. It is like a wind that comes and goes, a shadow that forms then disappears, a cloud that passes by or grass that springs up and then fades away. Human life is temporary.

The only way we can obtain eternal life is through Jesus Christ. This is taught in the most famous verse in the Bible, John 3:16,

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life".*

If man had eternal life already, there would be no reason for Jesus to die. Jesus died so that we might obtain eternal life.

If man already had eternal life, it would mean that wicked people would live forever. God's plan does not allow sinners to keep on sinning for eternity. This does not make sense.

God's plan allows for believers to obtain eternal life,

*"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).*

All of us will die because of sin. Death is the wages of our sin. However, there is a gift that God can give us, which is eternal life. This is obtained through the work of Jesus and our belief in him.

There are two problems with this arrangement. The first problem is that all people die. So how can they then live?

The answer to this problem is the resurrection of the dead. Dead believers will be raised from the grave back to life.

The second problem is that not all believers are genuine. Some are fake. Will fake believers get eternal life?

The answer to this problem is the judgment. Believers will be judged as to who is true and who is false, or put another way, who is wicked and who is righteous. Only the righteous will be given eternal life.

### **The Resurrection and Judgment**

In Romans 2:5-8 we read about God's attitude to wicked believers and about the judgment:

*"But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God "will repay each person according to what they have done." To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger."*

The righteous are those who do good. They will be rewarded with eternal life.



The wicked are those who are *"self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil"*. They will not be given eternal life but will be subject to God's anger.

God will ensure righteous judgment is carried out, when all believes are judged fairly according to what they have done.

Jesus explained God's plan of resurrection and judgment in John 5:27-29:

*"And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned."*

God has delegated the judgment to His Son Jesus. Jesus will call the dead believers out of the graves and judge them. They will be judged according to what they have done. They will either be declared 'good' or they will be declared 'evil'. The good will live and the evil will not.

### **The Resurrection**

The resurrection of the dead was taught by Jesus when Lazarus died. His sister Martha was crying when Jesus comforted her,

*"Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."*

*Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."*

*Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:23-26).*

Believers believe in the resurrection from the dead. This will happen "at the last day". Believers will be raised from the dead to an eternal life. Jesus wants us to believe in this.

The book of Thessalonians 4:16-17 gives us more details about the events of the resurrection;

*"For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."*

The resurrection starts with a shouted command from Jesus, which happens when he comes back from heaven. This results in the dead believers being raised. The believers who are alive at this time will be gathered with these raised believers and will be transported to be with Jesus. The good believers will then be with Jesus forever.

There was much confusion about the resurrection of the dead at the time of Jesus. Some believed in it and some did not,

*"Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead." When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. (The Sadducees say that there is no*

*resurrection, and that there are neither angels or spirits, but the Pharisees believe all these things)" (Acts 23:6-8).*

The Sadducees were the ruling priests and they did not believe in the resurrection. This was an error and Jesus told them,

*"Jesus replied, "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?" (Mark 12:24).*

Unfortunately today there is also much confusion about whether there is a resurrection. Many religious leaders do not believe in the resurrection, just like the Sadducees of Jesus' day. However, the Bible teaches there is a resurrection of the dead.

## **The Judgment**

We have given some of the verses that teach the resurrection of the dead. We will now give some more about the judgment.

The judgment is taught in many of Jesus's parables. An example of this is the parable of the fish net in Matthew 13:47-50:

*"Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

The believers are like the fish. They will be judged as to whether they are good and bad. The good are kept and the bad destroyed.

This separation of the good and bad at judgment occurs in many other parables. There is the separation of the wheat from the tares. There is the separation of the sheep from the goats.

The bad must be separated from the good so that the bad do not get eternal life.

Given that there is a separation of the good from the bad, how do we make sure that we are judged to be good by Jesus and not rejected? A ruler asked Jesus this exact question in Matthew 19:16-17:

*"Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life? Why do you ask me about what is good? Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments."*

If we want eternal life, we must obey God and keep the commandments. We must come to Jesus, believe in him and follow him.

If we think we already have eternal life, then we may not try hard in order to gain it. We have a danger of missing out on God's gift.

## **Conclusion**

Eternal life is a great gift. If man could buy it, he would. If man could earn it, he would. But eternal life is a gift that cannot be bought or earned.

Eternal life is more valuable than anything else this short life has. It is worth us doing everything we can to receive it. It is worth spending our short life now to gain it.

Let us think about this eternal gift that God is offering us in Jesus and obey the commands in order to receive it. We will leave you with a quotation from Jude 1:20-21:

*"But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the holy spirit, keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you eternal life."*

### **Summary Content of Lesson 24: Resurrection and Judgment**

- 1 Jesus will return to the earth to raise dead believers to life.
- 2 Jesus will then judge the believers as to whether they were faithful or not.
- 3 The faithful will be given eternal life, but the unfaithful will not.
- 4 Many people in Jesus' time did not believe in the resurrection.
- 5 There are many verses which teach that the resurrection is the true hope of Christians.

### **Revision Questions on Lesson 24: Resurrection and Judgment**

- 1 Given that all people die, how can the faithful then live?
- 2 How does God make sure that fake Christians are not given eternal life?
- 3 Who will be the judge of which believers are genuine and which ones are fake at the judgment?
- 4 How can we comfort Christians over the death of their loved ones who were believers?
- 5 How will the resurrection of the dead come about?
- 6 Did everyone believe in the resurrection of the dead at the time of Jesus?
- 7 What do you know about the judgment?
- 8 What happens to the good and the bad at judgment?
- 9 How can we make sure we are judged as good believers and avoid being rejected?
- 10 How important is it to you to get eternal life?

## **Lesson 25: Holiness**

### **Be Holy**

We are told we must be holy,

*"But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy"" (1 Peter 1:15-16).*

Just as God is holy, so we must be. Hebrews 12:14 says,

*"without holiness no one will see the Lord".*

Only holy people will be in the kingdom,

*"But the holy people of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it for ever – yes, for ever and ever" (Daniel 7:18).*

If we want to be part of that future age, then we must be holy. The holy kingdom of God will ultimately only have holy people in it.

The word "holy" means "set apart, separate". This raises the question: "What are they to be set apart from?"

The answer to this is "the world,"

*"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:1-2).*

We are not to be like the people in the world. We have to transform ourselves into the people of God – we need to change into holy ones who are pleasing to God.

