

# The Essential Christian Pack

A course to get you started

John West

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# Introduction

## Who is this for?



These booklet can be studied by individuals, but it is better done with another person or a small group. It aims to give people clear information and a good foundation for personal Christian growth.

If you are exploring Christianity or have just started off down this road, ask your church leader to recommend a mature Christian to work through it with you.

While the studies are primarily for new Christians, others who are ready for a refresher course, or even those who are preparing for church membership or Confirmation should find the course helpful

The first question is, Where are you now? What do you already believe and what questions do you have? What do you believe Christianity is about and how do you become a Christian? This is not a test, but an opportunity for you to take stock of where you are at the moment. With that in mind, write a few sentences after the following statements:-

What I believe about God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

I believe that you become a Christian by...

I would like to know...



OK. As we continue I hope that at least some of your questions will be answered. But now let me tell you something about this course.

At times it may seem like a classroom with many facts to be remembered and understood, but it is far more. In fact, it is rather like a marriage preparation. When I prepare a couple for marriage, they sit down and fill in a questionnaire which covers many aspects of the relationship. The forms go through a computer and come back as a printout which I then use to discuss with them attitudes and understandings about their intended; things which they may not have thought about before. It is an opportunity for them to get to know each other better, before they stand at the front of the church and say, "I will" (or as it used to be, "I do").

The marriage preparation course looks beyond the public consent of the wedding to the ongoing relationship, til death do them part!

*However this Course is more important than a marriage preparation.* No, it's true! A marriage course is for the rest of your life with another human being. This course is to prepare you for this life, and all eternity, in relationship with God! Becoming a Christian is after considering all the ramifications, you say, "I do," to God, and then be prepared to share your new-found faith with others.

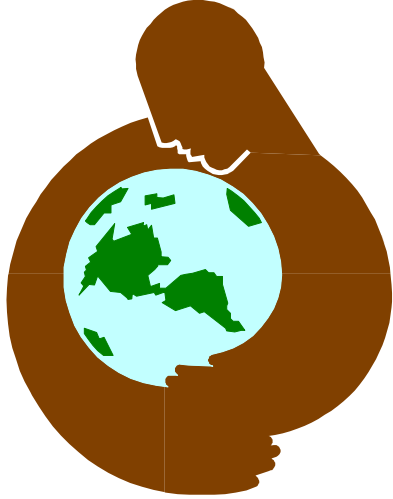
In my book, *Exploring the Meaning of Life (SPCKA)*, I have argued that God's purpose is to gather people to himself, and to enter into an ever deepening relationship with them. This is what life is about; knowing God, and making him known to others. God's actions are rather like a man wooing his bride. When we consent to this "marriage" with God, we discover the very meaning of life itself. If I am right, then there can be no more important decision that we make.

You may have heard the story of the clergymen who were having trouble with bats in their churches. One tried poison, another traps, but all to no avail; the bats persisted. The third however was completely successful. He Confirmed all his bats, and never saw them again! The story points to an all too common pattern. Many people who make a formal commitment to the Christian faith see it as a passing out ceremony rather than a marriage ceremony; the start of an amazing and continuing relationship.

Feeling daunted yet? Don't be. You are hopefully among friends who will encourage you in the greatest and most fulfilling journey you could ever take through life and beyond. Even if at this stage you are unsure about whether you want to take the step, stick with the course. At the very least you will finish up with the insights you need to make an informed decision.

# Part 1

## In the Beginning - GOD



Now that we have some idea of where we are going, let's come back to the beginning with the important questions about God.

In the first book in the Bible, Genesis, we read that God created everything, including people, and that he gave those first people instructions about how they should live. The overwhelming impression is that God has a claim over, and interest in, human life. But let's take one step further back. How do we know that God exists? What is he, she or it like?

In the space below take a moment to draw or write down your impression of what God may be like.

Now, if you could talk face to face with God, what three things would you like to ask him?

1.

2.

3.

Finally, what is it that either convinces you that God exists OR throws up doubts for you?



An atheist believes there is no god.  
An agnostic is unsure.  
A theist believes there is a god, but one who may not be involved in his or her creation.

**Here are a few of the arguments that people use in favour of God's existence...**

### **1. Life is very complex**

Some point to the complicated way that our bodies work. When we come across a complex piece of machinery, we don't say, "Isn't it amazing how this watch or this car came together just by chance." Rather we may ask, "Who made it?" So it seems reasonable to suppose that complex life forms have some sort of designer.

A stronger argument is bound up in the fact that within moments of the "Big Bang" scientists agree that the odds against the elements required for the beginnings of life actually coming together were *astronomical*. It strongly suggests that some intelligent being brought them together for that purpose.

### **2. Universal notions of God**

Although individuals may deny the existence of God, Every culture seems to have a concept of a god in one form or another. The fact that it is part of our human expectations that there should be something or someone greater than ourselves, points to the likelihood of God's existence.

### **3. God gives meaning to life**

If God doesn't exist then presumably our life has come about by chance and has no particular meaning beyond that which we wish to give it. If so, there is probably no life beyond death. Since we find it so difficult to believe that life is meaningless, this also suggests that perhaps there is something to it all, and there is someone who gives it form and direction.

### **4. God gives meaning to experience and morality**

Following on from the third point, if life is meaningless, then what we do, or don't do has no particular meaning either - other than perhaps the preservation of the species, (though we might also ask why we should then bother to preserve the species.) If there is no meaning then there is no right or wrong, all actions become equally valid. Notions of good and evil are just notions. The experiences of love, pleasure and aesthetic appreciation are reduced to biological interactions without any value in themselves. In fact it may be argued that one's own pleasure becomes the highest good. We might expect that when the idea of God is rejected, people will increasingly please themselves to the detriment of others, and that suicide will become more common. Others will just make the best of what they have, recognising that life usually works best when we are considerate of others, but for no other reason.

### **5. The accounts about Jesus**

Christians point to the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, and that he taught that he had come from God and was one with

him. We find the stories convincing because we realise they were written by eyewitnesses, or with reference to eyewitnesses still alive at the time of writing. These eyewitnesses constantly promoted high ideals and ethics, often dying because of their beliefs. Their testimony presents as a credible retelling of events which really happened. (More of this later).

## **6. The testimony of experience**

None of the above five opinions on its own will convince someone who is determined not to believe in God. Together however they provide a much more persuasive argument. But there is a further witness to God's existence – in fact millions of them. They are the people both living, and through history who can speak of their own experiences of God, through answered prayer, through visions, through lives changed, and simply through the discovery that the Christian life actually works. There are those who can say, "Yes, I believe in God, because we talk together every day."

## **SO WHAT IS GOD LIKE?**

The number of religions and sects bear abundant testimony to the fact that people turn to all sorts of sources for their information about God. Some claim visions, some see God in nature and others basically invent a god in their own image.

Although many have found God through nature and people (General Revelation), Christians believe that God is most clearly understood through the Bible – God's *Special Revelation* to us. Here we see the character of God, especially when we look at the life of Jesus Christ.

### **What the Bible tells us about God.**

Read the following samples and write down what they tell you about God.