### **Being Holy in this world**

We must live in the world, but that does not mean we should be like them. Peter says that we must live like we are different people – we must live like we are foreigners in this world,

*"Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" (1 Peter 2:11-12).*

There must be a difference in the way we live. This should be obvious to those around us. We must be different from the world. John writes about the world and underlines why we must be different,

*"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives for ever" (1 John 2:15-17).*

If we love the world, then we won't want to be different. Those who are like the world will pass away with it. If we are like God we will live for ever.

## What does it mean to be holy?

It is easiest to see this in the book of Ephesians where it gives many practical examples of what it means to be holy. In a section describing the differences, Paul writes in Ephesians 4:22–24:

*"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."*

Here it the transformation we need to make. We must transform our way of thinking into something that is like God. Another way of looking "holiness" is to consider it to be "godliness". We are to be like God, and not like the world.

The word 'holiness' emphasizes the difference we need to have from the world.

The word 'godliness' emphasizes the likeness we should have to God.

We can break the practical advice of Ephesians down into four headings. If we follow this advice, we will go a long way to being holy or godly:

- 1) Speech. We must speak truth (Ephesians 4:25). We must use our speech to build people up (4:29), speaking only wholesome words (4:29). We must avoid foolish talk, obscenity and bad jokes (5:4). We must be thankful (5:4).
- 2) Self-control. We must control our anger (4:26, 31). We must avoid bitterness, evil and fighting (4:31). We must avoid sexual immorality, impurity and greed (5:3). We must avoid drunkenness (5:18).
- 3) Love. We must be kind, compassionate and forgiving (4:32). We must submit to others (5:21).
- 4) Givers not takers. We must not take other people's things. We must work. We must have enough to give the poor (4:28).

The first two points are largely about controlling the flesh. We must control our tongues and our bodies.

The second two points are about walking in the spirit. We must show we live in the spirit.

If we only control the flesh, and do not walk in the spirit, we will not be like God.

If we walk in the spirit and don't control the flesh, then we will look like the world with bits of godliness. This is not like God either.

Much of the above guidance is summed up in the example of a little child. A little child does not know bad language, is thankful and speaks truth. A little child is not bitter, angry, impure, immoral or drunk. A little child submits to others and is kind. A little child does not steal and tends to share. We must all be like little children if we are to inherit the kingdom (Luke 18:17),

*"I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."*

We could summarise holiness as having 2 parts:

- 1) Controlling the flesh

## 2) Promoting the spirit

Promoting the spirit includes promoting the fruits of the spirit described in Galatians 5:22-23;

*"But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law".*

Someone who controls the flesh and promotes the spirit becomes a different person from one who does not. It is the difference between a man of the world and a man of God. It will help us understand the differences between the two if we put them side by side.

<u>Holiness</u>	<u>Worldliness</u>
Patient	easily angered
Peaceful	argumentative, complaining, fights
Humble	driven by self-importance and pride
Faithful to partner	driven by poorly-restrained sexual desires
Self-control	gets drunk and over indulgent
Happy at good things only	Happy at all things including evil
Loves enemies	Loves only friends
Kind to the poor	Selfish
Speaks only good	Speaks good and bad
Loves God's word	No place for God
Praises God	Disrespects God
Gentle	Harsh
Does good even when it hurts	Does whatever is necessary to avoid hurt/blame

There is a big difference between them and worldly people. God wants His people to be holy and godly people – people who are like Him.

We read about this in Colossians 3:12-14,

*"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity".*

As God's people, we have to choose to become holy and like God. It is not natural. We have to take positive steps to become holy. It is like putting on clothes. We have to choose the clothes and then clothe ourselves with the right attitudes and behaviours.

God knows whether we are holy or not. We must ensure we are holy when Jesus returns. This is one of the final messages of the Bible:

*"Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue*

*to be holy. Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done...The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen" (Revelation 22:11-12, 21).*

### **Summary Content of Lesson 25: Holiness**

- 1 We must be holy because God is holy. We must be like God.
- 2 The word 'Holy' means separate. We should be separate from the world.
- 3 We must control our flesh, which means we should control our bodies and our tongues.
- 4 We must promote the spirit, which means we should love others and be givers.
- 5 We must choose to have holy and godly behaviours in the way we choose what to wear.

### **Revision Questions on Lesson 25: Holiness**

- 1 What does 'holy' mean?
- 2 What should we be separate from?
- 3 Can we be people of God if we do the things of the world?
- 4 What does being godly mean?
- 5 Give 4 ways in which we need to show that we are godly or holy.
- 6 Can you summarise what it means to be holy in 2 ways.
- 7 Will we please God if we do spiritual things, but still carry on doing worldly things?
- 8 How did Jesus show us what we must be like?
- 9 Give examples of holy behaviour compared to worldly behaviour.
- 10 How do we become holy like God?

## Lesson 26: Fellowship

When people are baptised into Christ, they are baptised into a fellowship of believers. This is taught using the image of the body,

*"Just as a body, though one, has many parts; but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one spirit so as to form one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we were all given one spirit to drink" (1 Cor 12:12-13).*

We are all one body. Just as a hand is not the body, so we alone are not the body. We are only in the body if we are part of it. We are in the body when we are baptised.

We read how believers immediately came together in Acts 2:42,

*"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer".*

Here is the basis of Christian living. Believers join together and there are highlighted four ways of doing this,

- The apostles teaching
- Fellowship
- Breaking of Bread
- Prayer

1 John 1:7 makes it clear that believers must be together,

*"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin".*

If we walk in the light, then we automatically are in fellowship with our fellow walkers.

1 Corinthians 1:9 says, *"God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord".*

We are God's choice. The same is true for all our new brothers and sisters. They are God's choice. It is not for us to disagree with God's choice of our new brothers and sisters.

Just as a family is a collection of people with the same father, so we become part of a spiritual family with God as our Father,

*"So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith" (Galatians 3:26).*

We are called to be united in Christ with all our new brothers and sisters. The Scripture is full of this teaching. We are to be one body, one family, one loaf, one temple, one vine, one flock.

### The Breaking of Bread Service

The Breaking of Bread service is an essential activity for every Christian. Jesus told his disciples to break bread and drink wine in memory of his death and resurrection. The details are taught in Matthew 26:17-30, Mark 14:12-28, Luke 22:7-20 and 1 Corinthians 11:17- 29.



The disciples were to take some bread and break it. The broken bread was to be a symbol of the body of Jesus broken on the cross. They were to remember what Jesus had done for them and offer a prayer of thanks. The disciples were to share the bread among themselves and eat it.