#### *Genesis 1*

<sup>1</sup>*In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, <sup>2</sup>the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. <sup>3</sup>Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.*

#### *Psalms 19*

<sup>1</sup> *The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.*

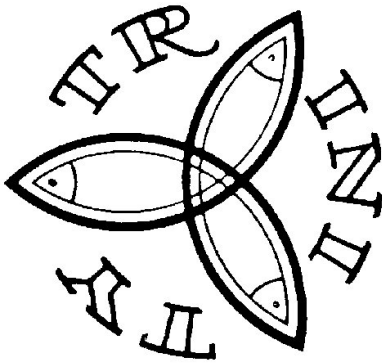
Look up Psalm 139 in your Bible

#### Exodus 20

<sup>4</sup>You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup>You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, <sup>6</sup>but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

#### Psalm 103

<sup>8</sup> The LORD is merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.  
<sup>9</sup> He will not always accuse,  
nor will he keep his anger forever.  
<sup>10</sup> He does not deal with us according to our sins,  
nor repay us according to our iniquities.  
<sup>11</sup> For as the heavens are high above the earth,  
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;



#### God is Trinity

In the Introduction I said that Christianity is all about a relationship with God. In fact *God* is all about relationship. The Bible says that God *is* love, and has relationship within, what we call, *The Godhead*. God is three persons in one – we call this *The Trinity*.

I don't think there is an adequate explanation of the Trinity, but the following may help.

Just as the same basic ingredient exists in the different forms of water, steam and ice, so God as Father Son and Holy Spirit are essentially God, within different forms or roles, (though it must be said that the roles performed by Father, Son and Spirit do overlap).

A better explanation may be that within a society while certain people, like the prime minister, president or queen are seen to have greater authority and position over the rest of us, we still recognise that they share basic attributes with us. Underneath it all we are the same in our humanness. So in the Godhead, Father Son and Holy Spirit share the same



‘Godness’ (divinity) but have different roles to play. Jesus, the Son, is sent by the Father and defers to his will and authority. The Holy Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son, and his role is to bring glory to the Son. So there are three distinct persons with different authority bound in their divinity, but with a unity that transcends the unity that we experience as humans.

### **God is spirit**

Despite the pictures of God as an elderly gentleman with a flowing beard, Jesus tells us that God is spirit, not a human being. That means that he is not limited in the way that we are. He is omnipotent (all powerful) and omnipresent (everywhere). He is also invisible, which makes our relationship with him rather difficult. However we read in Genesis chapter one that God made human beings in his image. Obviously we don’t physically look like God, but we do have the capacity to appreciate him, to share his values and creativity, and to relate to him.

### **Male or female?**

If God is spirit then he does not have a male or female body. Some point out that God is presented as Father in the Bible and that there is a continuing order of authority in maleness. Others say that it was appropriate for God to present as male, and for him to have a Son, Jesus, in a patriarchal culture, but that we should no longer limit him to that culture. They find evidence of God being referred to in mother images such as a hen protecting her young.

Certainly there is much debating still to be done on this issue, but for the purposes of clear writing and since that is the way that Scripture presents him, we shall refer to God as ‘he’.

### **Eternal**

The most frequent question I am asked as a Scripture teacher is, “If God made us, then who made God?” I reply, “God was not made by anyone. He was always there. No beginning and no end.” That is hard for anyone to get his or her mind around, but the fact is that there had to be something or someone that always was. Even for people who deny God, the question persists, “What started everything?” Something or someone had to be eternal—or pop into existence from nothing!

### **The problem of suffering**

One of the mostly frequently recurring problems that people have with God is the problem of pain and suffering. This is a large subject but I offer a few thoughts which may be of help.

Genesis reminds us that God created everything perfect and that it was human disobedience which introduced suffering into the world. God obviously could have stopped people from sinning, but to do so would have meant taking away our humanity and turning us into robots. How much would you value the love of your friend, spouse or child if they were forced to love you? Free choice is a gift that God has given us, though it must be said that there are dire consequences when we spurn the giver. Sin is a destructive force in the life of the one who commits the sin, and in the “innocent” lives of those that he or she comes in contact with. Sometimes it seems that God allows sin to have its way so that people might realise their need of God and turn to him. The Bible also seems to suggest that at times God actually causes suffering as a disciplinary measure, so that worse may not befall us. In other instances people who are no worse than anyone else, and often leading very good lives, endure the most terrible circumstances for no apparent reason that they, or anyone else,



can see. The story of righteous Job in the Old Testament is a case where he was unaware of events taking place in heaven which precipitated immense suffering in his life. Job never discovers the actual reason for his plight but God speaks, telling virtually telling him that humans don't have the full picture and only God is the Creator who knows all things. The story of Job is a call to trust in the ups and downs of life that God knows best. Job questioned and challenged God through his ordeal but remained faithful in never turning his back on his Creator. Unlike Job's friends who came to give him "comfort" which turned out to be prolonged criticism, we are to be careful not to jump to conclusions as to why a person may be suffering. In many cases we may just have to confess that we don't know.

**SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT:-**

**Which arguments for the existence of God do you find most convincing?**

**Is there a time when you have experienced the presence of God or felt close to him?**

**What are the reasons for suffering in these cases?**

**Genesis 3:14-19**

**Genesis 6:11-13**

**Job 2:1-6**

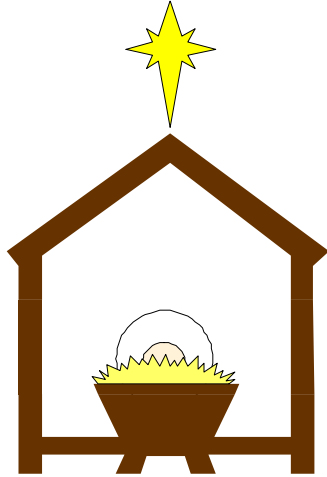
**Hebrews 12:7-11**

**1 Peter 1:6-9**

**Write down any questions you still have at this stage about God...**

# Part 2

## Jesus Godman



Jesus Christ is the very heart of Christianity. It is Christ who gives us the name Christian. Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name, Joshua, and means “Saviour.” Christ is the Greek form of the Hebrew word, Messiah, and means “anointed one” or “king”. The Jewish people had been expecting that God would send his anointed one to bring them deliverance. They expected that he would deliver them from the Romans, and were disappointed when he didn’t do that. Many rejected him because of it, but those who followed him discovered that he was the very Son of God, bearing all of God’s authority.

In order to make a decision about becoming a Christian, you must first know about Jesus Christ. Take a moment now to jot down a few of the things you already know about Jesus.

Next, consider these statements.

What do you think of them, and how would you answer them?

*“As far as I’m concerned Jesus is just a legend like the Greek myths.”*

*“I believe Jesus existed, but he was just a wise human being like Confucius, Buddha or Mohammed, nothing more.”*

*“I think what he taught was good, but I don’t believe all those miracles. I think the stories were added to until he was made out to be supernatural.”*

*“I don’t think it matters whether Jesus was real or not. Everyone to their own beliefs.”*

The evidence of who Jesus was, can be read in the Gospel accounts, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Later we will look at the reliability of these Scriptures but for now we will especially look at John's Gospel to see what it reveals about Jesus. John was a close disciple of Jesus, and he writes about him as "The Word" in chapter one.

Read John 1:1-4 and write down what it teaches us about Jesus – The Word. What do "words" do? Why do you think John calls Jesus "The Word"?

Read John 5:1-18 What power does Jesus demonstrate here?  
And what is Jesus claiming about himself? (v18)

Over what areas does Jesus demonstrate power and authority in the following passages?  
Read John 6:1-21

Read John 9:1-11

Read John 11:1-45

The other Gospels show Jesus casting out evil spirits, calming a storm and healing all types of diseases. Mark reports him forgiving the sins of a paralysed man (something only God could do).