They were then to take a cup of wine. The wine was a symbol of the blood of Jesus that was spilled on the cross. They were to remember the blood of Jesus and offer a prayer of thanks for it. Then they were to pass it among themselves and take a sip of wine each.

When the Bible refers to the 'Breaking of Bread', it means taking both the bread and the wine in memory of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

In the New Testament, it was their practice to break bread once a week, usually on the first day of the week, a Sunday. But there is no command that it has to be a Sunday or even once a week. The service can take place more frequently and on other days of the week. However, we are supposed to remember the work of Jesus, so it is good practice to break bread once a week.

### **Who to fellowship and not to fellowship**

Just as there is light, there is also darkness. Believers in the light are not to fellowship darkness,

*"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?" (2 Corinthians 6:14-15).*

We should not fellowship those who are in darkness. Our fellowship is only with those who are in the light and this light comes from understanding the apostles teaching.

The letters of John teach us who we should fellowship and who we should not fellowship. In 2 John, we are told not to fellowship those who believe Jesus did not come in the flesh;

*"I say this because many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist...If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work" (2 John 1:7, 10-11).*

We should not share with those who teach the nature of Christ falsely. Those who teach the Trinity are like this. We must not fellowship them.

On the other hand, we must fellowship true believers. In 3 John 9-10 we read of someone who did not and who also prevented others from fellowship, the apostle John said,

*"I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will not welcome us. So when I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, spreading malicious nonsense about us. Not satisfied with that, he even refuses to welcome the other believers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church."*

We must fellowship those who walk in the light. We must not fellowship darkness.

## **What is Fellowship?**

Fellowship means sharing. In Acts 2:44-45, we read,

*"All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need".*

They shared everything. They did not consider their own belongings as belonging only to themselves.

Fellowship means giving and not just taking. We must make sacrifices for the sake of others. We read in Hebrews 13:16,

*"And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased".*

We all have a duty to make sure that our fellow believers have a minimum of food and clothing,

*"Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (James 2:15-17).*

The ecclesia is a place where the basic needs for food and clothing can be met. The ecclesia needs to know the needs of its members so that these needs can be met.

## **When someone sins**

When a brother or sister sins, it is important that sin is recognized as sin by the sinner. This is necessary if there is to be repentance by the sinner. Sin takes them away from God (Isaiah 59:2, Psalm 5:4). It is the duty of the ecclesia to ensure that a sinner is restored (Galatians 6:1-4, James 5:15, 20) by bringing the sinner to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10, 2 Peter 3:9).

There are some sins which are considered so serious that consideration should be given to withdrawing our fellowship from them. The purpose of this is not to get rid of them, but to bring them to repentance.

Examples of this are incest (1 Corinthians 5), brothers deliberately not working (2 Thessalonians 3), divisive people (Titus 3:20, Romans 16:17-18) and false teachers (2 John 1, 2 Peter 2).

What is common to all these examples is that their sin can spread beyond the sinner. It can be copied and corrupt other brothers and sisters. In these cases, it is best to withdraw from the brother and sister so that no-one else is tempted to commit the same sin.

Matthew 18 gives an example on how to approach a sinner to bring them to repentance (Matthew 18:15-18). Firstly, this can be attempted by an individual. This should be done gently, considering that we are also tempted (Galatians 6:1). If this does not work, then two or three should try. If this does not work, then the ecclesia should try,

*"If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church, and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector" (Matthew 18:17).*

That is, fellowship from them is withdrawn until they repent. We should not forget them forever. The aim is to lead them to repentance. Remember that we all need the mercy and forgiveness of God if we are to be in the kingdom.

Sin disrupts the peace of the ecclesia. However, if it is dealt with in a loving way as described, then peace can be restored.

### **Conclusion**

Being a member of a loving family with God and Jesus as part of it is a great place to live. We are not alone in our lives, and we are together to help each other get to the kingdom. We will end with the words of 1 John 1:3-4,

*"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete".*

### **Summary Content of Lesson 26: Fellowship**

- 1 Baptised believers become part of a community of believers.
- 2 Believers must continue in the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer.
- 3 We must not fellowship those who believe Jesus was not a true man.
- 4 Fellowship means sharing our faith as well as practical things.
- 5 We must be careful with sin, especially sins that can be taught to others.

### **Revision Questions on Lesson 26: Fellowship**

- 1 When people are baptised, does God want them to live as Christians by themselves?
- 2 What 4 things do believers do together?
- 3 Can we choose which believers to fellowship?
- 4 What do we call our fellow believers?
- 5 Can we fellowship anyone we like?
- 6 Can we fellowship those who believe in the Trinity?
- 7 What does fellowship mean?
- 8 Do we only share spiritual things with our new brothers and sisters in Christ?
- 9 If a brother or sister in Christ sins, does it matter?
- 10 How does a believer help restore a sinner?

## Lesson 27: Prayer

Prayer pleases God,

*"The Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him" (Proverbs 15:8).*

So prayer is not just something that Christians can do if they want to. It is much more than that. It is something God wants us to do as part of living as Christians,

*"Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show that they should always pray and not give up" (Luke 18:1).*

So if we want to please God and Jesus, we should have an active prayer life and keep it active.

Christians were people who were known as people who prayed frequently. In the early days of Christianity, we read in Acts 2:42 that,

*"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer".*

Prayer was a very important part of being a faithful Christian and part of communal life together.

We should pray because it works. A key verse is from James 5:16:

*"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."*

The Psalms says a similar thing,

*"and call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honour me" (Psalm 50:15).*

God wants to be prayed to when we are in trouble. If we are delivered from our trouble, then we can give thanks to God.

We could spend our lives without praying to God. But why should we not have God as our helper by our side during our life? We don't need to bear our troubles alone. If we pray, we can imagine God as being at our own right side in our life.

### **The Need to listen to God first**

There is a simple rule in prayer - if we want God to listen to us, then we must first listen to Him,

*"When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen," says the Lord Almighty" (Zechariah 7:13).*

If we don't listen to God, then why should God listen to us?

We read in Proverbs 28:9,

*"If anyone turns a deaf ear to my instruction, even their prayers are detestable".*

A believer must show he is a believer by hearing and obeying God's word. If he chooses to ignore God in Scripture, then his prayers too will be ignored by God.

## How to Pray

The importance of prayer was really given full expression when the Temple of God was set up by Solomon. Solomon got down on his knees, raised his hands and offered a wonderful prayer that would help all believers of his day. God replied directly to this prayer:

*"the Lord appeared to him at night and said: "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices. When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and I will forgive their sin and will heal the land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there for ever. My eyes and my heart will always be there" (2 Chron 7:12-16).*

When they were in trouble because of sin, and they repented, then God would hear their prayer. Notice that the way the people prayed to Him was important. They were to humble themselves and turn from their wicked ways. If they were not to humble and turn, then it is likely that these prayers would not be heard. In contrast the prayer of the righteous would be powerful and effective.

If we pray to God in the name of Jesus, then God listens to our prayers because of Jesus. Jesus is the righteous man who can help our own prayers become effective. So Jesus tells us to pray in his name,

*"In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete" (John 16:23-24).*

So we offer our prayers in the name of Jesus because this makes them more effective.

It is because we pray in the name of Jesus that we should not be afraid of approaching God. We are told to be bold in prayer,

*"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:14-16).*

## A Model Prayer

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he gave them a brief prayer (Mat 6:9-13, Luke 11:2-4). This prayer started with things about God and included things about self. We can see these things below:

Our Father in heaven –	the title of address to God in our prayer.
Hallowed by your name –	things of God – 1
Your kingdom come –	things of God – 2
Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven –	things of God – 3

Give us today our daily bread – things of man – 1

Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors – things of man – 2

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil – things of man - 3

In this prayer, God comes first and man second. We are to pray for the things we really need – daily food, forgiveness and protection from evil. These are the things that really matter. The prayer is not about selfish goals or praying for material things. It is not “I” centred. It tries to see life from God’s point of view and prays from that perspective. God’s name must be honoured when we pray.

Jesus says that whatever happens in answer to his prayer, it is God’s will that should be done. When Jesus was about to be killed, he still prayed “*Your will be done*” (Matthew 26:39, 42). When we pray, we must also pray that God’s will be done, rather than our own. We should be content with whatever God’s will is in our lives.

One of the most important things to do in prayer is to not stop the habit of praying. Jesus spoke two parables with this specific lesson. The first is about a bad judge who only cared about himself. A widow was able to irritate him by her persistent requests (Luke 18:1-8). Eventually the judge was worn out and he granted the widows request. The parable challenges us to try and wear God out with our repeated requests. But we will not succeed. God continues to listen to the prayers of His people, and we must continue to pray. This is the point - “*they should always pray and not give up*”.

### **Attitude**

Our attitude when praying is important. When praying with others, we should avoid anger and disputes beforehand,

*“Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing”* (1 Timothy 2:8).

Paul continues to talk about the role of men and women and says that women,

*“I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man: she must be silent”* (1 Timothy 2:12).

It is clear that this means that women should not be giving the communal prayers.

There are dangers in the offering of communal prayers. The main danger is turning the prayer into a performance in order to demonstrate how spiritual one is to others listening. Jesus said,

*“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full”* (Matthew 6:5).

These “show prayers” may impress man, but they do not impress God. Our holy prayers should not be misused to impress one another.

The attitude we should have in prayer is described in Isaiah,

*“These are the ones I look on with favour: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word”* (Isaiah 66:2).

Humility and obedience to God’s word are the keys to the way we should talk to God.

When praying, it is about our attitude and way of life that is important. It is not about how clever we are with words or how educated we are or how much scripture we can remember. The qualifications for one to give a communal prayer are humility and one who listens carefully to God's word.

Prayer is really about having a relationship with God. For an active relationship with God, we need to talk to Him in prayer often. You cannot have active relationship with someone you never talk to. This would be a one-sided relationship. We also need to listen to God. We need to read His words in the Bible regularly.

Having an active prayer life is necessary to have an active relationship with God. So let us pray, pray often and never stop praying.

### **Summary Content of Lesson 27: Prayer**

- 1 God wants us to keep on praying and not to give up.
- 2 If we want God to listen to our prayers, we must first listen to God's words in the Bible.
- 3 We must pray to God in the name of Jesus.
- 4 We must pray with humility and not pray to impress other people.
- 5 The Lord's prayer is a model prayer.

### **Revision Questions on Lesson 27: Prayer**

- 1 Why should we pray?
- 2 Does prayer work?
- 3 What should we do when we are in trouble?
- 4 When might God not listen to people's prayers?
- 5 As Christians, how should we approach God in prayer?
- 6 How did Jesus teach us to pray?
- 7 What does the Lord's prayer teach us about how to pray?
- 8 Must God answer our prayers?
- 9 After praying for the same thing several times, is it best to stop asking?
- 10 What should our attitude be when we pray?

## Lesson 28: The Family

God made the one man and one woman and gave them the ability to have children. God designed the family from the beginning.

We are all from families. It is important that we understand our roles within our family so that we can live in a way that is acceptable to God.

The marriage unit is the centre of the family. Marriage is a blessing from God,

*"He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favour from the Lord"*  
(Proverbs 18:22).

Jesus and the apostle Paul endorsed the Genesis basis for marriage and quoted from the original passage in Genesis 2:24:

*"That is why a man will leave his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh."*

In Genesis 2:20 we are told that the woman was to be made as a "help in front of" Adam, as the Hebrew words literally mean. She was to help him in his life before God. She was not the same as man and had a different role.

The woman came from the man himself. So man was to think of his wife as part of himself and to care for the woman in the way that he would care for his own flesh. Ephesians 5:28-29 & 33 brings this out,

*"In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church...However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband".*

Husbands must love their wives as their own bodies. He feeds and cares for the wife like his own body. Ephesians 5:25-27 tells us that husbands must love their wife just as Christ loved the church,

*"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."*

We are given a beautiful description of marriage in Ecclesiastes 9:9,

*"Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun".*

This picture is also in Proverbs (5:18),

*"May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth."*

We note the words "wife of your youth". Marriage is designed to be a life-long commitment. As Jesus said,

*"So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" (Matthew 19:6).*

Malachi brings out God's opinion emphatically, "I hate divorce" (Malachi 2:16).



## **Marriage is a Spiritual Pattern**

Marriage is a pattern of the relationship between Christ and the church. Just as Christ does not cast off his church, so the husband must not cast off the wife. Paul tells us, *"For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, of which he is the saviour"* (Ephesians 5:23).

Just as Christ provides leadership to the church, so the man provides headship in the marriage. The husband is not to rule the wife harshly,

*"Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh to them"* (Colossians 3:19).

They were to be considerate if they want their prayers heard,

*"Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers"* (1 Peter 3:7).