Jesus also made some remarkable claims about himself.  
Write them down next to their references, and think about what he meant by such claims...

John 6:35

John 8:12

John 10:11

John 11:25

John 14:6



Although Jesus had all the power and authority of God and could have done anything, he chose to take on the limitations of our humanity. Find in the following verses, evidence that Jesus was fully human:-

John 4:6

Luke 19:41, John 11:33-35

Luke 4:1-2

John 19:28-30

Jesus Christ, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, never forced people to follow him. He still allows people like you and me to choose whether we will accept him as Lord of our lives, or not. If the evidence we have seen in the Gospels is true, if Jesus' claims are genuine, then we simply cannot ignore him. We must come to some decision. And as I indicated earlier, Confirmation is the opportunity to make a public declaration about that choice.

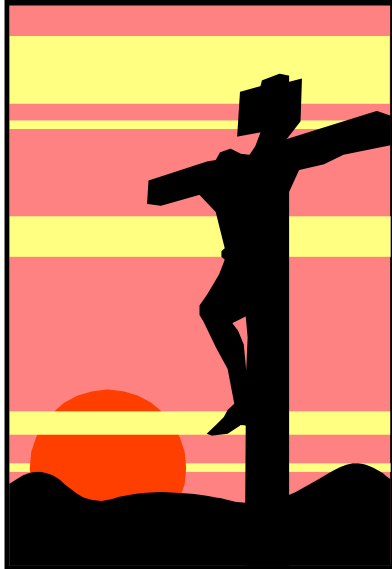
#### **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT:-**

What impresses you most in what you have read about Jesus?

What questions do you have about the life and teachings of Jesus?

# Part 3

## The Crossroads



Each of the Gospels gives a large amount of space to the events surrounding Jesus' crucifixion, suggesting that it is tremendously important. The Cross has become the symbol of our Christian churches because its significance is central to all we believe.

Jesus knew that he was going to die. He told his disciples and he prayed to God even before he was arrested, *"Let this cup (of death) pass from me. Nevertheless, not what I will, but what you will."*

When soldiers came to arrest him, he told the disciple who tried to defend him, *"Put your sword back in its place... Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?"* (Matthew 26:52)

Jesus, who could heal the sick and the blind, cast out evil spirits, calm storms, feed thousands, and raise the dead, could have called on God's power to prevent his own death. But he didn't because he knew that it was God's will for him to die.

The question we want to try to answer is, "Why?"

Let's first of all read about it from Matthew's perspective in chapter 27.

### The Death of Jesus

<sup>45</sup>From noon on, **darkness** came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. <sup>46</sup>And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"** <sup>47</sup>When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." <sup>48</sup>At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. <sup>49</sup>But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." <sup>50</sup>Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. <sup>51</sup>At that moment **the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split.** <sup>52</sup>**The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.** <sup>53</sup>After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. <sup>54</sup>Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, **"Truly this man was God's Son!"**

Matthew records a number of unusual things happening on that day.

**The Darkness** was not an eclipse since it was the wrong time of the month for such an event. These three hours coincide with Jesus' time on the cross, and point to the fact that this was no ordinary death. The earthquake also indicates a momentous occasion.

Jesus' cry, **"Why have you forsaken me?"** is a quote from Psalm 22. Although the psalm finishes with the idea that God will help, at this time it seems as though Jesus had an experience of being in some way, cut off from God. Why? What was happening?

To understand we must first go back to Genesis 3 where humankind first turned their backs on God and deliberately disobeyed him. By chapter 4 Cain had killed Abel, and within a few more chapters the world had become so evil that the Flood seemed the only chance of the human race having a future at all. The destructive power of sin still continued with

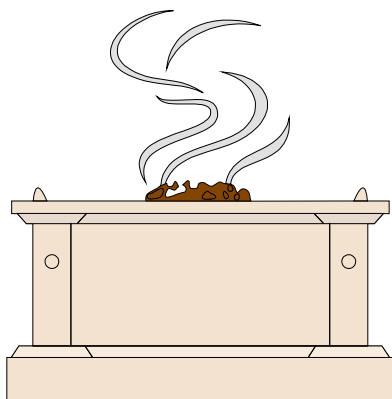
humanity, and Paul could write in Romans 3:23: *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*

What is sin? It is not just the wrong things we do, such as lying, cheating or stealing. It is our very nature, which leaves God out of our lives and says in effect, "God, I'll make my own decisions and do my own thing. I may call on you if I need you, but until then don't interfere with my life." We may not say it in so many words, but the way we live bears out that that is what we mean. God cannot have a relationship with a person who holds that sort of attitude.

The Bible says in Romans 6:23 that, *"the wages of sin, is death"*. It means that it destroys relationships and involves separation from God. And we choose to go down that path by our attitude. We cannot blame anyone else. We are responsible for our own failures.

Humans often display some of God's sense of justice. We tend to hate it when criminals are let off too lightly. Because God is just, he cannot allow sin to be swept under the carpet, nor can he allow sinful people to enter heaven and pollute it.

But God continued to love us, despite our sins. He wanted us to come back to him and, realising that we could not achieve that by ourselves, he took the necessary steps.



In the Old Testament God gave his people, Israel, a way by which they could know forgiveness, through the sacrifice of animal, as close as possible to perfect. It was as if the perfect animal died in the place of the guilty person who sacrificed it - and amongst those animals there were lambs. But this was a temporary measure. Ultimately *animals* cannot take punishment in place of *people*. It required a perfect *person* to do that!

John the Baptist, when he first saw Jesus, said of him, *"Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* On the Cross Jesus became the perfect sacrifice for our sins. Paul explains it in chapter 5 of Romans...

*v6 at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.*

*v8 But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.*

Even Jesus himself said it...

*Matthew 20:28 The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."*

It seems that in some way, as Jesus died bearing our sins, he was cut off from God so that we don't have to be. He was a perfect human being and his death means that we can be set free from the penalties associated with sin.

As Jesus died **The Temple Curtain was torn.**

The thick curtain in the Temple divided the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. Only priests could go into the Holy Place and only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, once a year, to meet with God and then take his message out to the people. The tearing of the curtain from top to bottom instead of from bottom to top, indicates that it was a symbolic act of God, opening the way into his presence through Christ's death. Now

with the barriers removed we have the opportunity for a direct relationship with our Creator.

**The tombs were opened.** This verse raises a lot of questions which the Bible does not answer, but it seems to be saying that Jesus' death became effective for those who had already died in faith under the Old Testament system of sacrifice.

The Centurion, in awe of all that he experienced, affirms that this was no ordinary death, and no ordinary person when he declares, **"Truly this man was God's Son."**

#### **SOME QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT:-**

Can you think of an example of someone taking someone else's punishment or laying down his or her life so that another could live?

How do people deal with the wrong things that they do?

How does it affect you to be told that Jesus Christ died in *your* place?

Read Romans 5:1-11. What do we read there about the effects of Jesus' death?

What questions do you have about Jesus' death?



# Part 4

## The Resurrection



It's not surprising that people have found it difficult to believe in someone rising from the dead. It just doesn't happen every day. Through the ages many have tried to come up with explanations for what they think really happened. But there are some good reasons for believing that Jesus really did come back to life, "beyond all reasonable doubt," as they say in court.

### It was foretold by Jesus

Jesus told his disciples on a number of occasions that he was going to die and rise again, but they were slow to believe or understand at the time what he was talking about.