Man may be stronger and the head, but he was not to take advantage of his position, just as Christ did not take advantage of his position.

A key element of the role of the wife is her submissive behaviour to her husband. This is reiterated many times in the Old and New Testaments. She submits just as the church submits to Christ,

*"Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything"* (Ephesians 5:24).

We read in 1 Peter 3:7 that wives are *"fellow-heirs of the grace of life"* with their husbands. They were both to live in faith. One way they live in this faith is to carry out the roles given to them in marriage.

If a husband has an unbelieving wife, then he should teach her and love her so he can win her for Christ.

If a wife has an unbelieving husband, then she should submit to him and by her meek behaviour she may win him for Christ.

## **Children**

A marriage may be blessed with children. For example,

*"Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table"* (Psalms 128:3).

Children are to be brought up in a godly household so that they become godly. Speaking of the unity of marriage and how this helps children it says in,

*"Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth"* (Malachi 2:15).

A child's attitude to its parents is covered by one of the 10 commandments,

*"Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you"* (Exodus 20:12).

This command is repeated in the New Testament. Honouring father and mother is a critical step in keeping the family of God faithful and united.

Honour includes respect. Leviticus 19:3 highlights this,

*"Each of you must respect his mother and father."*

Another way to honour one's parents is by listening and obeying them,

*"Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching. They are a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck" (Proverbs 1:8-9).*

*"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Ephesians 6:1).*

Parents must teach their children the ways of God.

*"Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them". Note that this command is not just for parents to teach their children. It also requires grandparents to teach their grandchildren" (Deuteronomy 4:9).*

Teaching children is part of helping the next generation. There is the critical need to pass on the teaching of God to the next generation, otherwise faith will die and our children will not be saved.

## **The Family**

Let us put the laws about children together.

The parents must teach the child about God and children must listen to their parents. In that way God is ensuring that faith is passed onto the next generation. One generation must teach and the next must listen. Proverbs 22:6 says,

*"Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it".*

But it goes further. The grandparents must teach their grandchildren. In this way, 2 parents and 4 grandparents are teaching the same children about God.

Not only that. Since grandchildren are honouring their parents, they also honour them by honouring their parent's parents. In other words, children must listen to both their parents and grandparents. God is making very sure that faith is passed onto the next generation.

Parents discipline their children as part of their upbringing. When a father does this, he must be wise,

*"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).*

The honouring of father and mother continues throughout life, even when the children become adults. says;

*"Listen to your father, who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old" (Proverbs 23:22).*

We are told that children are required to look after their parents in old age and so repay the care that they had received when they were young (1 Timothy 5:4). The need to do this is critical,

*"Anyone who does not provide for his relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever"*  
(1 Timothy 5:8).

In summary, all members in a family have a role they must live up to. These roles are for husbands, wives, parents, children and grandparents. By living up to these roles, families can be happy, spiritual and harmonious. In that way they will be blessed. May God bless you and your family as you try to live according to these roles.

### **Summary Content of Lesson 28: Family**

- 1 God designed marriage from the beginning.
- 2 Both husband and wife have different roles, but should be united in their faith.
- 3 The husband should love his wife as his own body, as Christ loved the church.
- 4 The wife should submit to the husband, as the church submitted to Christ.
- 5 Children should be raised to share their faith, and should obey their parents.

### **Revision Questions on Lesson 28: Family**

- 1 What does the Bible say about marriage after God made man and woman?
- 2 Why was the woman not made exactly like the man?
- 3 Why was the woman made from man?
- 4 What must the husband do for the wife?
- 5 What must the wife do for the husband?
- 6 Is it OK for a Christian to divorce?
- 7 What type of husband or wife should a Christian look for?
- 8 If our husband or wife is not a believer, what should we do?
- 9 How should parents bring up their children?
- 10 What must children do?

## **Lesson 29: Politics, voting and joining the army/police**

### **God rules**

God is in control of this world. He is in control of this world's rulers and their politics.

*"The Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men" (Daniel 4:17).*

The people God wants to be in power will be in power. He is working out his divine purpose through them, even if they are evil.

If Christians vote, they could be supporting someone God does not want in power. Of course, God needs no help from us in choosing leaders.

There can only be one wise choice for a world leader – Jesus. The Lord Jesus is the world's future king,

*"The Son of Man (Jesus) will sit on his glorious throne" (Matthew 19:28).*

The believers are those who will help Jesus rule in this future kingdom,

*"If we endure, we will also reign with him in his coming kingdom on earth" (2 Timothy 2:12).*

### **Politics and Warfare**

Jesus was never involved in either politics or protests. He had a simple, guiding principle,

*"My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36).*

Jesus made it clear that we need to be different from the world,

*"I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it" (John 17:14-16).*

We live in the world, but we must not be like the people of the world. Just as Jesus was not like the people of the world.

Every country has its own army so that it can fight enemies. This is against the teaching of God. Christians are told to love our enemies. They cannot shoot an enemy and say that they love them! The military and police service will use violence if they believe it is necessary.

Jesus was trying to change the world for the better, but he did not do it through politics. He was concerned about the people's spiritual condition. He left politics to the leaders of his day. Even though Jesus was unjustly treated by the government, he did not protest. He was never in conflict with the Roman authorities.

When Jesus was on trial for his life, he did not show any resistance. He set the example on how to behave. Jesus said,

*"love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).*

Jesus was a man of peace. His followers must do the same:

*"strive for peace with everyone" (Hebrews 12:14).*

*"if possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all"* (Romans 12:18).

*"if when you do good and suffer for it you endure; this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps"* (1 Peter 2:20,21).

Christians must learn contentment, not protest,

*"I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content"* (Philippians 4:11).

The writer was in prison potentially facing death when he wrote that!

### **The Christian attitude to World Governments**

All these scriptures show us what a Christian's attitude towards authority must be:

*"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, whoever resists authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement"* (Romans 13:1-2).

All authorities are appointed by God. To disobey the rulers of your country is to disobey God. Instead. Christians are,

*"to be submissive to rulers and authorities; to be obedient; to be ready for every good work; to speak evil of no one; to avoid quarrelling; to be gentle; and to show perfect courtesy toward all people"* (Titus 3:1,2).

And,

*"be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution"* (1 Peter 2:13).

One way that Christians are subject to human authorities is to pay taxes. When he was asked whether Jews should pay their taxes to the Romans Jesus said,

*"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's"* (Luke 20:22-25).

But there is one exception and that is when man's rules are clearly against the commandments given by God,

*"we must obey God rather than men"* (Acts 5:29).

The commands of God and Jesus Christ must always come first. For the same reason, Daniel's three friends refused to worship a golden image set up by a mighty king called Nebuchadnezzar on threat of death (Daniel 3:18).

There are many other examples where the attitudes and behaviours of the leadership of a country are different from those of God. The leaders of the world do not think like God. Sometimes the state will disagree with the Christian way. Christians must then accept any punishment which may come from obeying *"God rather than men"*.

### **Citizens of God's Kingdom**

The manifesto of God is very different from the manifesto of men. God's Kingdom is not like the current kingdoms of this world. Jesus told Pilate, the leading politician of his country,

*"Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place" (John 18:36).*

The kingdom of Jesus will not be based on violence and greed. A Christian should not mix the two kingdoms.

The kingdom of God already has its appointed king – Jesus. It already has its Manifesto for the kingdom of God. It is collecting its citizens now. Christians are citizens of God's kingdom,

*"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20).*

We belong to a heavenly kingdom, a godly kingdom. We are waiting for Jesus to return from heaven and set it up on earth. It will replace the kingdoms of the world.

We do not belong to the kingdoms of this world. We belong to the kingdom of God.

We are told we should live like strangers in the country we live in. This was how Abraham lived. Even though God promised him the land of Canaan, he lived like a foreigner. So must we,

*"Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your souls" (1 Peter 2:11).*

Just like a foreigner does not get involved in the politics of the country, so Christians should not get involved in politics.

### **Summary Content of Lesson 29: Politics, Voting and joining the Army/Police**

- 1 God chooses who are the rulers of this world. He does not need help in choosing them.
- 2 Jesus did not get involved in politics or protest. He said his kingdom was not like those of this world.
- 3 Christians should pay taxes, submit to the authorities and honour the rulers of this world.
- 4 Where there is a difference with what God wants and what man wants, we should obey God.
- 5 We must love our enemies, so we cannot get involved in the army or the police force.

### **Revision Questions on Lesson 29: Politics, Voting and joining the Army/Police**

- 1 Who is the ruler of this world?
- 2 Is it OK for a Christian to vote for world governments? Why?
- 3 Who is the ruler we want to govern?
- 4 Did Jesus get involved in politics in his day?
- 5 Did Jesus lead protests groups against the government or resist government policies? Why?
- 6 Should a Christian pay taxes? Why?

- 7 Do world governments follow peace? What should a Christian do?
- 8 What happens when the rules of man conflict with the ways of God?
- 9 Why must a Christian not get involved in warfare or police work?
- 10 Do governments love their enemies? What should Christians do?

## Lesson 30: Godliness

When God made man, God made man in His own image. When God looked at creation, He would see many creatures. But only one looked like Him. God intended man to be like Him.

Not only that, but man was also given a role by God. God told man to rule over His creation. Man represented God to creation and ruled over it on God's behalf. He was God's representative.

There is something further. God breathed into man the breath of life so that man lived. The life that man had was from God. God was working through man to rule His creation.

This teaches us some great principles. Firstly, we are designed to be like God. Secondly, we are intended to live like God.

We will see that these principles are part of a greater plan. We are to behave like God now. That is, we must be godly. And in the future, we will be genuinely like God.

### The godly man and the worldly man

First let us consider 2 men. The first man is a worldly man. He lives for himself. He eats and drinks much. He watches anything he pleases. He says anything he wants. He does anything he chooses. The only control that exists is what is necessary to enjoy life. If he were a farmer, he would be lazy and harsh on the workers and animals. If he were managing a business, he would boss people around from his office and demand the best service.

The second man is a godly man. He does not live for himself. He lives for God. He is not the centre of his own world, but a small part of a greater plan. He watches what he says. He watches what he does. He is controlled by God's word in the Bible. If he were a farmer, he would work hard and care for workers and animals. If he were managing a business, he would be doing the work as well and make allowances for the weaknesses of others.

The first man is worldly. The second man is godly.

The first man looks like God but does not behave like God.

The second man looks and behaves like God.

God wants people to be like the second man – to be godly, not worldly. Ephesians 4:22-24 says,

*"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."*

We must stop being worldly and start being godly.

In the examples of the 2 men given, the first man reminds us a bit of Adam. He got what he wanted, but it was not what God wanted.

The second man reminds us a lot of Jesus. He did not live for himself, but he lived for God. He followed the instructions of God, spoke the words of God, and acted in the way God would have acted. He was a living representation of what God would have behaved like if He appeared as a man.



Those who looked at Jesus could see God. Jesus made this clear,

*"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).*

God cannot be seen. Jesus was not talking about his physical appearance. He was talking about the character and behaviour of God. If people looked at Jesus, they could see that he was godly.

Jesus was so close to the ways of God; it is like they were the same. The two perfectly united together. Jesus tells us this,

*"Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves." (John 14:10-11).*

Jesus describes his relationship with his Father more simply,

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

### **The character of God in us**

Jesus is the perfect example for us to follow. If we follow the example of the second man, then the words and ways of God can be seen in us. This is described as God living in us. Consider the following teaching from the first letter of John,

*"The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them" (1 John 3:24).*

If we keep God's commands and do what God does, then the ways of God can be seen in us.

Here is another example from 1 John 4:12:

*"No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us."*

If we show love, just like God shows, this is described as 'God living in us.' 1 John 4:16 emphasises this:

*"God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them."*

### **How we become like God**

God intended man to be like Him. Man can do this if he lives in the way that God does, and Jesus did.

But this is the problem. We are not like them. We cannot reach that standard.

God knew that this will be a problem for us. And He has the solution,

*"He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment – to bring to unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ." (Ephesians 1:9-10).*

God intends to be united fully with us through the work of Christ. We will not get to perfect unity with God on our own, but we can through the work of Christ.

Both God and Jesus are working together to bring the godly people into unity with them.

Ephesians 3:17-19 puts it like this:

*"so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."*

### **God, Jesus and Us**

Let us summarise what we have learnt of God's plan. We have God living in Jesus and united with him – one with him. We also have God living in the believers – united with them – one with them. God is in all.