*Read Mark 10:33-34. What did he say?*

### All four gospels tell the story

The writers of the gospels either knew eyewitnesses or were eyewitnesses themselves to Jesus being alive again.

*Read Luke 24:13-35. Why might they not have recognised him at first? How did they come to recognise him?*

*Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 and jot down those who saw Jesus alive.*

### The Disciples died for this belief.

Many of the disciples were put to death for their faith, always proclaiming that Jesus died and rose again. No-where do we have any record of any of those witnesses saying – "No, it didn't really happen."

### Other explanations seem unconvincing.

The Gospels record that a Roman soldier saw that Jesus was dead but put a spear in his side to make sure. Jesus was wrapped up, put into a rock tomb, and a large stone was rolled across the entrance. So large was the stone that women, going to the tomb on the Sunday morning, were wondering how they could move it to put spices on the body. Roman guards were posted outside to ensure that no-one stole the body. It seems highly unlikely that Jesus, weakened by a flogging, crucified, and stabbed, would then recover, roll back the stone, and get past the Romans. The disciples seem to have been as surprised as anyone by the news that Jesus' body had gone. It hardly seems likely that they could have crept past the Romans and stolen the body, and more unlikely that they would have lied about it for the rest of their lives.

### Many people believe that people's experiences of Jesus' resurrection were spiritual rather than physical encounters.

*Read Luke 24:36-48 and write down what you think, giving evidence for your answer.*

## **SO WHAT DID IT ALL MEAN?**

### **Jesus proved he was the Son of God.**

Since Jesus foretold his resurrection, it is another piece of evidence that Jesus was who he claimed to be – God’s Son.

### **There is assurance of eternal life.**

Jesus’ resurrection was the assurance that there is eternal life for all who put their trust in Jesus.

*Read what Jesus told his disciples even before he died in John 14:1-6*

### **Death has been conquered.**

In first Corinthians, chapter fifteen, Paul concludes a piece of writing of Jesus resurrection, by talking about the resurrection of those who believe in Christ.

*Read 1 Corinthians 15:54-56. What does he say will happen?*

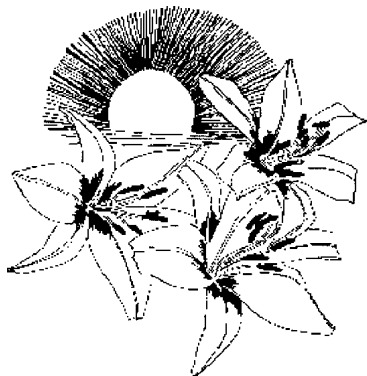
### **Jesus is alive.**

The disciples knew that their Lord was alive. Paul didn’t see Jesus before his death, but later met with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus.

Through the ages men, women and children tell of their own encounters with Jesus, some of which were face to face.

**SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT:**

1. Are you convinced by the evidence for the resurrection. Is there any alternative explanation you can think of. Do you have any questions about the resurrection?
2. What does it mean to you that Jesus rose from the dead? Does it matter?
3. Read some more of 1 Corinthians 15. What else do you learn about the resurrection from this chapter?
4. How do you feel about the subject of death?



# Part 5

# Grace



GRACE Is unique to Christianity. It is what sets it apart from every other world religion and it is crucial to understanding the Christian message.

To help you to understand it I would like you to answer two very direct questions in the spaces below.

**Question 1:**

**Are going to heaven?**

Yes.

No.

Don't Know.

**Question 2:**

**What does it take for you (or any other person) to get into heaven?**

Answer to question 1.

The Bible makes it clear that we can be sure about whether we are going to heaven or not. But it is important to understand the right answer to question 2 in order to be sure.

Answer to question 2.

Most people would answer question 2 by saying something like this:-  
“Well I basically live a good life. I believe in God. I try to do the right thing. I even go to church and read the Bible. I believe that I’ve done enough good things to get me in.”

You may have written something like that, but it is not the answer the Bible gives. *In fact it is quite the opposite!*

**Let me tell you why...**

Read Romans 3:23...

*since **all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

Falling short of the glory of God, means failing to reach God’s standard  
Does ‘all’ in that verse include you?

If so then you (and I) are sinners who don’t meet God’s standards for heaven. Which is bad news.

Further bad news is that there is nothing that we can do to wipe out the sin in our lives. *It doesn’t matter how good we try to be or how many good deeds we do, none of it will be sufficient .*

But there is good news. Read Ephesians 2:8-9...

*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast.*

GRACE is a kindness or gift to a person who doesn’t deserve it and is not able to earn it for him or herself It is important to realise that the gift is FREE. It is God’s gift which is received through faith, not by works (ie. the things we do).

So what is the gift?

It is the death of Jesus Christ on the cross for our sins, cancelling the effect of those sins and offering us forgiveness.

Faith is believing that that is true and receiving the forgiveness that God

offers through what Jesus has achieved on our behalf.

How do we get to heaven?

By trusting, not in ourselves, or our own efforts, but in Jesus Christ as our Saviour from sin, and the one who we will follow as Lord.

Eugene Peterson puts it this way in his translation of part of Romans 3 in "The Message"...

*Jesus-setting-things-right for us. And not only for us, but for everyone who believes in him. For there is no difference between us and them in this. Since we've compiled this long and sorry record as sinners (both us and them) and proved that we are utterly incapable of living the glorious lives God wills for us, God did it for us. Out of sheer generosity he put us in right standing with himself. A pure gift. He got us out of the mess we're in and restored us to where he always wanted us to be. And he did it by means of Jesus Christ. God sacrificed Jesus on the altar of the world to clear that world of sin. Having faith in him sets us in the clear.*

**If you believe that Jesus died for your sins and rose again, you can receive the gift of Eternal Life by sincerely asking God to forgive your sins on the strength of what Jesus has done, and ask Jesus to come into your life as your Lord and Master, Friend and Guide.**

Now read John 5:23...

*Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life.*

Now, I would like you to answer the two questions again....

**Question 1:**

**Are going to heaven?**

Yes.

No.

**Question 2:**

**What does it take for you (or any other person) to get into heaven?**

**And a Question 3...**

If you answered 'no' to the first question, what is it that I stopping you?

### **SOME QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT...**

Read the following references from your Bible.

What do you think they mean?

Romans 6:23

John 3:3

John 14:6

Romans 10:9-11

2 Corinthians 5:15

Revelation 3:20

See what you can find out about John Newton.

**"Amazing Grace  
How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost  
But now am found.  
Was blind, but now I see."**

**John Newton**

# Part 6

## The Holy Spirit



If you find the concept of God a hard idea to get your mind around, then the Holy Spirit can at first seem even more confusing! Even Jesus seemed to indicate that the Spirit has a mind of his own...

*The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.* John 3:8

What do you think of when you hear the words “Holy Spirit”?

The Holy Spirit is described in different ways in the Bible.

Try to identify some of those ways in these references...

*Matthew 3:16*

*John 3:8*

*John 7:37-39*

*Acts 2:17-18*

*Acts 2:1-3*

The Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of the Lord, and yes, the Spirit is personal. Not “it”, an impersonal force, but “he”.

**Let’s now see what the Holy Spirit does...**

### ONE

<sup>1</sup>Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. <sup>2</sup>He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” <sup>3</sup>Jesus answered him, “**Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.**” <sup>4</sup>Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” <sup>5</sup>Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. <sup>6</sup>**What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.** <sup>7</sup>Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’” John 3

Paul White once told a Jungle Doctor story of a monkey who wanted to be a lion. The monkey dressed like a lion and acted like a lion, but fooled few of the other animals. The only way he could have been a lion was to be born as one.