This is the final purpose of God. To be "all in all". We read this in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28:

*"Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he "has put all his enemies under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all."*

The final purpose of God is for God to be "all in all." God, Christ, and the believers are like one another. God can be seen in all of them. Ephesians 4:6 puts it this way:

*"one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."*

### **The New Creation**

This is the purpose of creation. The existing creation does not achieve this. It is only through Jesus that this can be achieved. In Galatians 6:15 it is described as the 'new creation,' when it says, *"what counts is the new creation."*

Jesus was the beginning of this new creation. Colossians 1:15 tells us:

*"The son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation."*

And through the life and work of Jesus, the believers become part of this 'new creation'. It is only in Jesus that we can be part of this. We read in the next verse:

*"For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him."*

God gave us His son to reconcile the world to Himself and bring unity. We read in:

*"For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Colossians 1:19-20).*

## **The Final Call**

God has done all He can for us by giving us Jesus and calling us to the gospel. It is up to us to fulfil the purpose that was planned for us from the beginning of creation. We must live and behave like God, as God intended us to do from the beginning.

As it says in Titus 2:11-13:

*"For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ."*

We thank God for such a great hope. May God be with you in your effort to be godly and be united with your God. So that you may become part of the new creation in Christ.

## Additional Topics for Information

The following topics may be important to you in your country. If so, please read these topics as well.

### 1. Witchcraft

'Witchcraft' refers to claims of people to have magical or supernatural powers.

Deuteronomy describes these activities and God's view of them:

*"When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no-one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord, and because of these detestable practices the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you" (Deuteronomy 18:9-12).*

God hates witchcraft and its associated activities. They are "detestable" to God. Other nations practice these things, but God's people were not to.

We can group the activities into four parts:

- Burning one's children (No.1).
- Divination (No. 2, 3 & 4).
- Sorcery (No. 5 & 6).
- Consulting the dead (No. 7, 8 and 9).

The first on the list is burning one's children as child sacrifice. This is murder and is clearly wrong. We will cover the remaining three activities.

### Divination

Divination is the practice of determining the divine will and trying to influence it.

The word translated sorcery (No. 3) literally means "observing clouds". People have observed cloud shapes (and other heavenly signs such as thunder/lightning, wind changes, etc) as messages from heaven. The word translated 'omens' means "signs". People claim they are able to read signs like seeing which way an arrow points, looking at the liver, etc. People claim to have access to the knowledge of God by reading signs in heaven or on earth.

Seeking answers to important questions has always been attractive to man. However, the knowledge of mysteries is not with man. When the King of Babylon asked his men a question, they told him,

*"There is not a man on earth who can do what the king asks!" (Daniel 2:10).*

In contrast, Daniel answered the King,

*"No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in the heavens who reveals mysteries" (Daniel 2:28).*

Another example is the fortune-teller in Acts 16:16. When she came across the apostle Paul, she recognized that their miracles were true miracles (v17). She recognized the true power of God when she saw it.

Knowledge and power is with the God of Israel. God says,

*"I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols. See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you" (Isaiah 42:8-9).*

Balaam was a diviner (Joshua 13:22) who was hired by the King of Moab to curse the people of Israel. We learn from Numbers 24:1 that Balaam used omens as part of his ceremony.

We learn the reason why. The King of Moab wanted to make war with Israel (Number 22:11). But Moab was not going to go to war unless the signs were favourable. They hired Balaam as the deciding factor as to whether to go to war or not. God giving His word to an evil man like Balaam is unusual but the circumstances required it. God did so to stop a war.

Diviners often work through the reading of signs or omens. The Babylonians would cast lots with arrows and look at the liver of an animal in order to discover military targets (Ezekiel 21:22). God used this process in order for the Babylonians to target Jerusalem for destruction because of their sins (v25). Just like God used Balaam to prevent war with Israel, here God worked through omens to bring a war on a wicked Israel. God works in different ways at different times to bring about His purpose.

The Bible is clear that seeking answers by divination is wrong,

*"the diviners see visions that lie; they tell dreams that are false, they give comfort in vain" (Zechariah 10:2).*

Those who practice this do not have access to divine answers and are misleading the people. True knowledge and wisdom comes from God alone. God acts against divination,

*"I am the Lord, who has made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself, who foils the signs of the false prophets and makes fools of diviners, who overthrows the learning of the wise and turns it into nonsense" (Isaiah 44:24-25).*

## **Sorcery**

A sorcerer is someone who claims to have supernatural powers. The first occurrence is with the magicians of Egypt. When God brought the first 3 plagues on Egypt, the magicians were able to do similar things. It is unlikely that they were able to fully copy the plagues. Nevertheless they were able to give the impression of turning water into blood and they did it well enough to convince Pharaoh,

*"But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts, and Pharaoh's heart became hard; he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said" (Exodus 7:22).*

The Hebrew word for "secret arts" means "flames". It therefore seems that they were able to give the impression of miracle working through the use of flames.

But the Egyptian magicians were not able to produce the other 7 plagues. They called the fourth plague "the Finger of God" (Exodus 8:19) and recognized that it was done by the God.

The work of a sorcerer is shown by Simon the sorcerer. We read,

*"Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great" (Acts 8:9).*

The whole town had been convinced by him. The apostle Philip went to Samaria to preach the gospel while performing miracles. Even Simon the sorcerer was convinced by the miracles!

*"Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw" (Acts 8:13).*

This means that Simon's own miracles were not true miracles. They were designed to fool the people and help him earn a good living. Like other sorcerers, Simon recognized true power when he saw it.

Another sorcerer was Elymas. Elymas opposed the preaching of the gospel,

*"But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith" (Acts 13:8).*

The apostle Paul confronted him,

*"You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?" (Acts 13:10).*

As a result, Paul afflicted him with blindness (Acts 13:11). The example of Elymas explains how sorcerers work. Their 'miracles' are achieved through "deceit and trickery". They do not truly have the powers they claim, but they are clever at performing tricks.

The Bible warns us that there will be false teachers who can do 'miracles'. We read about this in Deuteronomy,

*"If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him" (Deuteronomy 13:1-4).*

We will come across people who claim to do special signs. In some cases, these signs will happen. When this happens, it is a test as to whether we will follow God's teaching or the teaching of the person who performs the sign. Jesus warns us;

*"For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect – if that were possible" (Mark 13:22).*

## Consulting the Dead

Man has often wanted to contact the dead in order to find answers. The assumption is that the dead know the answers and that they can be contacted. These assumptions are wrong. The Bible teaches that the dead know nothing and that they no longer exist.

The Bible is clear on the characteristics of those who are dead:

*"For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 9:5-6).*

The dead do not know anything, so there is no point trying to contact them for answers. They also have no part in anything that happens under the sun. In other words, they cannot influence those who are living above the ground in any way. The Bible repeats this information,

*"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working or planning or knowledge or wisdom" (Ecclesiastes 9:10).*

There is no knowledge in the grave. There is no point trying to ask the dead because they do not know. Those who are dead are silent: They are not able to speak.

*"Unless the Lord had given me help, I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death" (Psalm 94:17).*

*"It is not the dead who praise the Lord, those who go down to silence" (Psalm 115:17).*

The same advice was given by the prophet Isaiah when Israel turned to dead people for answers:

*"When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people enquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn" (Isaiah 8:19-20).*

In the Isaiah passage we learn how mediums and spiritists operate. They put on strange voices to appear as if they are able to talk to other people. They are not truly contacting the dead but are only appearing to do so. They put on a display to convince the simple, in order to receive money or goods.

## The Witch of Endor

The incident of the witch of Endor is well known. King Saul was wrong to consult her:

*"Saul died because he was unfaithful to the Lord; he did not keep the word of the Lord, and even consulted a medium for guidance, and did not enquire of the Lord. So the Lord put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse" (1 Chronicles 10:13).*

The medium claimed to be able to bring up from dead, so she said to Saul; *"Whom shall I bring up for you?"* (1 Samuel 28:11). Since we know that the dead are dead and cannot respond, the medium was only pretending to be able to do this.

The medium was shocked when she actually saw the dead Samuel; *"When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out at the top of her voice"* (v12). She had not expected to see anything! God had enabled her to see a vision of Samuel.

Saul did not see Samuel. He had to ask the medium what she saw (v13).

We are told that Samuel spoke to Saul and Saul replied. Since Samuel only existed in the mind of the medium, it means Saul was speaking to the medium.

Samuel explained why God had deserted Saul. Since the medium did not know, God must have given her this information.

The medium told Saul that he would be killed by the Philistines the next day. Only God would know this. God also gave the medium this information.

Consulting a medium was a sin. Through the incident, Saul knew that God had found him out and had seen him consult a medium. This was one reason why God put Saul to death.

Consulting the dead is always a bad thing in the Bible. About king Manasseh we read,

*"He sacrificed his own son in the fire, practiced sorcery and divination, and consulted mediums and spirits. He did much evil in the eyes of the Lord, provoking him to anger"* (2 Kings 21:6).

In the New Testament, witchcraft is listed among the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:20), and those who practice these things will not enter the Kingdom of God.

## **Conclusion**

The Bible teaches that witchcraft is false. These people trick the simple to gain money and respect. In all cases, supernatural power and knowledge belongs to God alone.

Our review has shown that at times God works through evil people to promote what is true. It does not mean that God approves of Balaam, Babylon or the witch of Endor. But God works in the world to bring about His purpose, and sometimes that means working through wicked people. We should not be shocked by this because God has always worked through people who are sinners. The single exception is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Witchcraft is wrong and a system of falsehood. God is not happy if we persist in following what is false,

*"But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger"* (Romans 2:8).

## **2. The Law of Moses and the Christian today**

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

The Law of Moses was given until Jesus came,



*"It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come" (Galatians 3:19).*

It pointed forward to the blessings of Christ,

*"The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming – not the realities themselves" (Hebrews 10:1).*

The Law of Moses was like a shadow. It gave the outline of God's purpose with Jesus, but it was not Jesus. Now that Jesus has come, we do not need to keep the Law of Moses. The reality of Jesus is better than the shadow of the Law of Moses.

The early Christians were all Jews who kept the Law of Moses. The gospel was then preached to the 'Gentiles' (that is, to non-Jews). The early church leaders met to discuss whether Gentiles needed to keep the Law of Moses. We are given the details of their discussion in Acts 15. We read about their conclusion in Acts 15:19,20,

*"It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood" (Acts 15:19-20).*

The Gentile Christians did not need to keep the Law of Moses. The church leaders wrote to the Gentiles instructing them with 4 specific things, because of the sensitivities of the Jewish Christians. Gentiles were asked to:

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

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

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

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

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

bread usually do this on the first day of the week, which is Sunday, but there is no command to do it on a specific day.

4. Food. In Christ, all foods are clean (Mark 7:19).

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

## Next Steps after completion Bible-Based Christian Course

In this course, you have learnt what it means to be a Christian. You have learnt what a Christian needs to know and what a Christian needs to do. You are now ready for the next step.

You must be ready for the kingdom of God. This means you need to repent and be baptised. Baptism is the starting point of being a Christian. Baptism removes all your past sins. Your life becomes linked to Jesus. It is a commitment to change from the old ways of the world to the new way of Christ. When you are baptised, you will become born again and become part of God's family,

*"Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).*

Baptism changes our destiny from one where death is the only outcome to one where our destiny is life, through the resurrection. A person changes from darkness to light. They change from being alone in the world to a person where God gives His special care and protection, and where the believer has a new family of spiritual brothers and sisters. There is every benefit from being baptised.

Baptism is a life-long commitment. It is no good starting and then deciding to stop. As Jesus said,

*"No man who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).*

Once you have made the decision to follow Christ through baptism, you need to speak to your tutor or another Christadelphian on how to be baptised. They will explain how this can happen.

You may wish to learn more before you decide to be baptised. If so, then speak to your tutor or another Christadelphian to discuss this further. We do not pressurise you into being baptised, because this is a personal choice. However, if you are ready for baptism, you should not delay.

If you have made the decision to be baptised, you must start behaving like Jesus. You need to begin an active prayer life, praying several times daily. You must start reading and thinking about God's word in the Bible daily. You must think about what Jesus would do and say in every situation. You must try to act like Jesus.

Your decision to follow Christ brings pleasure to God, the angels, and to other believers,

*"I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10).*

There are other believers like you. These are your new spiritual family - your new brothers and sisters in Christ. Christadelphians refer to their fellow believers as 'brother' or 'sister.' You need to live as part of this family by meeting with them at your nearest ecclesia. Your tutor or another Christadelphian can help you contact your nearest Christadelphian ecclesia.

Christadelphians use the word 'ecclesia' rather than 'church' because that is word used in the New Testament. It refers to the people who make up the ecclesia. The word 'church' is used to refer to the church building. God is not concerned with buildings but with the people who follow Him.

There are many things we should do as we begin a new life in Christ. We need to think and behave differently from how we lived before. There is another course to help you do this, which is designed especially for the newly baptised. It is called 'Growing into Christ.' We recommend that you do this once you are baptised.

We will finish with the blessing used on God's people which we wish for you:

*"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace."  
(Numbers 6:24-26).*