You can behave like a child of God, and talk like a child of God, but the only way that you can be a child of God is to be born as one. Since God is spirit, his children must be spirit too. Jesus said that to be a member of God’s family (his kingdom) you must be born spiritually – from above.

So one work of God’s Spirit is to breathe God’s life into you and make you his own.

### TWO

<sup>14</sup>For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. <sup>15</sup>For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” <sup>16</sup>**it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God,** <sup>17</sup>**and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.** Romans 8

The Holy Spirit assures you that you belong to God. As a consequence you can know that you will inherit God’s promises of eternal life.

### THREE

Read Galatians 5:22-23 and write down the fruit of the Spirit...



How much of this fruit can you see in yourself?

If your answer is, “Not much,” don’t despair.

Have you ever had someone tell you how like your father or mother you were? Sometimes it can be a worry that we take on, not just the looks, but the mannerisms and habits of our parents! When God is your Father, taking on his habits and mannerisms is just what you want. You didn’t learn everything from your earthly parents on the day you were born. It happened gradually as you lived with them over the years. Just so, as you spend more and more time with God, his Spirit transforms you gradually to take on his characteristics, listed in Galatians, chapter 5.

#### **FOUR**

*Read 1 Corinthians 12 and list the gifts of the Spirit mentioned there...*

*(Notice that this is not an exhaustive list by any means)*

As his child God will give you abilities which are to be used, not just for yourself, but to encourage and build up other Christians in the faith. You are to ask God for the gift that will be most helpful towards that aim, the gift or gifts which God has for you.



### **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

Note how each of the Gifts mentioned could help others.

Look up other passages which talk of the Gifts of the Spirit.

Jot down any not mentioned so far.

*Roman 12:3-8*

*Ephesians 4:11-13*

Which do you think is more important, the Fruit or the Gifts of the Spirit?  
Why? (Refer to 1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

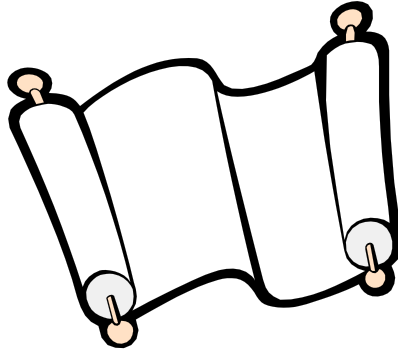
### **Find out more about the Holy Spirit**

Read *John 16:7-15* where Jesus is talking to his Disciples shortly before his crucifixion.

Write down other things that the Holy Spirit does.

# Part 7

## Now you see Him God's Revelation in the Bible



Do you know my favourite colour, who my childhood heroes were, what I like to eat and the things I dislike most? Even if you know me, I would have to tell you these things. I would have to reveal them to you. You may not actually care about what I like or dislike, but I hope you care to know about the things God likes and dislikes.

When two people meet and want to get to know each other, they talk and reveal things about themselves. Now God wants us to get to know him (he already knows all about us). So God has spoken to people and inspired them to write about him. We have these writings in the 66 books of the Bible recorded over a period of about one thousand, five hundred years. 39 books written before Christ and 27 in the first century after. Paul, in writing to Timothy commented...

*<sup>14</sup>But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, <sup>15</sup>and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup>All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3*

Although he spoke primarily of the Old Testament (written mostly in Hebrew) there is good evidence that the New Testament (written in Greek) should be regarded the same way. As Christians we have no other authoritative information about Jesus Christ and about God than that revealed in the Bible. Reading it is an essential if we want to know God.

"But," you say, "It's so complicated. So hard to understand!" It is, in places, but the more you ask the Holy Spirit to teach you, and the more you read it, and the more you talk with other Christians about it, the clearer it will become. And much of it, you may find, is clearer than you think

### READING THE BIBLE

When you read, there are some important things to bear in mind:-

**Pray first** that God's Spirit will give you insight and understanding and application

**Recognise that not every book is the same sort of literature.** There is history, there are poems, wise sayings, observations about life, prophecies directly from God, laws, stories, parables, letters and so on. Realising this saves us from a slavish literalism which can distort God's message to us. We do of course want to affirm that the whole of the Bible is God's Word to us, but that not all of it is meant to be taken literally, and not all of it applies to us directly.

In Psalm 80, where it says, "You brought a vine out of Egypt," we know that the "vine" was the nation of Israel, not a literal vine. Poetry, by its very form can speak the truth without being taken literally. In Judges 9 a talking vine appears in a parable of talking plants, in John 15, Jesus refers to himself as "The Vine," and there he speaks metaphorically, while in Leviticus 25:5, a literal vine is spoken of.

“Reading the Bible for All it’s Worth” by Fee and Stuart is a good introduction to reading the Bible in context.

**Try to recognise the type of writing (the genre) and read words and passages in their context** for it will enable you to see the wider picture. If we read Luke 10:5 in isolation (“Do not go among the Gentiles”) we might get the impression that only Jews were to receive the Good News. Reading further though, reveals that Jesus later sent his disciples to the Gentiles as well. (Which is just as well, or you probably wouldn’t be taking this course now).

In many Bibles there is an introduction at the beginning of each book, which often gives some historical background. **Understanding the historical and cultural background will further help you to understand what the writings meant to the original readers.** When you understand their primary purpose you can begin to see how they may apply to you. When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “Pray for me,” quite obviously *they* were meant to pray for *Paul*, but *you* are not. He’s dead for goodness sake! However you may deduce that there is a principle that it would be a good thing for you to pray for living missionaries, as Paul was. Similarly there were laws given to Israel in the Old Testament, which we recognise were for their particular circumstances (those to do with animal sacrifice for instance), but no longer apply to us. A useful rule of thumb here is that we probably do not have to adhere to an Old Testament law unless it is repeated in the New Testament.

See the brief book list at the end of this booklet.

Although it may sound as though you need a degree in literature, in fact you really only need to read with an awareness of these matters. There are occasional passages that the greatest scholars have trouble with, but most of it is common sense. Where you still have trouble, Daily Bible Reading booklets, marginal Bible notations, and commentaries can help.

Let’s now take a look at some of the Old Testament content. What follows is a brief outline, followed by a one-page summary, just to help you to get your bearings. Knowing the order in which things happened enables you to read events in their historical context.

The names of Bible books are in ***CAPITAL ITALIC BOLD TYPE***

After the summary of the Old Testament (sometimes known as the Hebrew Scriptures) I have included a brief summary of what are considered to be two major themes of the Bible—The **Kingdom of God** and **Covenant**. Understanding major biblical themes helps you to read individual passages in the light of the broader context of God at work in the world. (See also my book, “Exploring the Meaning of Life through Great Themes in the Bible.” - email [johnwest@outlook.com](mailto:johnwest@outlook.com) for a copy)



## GENESIS

The first book of the Bible lays the foundation for understanding all the rest. Genesis means “In the beginning,” when God created all things and saw that they were good. He created people as the pinnacle of his creation, and gave them responsibility to look after it. The perfection was soon ruined when Adam and Eve took from the “Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.” Their desire to be “like God” was their undoing, and led to them losing the paradise of the Garden of Eden. Not only was humankind affected, but so was the whole creation from then on.

### Growing evil. The Flood.

Things went from bad to worse. Their son Cain killed his brother Abel out of jealousy, and soon after we read of the violence of Lamech, telling his wives how he would be avenged seventy seven times over. So corrupt did the world become that there appeared to be no option but to destroy humankind. Only righteous Noah and his family would be preserved, and so it was following the catastrophic flood, that eight people emerged from the ark. The rainbow was given by God as a covenant sign that he would never destroy the earth by flood again. God commanded the people to multiply and fill the earth.



### The Tower of Babel.

After Noah’s family multiplied greatly, they stopped filling the earth and settled in one place. There they started to build a tower trying to reach heaven. Because of their disobedience God confused their languages, building came to a standstill, and the people moved out in different directions.

The stories so far have covered Genesis, chapters 1 to 11. We don’t know what period of time it covers, because although we have a number of family trees, we don’t know whether they are complete. The chapters appear to portray a brief world history to show why it was necessary for God to hatch a plan. The plan narrows down to one man, Abram.

### Abram.

About 2000 years before Christ, Abram was called by God to leave his home in Haran and travel to a place that God would show him. That place was the land of Canaan, later to be known as The Promised Land, Israel, Palestine, and even Judah. God made a covenant with Abram, promising him that he would be blessed, have many descendants, and that they would inhabit the Land. Abram moved with his wife, Sarai, his nephew, Lot, and all their livestock into Canaan. Following quarrels over wells and feed for their animals, Abram and Lot went their separate ways, Abram living in the hills, while Lot went into the greener Jordan valley, and finally gravitated to the city of Sodom. Lot’s life was saved when God eventually destroyed Sodom and nearby Gomorrah because of their wickedness.



Abram had some doubts about the promise of many descendants, since he and Sarai were so old, and they both agreed that he should have a child with Sarai’s Egyptian maidservant, Hagar. That child was Ishmael. Sarai and Hagar didn’t get on too well after that. But Sarai and Abram should have trusted God, for miraculously they did have a son as God promised. He was Isaac. Sarai became known as Sarah, and Abram as Abraham.

### Isaac

To test Abram’s faith God asked him to sacrifice Isaac on a stone altar.

Trusting, Abraham went to do as he was told, but God stopped him, supplying a ram to sacrifice in Isaac's place. Isaac grew and received the same promises from God that were given to his father, Abraham.



### Jacob and Esau

Isaac married Rebekah and they had twins, Esau and Jacob. They were very different and although Esau was the elder, and should have inherited all the promises, he obviously didn't value them. On one occasion he actually sold his birthright to his younger brother, Jacob, for a bowl of soup!

As half-blind Isaac was about to die, Jacob, with his mother's help, pretended to be Esau, and tricked his father into giving him the blessings that normally would have gone to his older brother. Esau was furious and Jacob decided he'd better run for his life. Alone on the road he stopped to sleep, and had a dream of a stairway going into heaven. He realised God was still with him as he continued to his Uncle Laban's. There he met Rachel, and fell in love. He worked for seven years for his uncle in order to win Rachel's hand in marriage, and then Laban double-crossed him by marrying him to Rachel's elder sister, Leah. Laban did allow him to marry Rachel, too, but only if he would work another seven years. Jacob agreed and both he and Laban proceeded to try to cheat each other over the livestock that Jacob was looking after. In the end Jacob returned with a family and many possessions to be reunited with Esau, who had forgiven him after all that time. Though not before an unusual incident where Jacob wrestled all night with "a man" who appears to have been God or his representative, until eventually the stranger put Jacob's hip out of joint, and blessed him.

Jacob had twelve sons:

Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun by Leah.

Dan and Naphtali by Rachel's maid, Bilhah.

Gad and Asher by Leah's maid, Zilpah.

Joseph and Benjamin by Rachel.

Jacob became known as Israel. So of course, his children and their descendants became known as the **Children of Israel**.



### Joseph

Since Rachel was Jacob's favourite wife, he also tended to favour her children Joseph and Benjamin. Jacob gave Joseph a special coat, which only served to make his brothers jealous of him. They disliked him even more when he told them about dreams he had with the meaning that his family were going to bow down to him.

So much did they hate him that one day the brothers put him down a well and then sold him to traders going to Egypt. Joseph was then sold to an Egyptian who had him put in prison when his wife wrongly accused Joseph of trying to molest her. In prison Joseph was able, by God's power, to interpret the dreams of two other prisoners, a cup-bearer and baker from the Pharaoh's court. When the Pharaoh later had two dreams that he couldn't understand the cup-bearer recommended Joseph to help. God explained the dreams to Joseph and he explained to the Pharaoh that there would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of drought. Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of storing up grain in the good years, to carry them through the drought years.

The drought also hit Canaan, and sure enough, Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy grain. Joseph recognised them, but they didn't recognise him, and they bowed down to him, just as in his early dreams. When he

finally told them who he was, they were terrified, but Joseph told them that God had a good purpose in his being sold into Egypt, for now he was able to save the lives of his family from famine, and so help fulfil God's promises made to Abraham, Isaac and their father, Jacob, that they would be a great nation.

After a while the whole family moved to Egypt and settled in the area of Goshen. They multiplied over a period of more than four hundred years, bringing us to the book of...

## **EXODUS**

The Pharaoh of the day was worried that the numerous Hebrews, the Children of Israel, might stage an uprising. To control them he turned them into slaves and tried to enforce birth control by having the baby boys killed. Enter Moses.

Moses' mother put him in a tar covered basket and told his sister Miriam to float it in the bulrushes at the edge of the River Nile and keep watch. The Pharaoh's daughter came down to the river, discovered the baby, but wanted to keep him alive, even though she knew he was a Hebrew. Miriam seized her opportunity, ran up and offered to find the Princess a nurse for her brother. No prizes for guessing who she asked. Moses' mother was paid by the palace to look after her own child, and the boy received a Hebrew and Egyptian education.



Years later Moses killed an Egyptian who was beating one of his Hebrew countrymen, and had to flee for his life into the desert. There he found a wife and settled down to looking after sheep. One day, however, he saw a bush burning without being consumed. He approached and a voice told him to remove his sandals, as he was on holy ground. God, who introduced himself as Yahweh (meaning something like "I am who I am") told Moses to go to the Pharaoh and tell him to let the Hebrews go into the desert. Despite all his excuses God insisted, and armed with some miraculous signs and his brother, Aaron, as spokesperson they fronted the Egyptian ruler. Pharaoh was not impressed, so God, through Moses, demonstrated that he was more powerful than all the gods of Egypt and should not be ignored. Ten plagues came upon Egypt: The Nile turned to blood, frogs covered the land, followed by gnats and flies. The Egyptians' (but not the Hebrews') livestock died, the Egyptians became covered in boils, hail and fire poured down from heaven, locusts cleaned up what was left of the crops, and then for three days darkness covered the land, except for Goshen, where the Hebrews lived. Each time the Pharaoh almost gave in, and then hardened his heart, until the tenth plague.

The Children of Israel were to kill a lamb and put the blood around the door of their houses. While they were inside they would be safe. God would **pass over** those houses. Elsewhere in Egypt the firstborn male of animals and humans would die that night. The Hebrews also ate the lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, ready to go. The meal was known as The **Passover** and has been celebrated every year to the present day as a reminder of God's deliverance.

About a million Hebrews were hurried off Egyptian soil taking with them gold jewellery given to them by the Egyptians. God led them with a cloud by day and fire by night. Even then the Pharaoh changed his mind, for the last time. Leading an army of charioteers he trapped the Children of Israel at the Red (or Reed) Sea. God put a cloud between the two groups and told Moses to hold out his staff over the water. The waters parted and



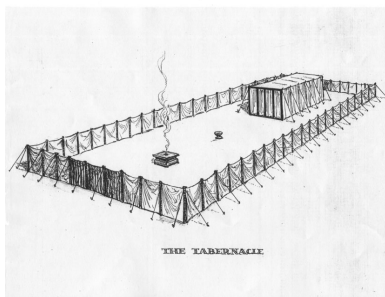
the Israelites went over on dry land. The pursuing Egyptian army became bogged as they entered the sea bed, and Moses again holding out his staff, watched as God closed the waters in over their enemies.

### **The Journey Through The Wilderness.**

The wilderness journey which followed was marked by complaints from this newly formed nation on the move. There was water shortage, food shortage, and lack of variety of food. Each time God supplied the need in a miraculous way, by giving them water from a rock, a white crispy wafer called Manna (meaning “What is it?”), which appeared on the ground, and quails.



Early in the journey Moses took the people to where he had first met God at the burning bush. God made a covenant with the Israelites telling them that, since he had delivered them, he would be their God and they would be his special people. The area where this happened was Mt Sinai, and on the mountain God gave Moses the **Ten Commandments**, and a lot more laws besides. Some of those related to the erection of the **Tabernacle**, a sort of Temple tent which was placed at the centre of their camp when they stopped. It was to remind them that God was with them. Within the most holy place in the Tabernacle the **Ark of the Covenant** was placed. This was a chest which contained Moses’ staff, some manna and the Ten Commandments. It was the most holy thing of all and was carried in procession as the Hebrews moved from place to place. Other laws related to the formation of a priesthood from the tribe of the Levites, who were mediators between God and the people. There were laws that covered animal sacrifices made for the sins of the people, thanksgiving sacrifices, ways of purifying things, and those laws which told them how they were to behave and relate to God when they reached the land. The third book in the Bible, **LEVITICUS** is very much to do with laws concerning holiness. When Moses came down the mountain, he had been gone so long that the people had put pressure on Aaron to cast a golden calf for them to worship, in the apparent absence of God. Moses in his anger, broke the stones on which the Ten Commandments were etched, ground down the calf and made the people drink it with water!

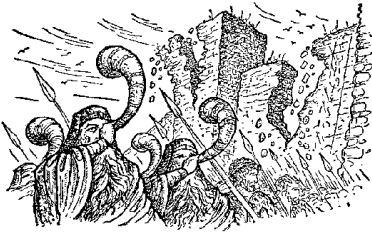


The journey which was heading for the Promised Land of Canaan, was set back forty years when the Hebrews came to the borders and sent spies in. Although impressed by the quality of the Land, only Joshua and Caleb were convinced that they could take it by God’s power. The rest were ready to return to Egypt or die in the desert rather than die at the hands of the residents of Canaan. God granted their wish and only Joshua and Caleb of the older generation finally set foot in the Land. Much of the story of the journey is told in the book of **NUMBERS**, including a notable time when the people complained yet again and were bitten by poisonous snakes. When they cried out to God, he told Moses to put a bronze snake on a pole. Those who looked at the bronze snake recovered.

Eventually the next generation reached Mt Nebo, overlooking Canaan. There, Moses recounted what God had done for them, and the laws he had given them, in the book called **DEUTERONOMY** (meaning “The Second Law”). He died there, and Joshua took over leadership.

### **THESE WERE THE BOOKS OF MOSES – THE PENTATEUCH**

The above first five books of the Bible are supposed to have been written by Moses, and are known as **The Pentateuch**.



## **JOSHUA**

The conquest of the land of Canaan began with the crossing of the Jordan on dry land, similar to the way the Hebrews had crossed the Reed Sea. The destruction of Jericho followed as the people marched around the city once each day until the seventh. On that day they marched around seven times, sounded the trumpets and shouted. The walls fell and only Rahab, the prostitute, who had sheltered two Hebrew spies, was spared with those in her house. (It's interesting that Rahab was an ancestor of Jesus).

The battle for Ai, however, met with defeat. It turned out that Achan had, in disobedience to God's instructions, held on to some booty. Once his sin was dealt with victory followed.

The Israelites waged war in a series of campaigns against the kings, who reigned over local cities in Canaan. The instructions usually included complete destruction so that God's people would not be seduced by the idolatry of the inhabitants of the Land.

By the end of Joshua the Hebrews (Israelites) possessed most of the Land, but those areas they had failed to secure would be a thorn in their side. As the twelve tribes settled in their allotted territories West and East of the River Jordan, Joshua issued a challenge to put away idolatry and serve God alone. Obedience to God would bring blessings, while disobedience would bring the curses (mentioned in Deuteronomy) against them.



## **JUDGES**

Settlement ushered in a period of time when there was no overall leader. The twelve tribes existed side by side as a loose confederacy under God. The Levites (priests) had no land of their own, but were spread around ministering to the various tribes. The Tabernacle was set up and the Ark of the Covenant stayed there.

It was not long before the people of the next generations fell into the Canaanite ways of idol worship. As they did so God allowed neighbouring tribes to afflict the Israelite tribes until they cried out to God for help. God heard them and raised up a charismatic leader who was able to unite the Israelites and defeat the enemy by God's power. Such leaders were known as Judges and included such notable names as the prophetess Deborah, Gideon and Samson. These and other stories show how violent those times were.



## **RUTH**

The story of the Moabitess, Ruth, falls into this period. Her faithfulness to her mother-in-law, Naomi is a touching account, which led to Ruth also becoming part of Jesus' family tree. Ruth came to live at Bethlehem. They had a child Obed. He had a son, Jesse, and Jesse became the father of David, who eventually became king.

## **1 & 2 SAMUEL**

Samuel was really the last of the judges. As a boy he was assistant to Eli, the priest, in the Tabernacle. One night he heard God call his name. God told him that Eli and his sons would die, and consequently Samuel became priest and leader of Israel. At that time the Philistines, an old enemy of Israel's were causing a great deal of trouble with their iron weapons and chariots. The Israelites felt that they needed a king to unite them,





despite the fact that God had always raised up a leader to unite them and defeat their enemies. Samuel tried to warn them of the hardships that a king would bring to their way of life, and that God should be their king, all to no avail. God, and Samuel relented, choosing a tall, handsome man named Saul to become the first king of Israel.

### Kings Saul and David

Saul started well but disobeyed God's instructions through Samuel. God told Samuel to anoint another king, the young lad, David. Although anointed it would be many years until he was able to rule. He first came to Saul's notice when a Philistine giant, Goliath, challenged any Israelite who would dare to fight him. Young David, outraged by the giant's comments mocking God, volunteered to fight. "I come in the name of the Lord!" he told Goliath, and felled him with a single stone from his sling. David the shepherd boy became David the warrior, leading troops against the Philistine menace. So successful was he that Saul became jealous, and after attempting to pin David to the wall with a javelin on a couple of occasions, David decided it was time to get away.



So began his adventures as an outlaw, and gathering others to his band they evaded Saul on a number of occasions. David could have taken Saul's life but chose rather to remain faithful to the king even though he did not trust him. Eventually Saul and his family were killed in battle, and David, because of his loyalty, was able to unite even those who had been Saul's followers under his kingship. David, from Bethlehem, of the tribe of Judah was the greatest king in Israel's history and an ancestor of Jesus. He was seen as a deliverer and under him the kingdom of Israel expanded its borders to their maximum.



Musical Instruments

David played the harp and wrote many of the **PSALMS**, including one which asked for God's cleansing from his sins of committing adultery with Bathsheba and trying to cover up her resulting pregnancy by having her husband put into the forefront of battle where, unsupported, he died. The Bible portrays David as a flawed human being as well as a hero.

## 1 & 2 KINGS (1 & 2 CHRONICLES)

### King Solomon

Although the child died, David had another by Bathsheba. His name was Solomon and he succeeded David. As he took over the throne God asked him what he wished for, and was pleased to see that Solomon requested wisdom to lead God's people. God also gave him fame and great riches for good measure. His wisdom was demonstrated when two prostitutes came before him, each claiming that the baby they brought belonged to her. Solomon commanded the baby be cut in half and shared between them. At once the real mother pleaded that the child be given to the other woman, rather than killed.

Solomon built a palace and the first **Temple**, specified by God, and similar in design to the Tabernacle. He also had stables, many wives and inherited a large kingdom at peace with his neighbours. This was Israel's golden age.

### Wisdom literature

It is quite likely that much of the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Testament of the Bible was gathered in this period. The **PSALMS** used in worship, the books of **PROVERBS** and **ECCLESIASTES** with their observations on life, **SONG OF SONGS** about human love, and **JOB**, a lesson in faith in



the middle of unexplainable suffering.

The golden age of Israel's monarchy did not last long. The extensive building program came at a cost. The labour brought discontent amongst the people (as Samuel had predicted) and sowed the seeds of civil war. Solomon secured peace alliances by marrying foreign wives, who brought their idols with them. Solomon who started so well, found himself straying from God by the end of his reign.

#### King Rehoboam

Solomon's son, Rehoboam, took advice from younger men instead of those who were older and wiser, and made life even harder for the Israelites. As a result Rehoboam, once a servant of Solomon who rebelled, made himself king of the ten northern tribes, set up two golden calves for them to worship and began civil war with the tribes of Judah and Benjamin under Rehoboam.



#### The Divided Kingdom

##### Israel in the North

The northern tribes became known as Israel while the south was known as Judah (or Judea). Rehoboam led Israel astray into idol worship, and a succession of eighteen kings followed with a number of coups and murders. Almost all evil kings, one of the most notable was **Ahab** with his wife **Jezebel** who encouraged the evil worship of Baal, establishing a priesthood and persecuting the prophets of God.



##### Elijah & Elisha

At this time Elijah came on the scene. As a prophet of God he constantly challenged King Ahab. He prayed for drought to teach Israel a lesson, and set up a contest on Mt Carmel between himself and the prophets of Baal. An altar was built with an animal sacrifice. The prophets of Baal were to try to pray down fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice. They failed, but God answered Elijah's prayer and the sacrifice, altar and dust from the ground were burned up. The spectators acknowledged God and put the prophets of Baal to death. Rain came, but an angry Jezebel threatened Elijah's life, and he fled. However, God spoke to him, reassuring him that he was not alone, but that seven thousand had not bowed the knee to Baal. At God's instruction Elijah returned anointing the next king. God was still in control, and Elijah was succeeded by Elisha who continued to lead a school of prophets.

Later the prophets **AMOS** and **HOSEA** would also speak God's messages to Israel. Amos is mostly a message of impending doom, while Hosea also spoke of God's love for the people. God was like a husband whose wife (Israel) had been unfaithful.

The warnings were to no avail. Israel continued her idolatry and unjust and evil practices until God eventually allowed her to be overrun by Assyria, and her people were taken into captivity in 722BC.

##### Judah in the South

Judah fared somewhat better. Her kings followed in succession from King David and although many were evil, there were bright spots and times of reform. In the days of King Josiah, the Temple was renovated and the book of the law (probably Deuteronomy) was rediscovered. They realised how far they had moved away from God, but despite sweeping changes it



was somewhat too late, and the following evil kings led Judah to **Exile** at the hands of the Babylonian conquerors, first in 597BC, and again in 586BC.

The southern kingdom also had its notable prophets. **ISAIAH** who predicted both doom, and a return and restoration. **JEREMIAH** who suffered at the hands of those who didn't want to heed his warnings, and lesser prophets such as **MICAH** and **ZEPHANIAH**.

Other prophets who operated in the time of the divided kingdom were **JONAH**, **JOEL**, and **OBADIAH**.

#### The Exile

The Exile to Babylon saw the destruction of the Temple built by Solomon, and the loss of the Land that God had given his people. It was a time of utter hopelessness expressed in Jeremiah's **LAMENTATIONS**. People wondered why it had happened, and others thought that perhaps their God had been defeated. Prophets during the Exile attempted to tell the exiles that this was God's judgement, that he was still in control and that he would eventually bring some of the people (a remnant) back to the Land to rebuild. During this time there arose a strong expectation of a Messiah, a deliverer from God from the line of David. Prophets of the Exile were **JEREMIAH**, **NAHUM**, **HABBAKUK**, **EZEKIEL** and **ISAIAH**.

The stories of **DANIEL** also cover this period to show that the Babylonian conquerors were still subject to the Kingdom and power of God. Such stories include Daniel's interpretations of the king's dreams, Daniel preserved in the lion's den after he prayed to God instead of the king, his three friends saved in the furnace when they refused to bow to the statue of the king, King Nebuchadnezzar's madness, and the writing on the wall for King Belshazzar who dared to use the vessels taken from Jerusalem's Temple for his own banquet. That writing announced the end of the Babylonian kingdom, and that night the Medo-Persians became the masters.

Under Persia we read of the brave queen, **ESTHER**, a Jewess, who saved her people from extermination. Although God is not mentioned, the "coincidences" show that God was still looking after his people even in exile.

#### The Return

After seventy years of exile, the Persian king, Cyrus, allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem, rebuild the walls and re-establish the Temple. **NEHEMIAH** and **EZRA** cover this period, while **MALACHI** wrote to encourage the priests and people to be diligent in their worship and service to God.

#### The gap before Jesus came

Between the end of the Hebrew Scriptures and the beginning of the New Testament there was a period of about four hundred years. During that time the first dominant power after Persia was the Greek Empire, under Alexander the Great (334 to 331BC). Egypt and Syria were next and in 198BC Syria took Palestine from Egypt. Antiochus IV of Syria was particularly remembered because of his desecration of the new Temple in Jerusalem, followed by its purifying by the Jewish hero, Judas Maccabaeus. Finally the Romans conquered and Pompey established a Roman protectorate in Palestine. When Jesus was born, Augustus had been the emperor since 27BC, at a time when the Jewish people were more than ever looking for their Messiah, the Christ.



### SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

What does "Lion" mean in each of these references?

Numbers 23:24,

Numbers 24:9,

Psalm 7:1-2,

Psalm 91:13

Daniel 6

Daniel 7:4

Make a list of the prophets who spoke

Before the Exile

During the Exile

After the Exile

### AN EXERCISE IN SORTING OUT

#### THE OLD TESTAMENT ORDER OF EVENTS

See how you go sorting each section in order,  
and then numbering the sections in chronological order...

No. \_\_\_\_

The Judges

\_\_\_\_\_

Joshua becomes leader

\_\_\_\_\_

K. Solomon

\_\_\_\_\_

Conquest of the Promised Land

\_\_\_\_\_

K. David

\_\_\_\_\_

Samuel

\_\_\_\_\_

K. Saul

\_\_\_\_\_

No. \_\_\_\_

The Kingdom divides

\_\_\_\_\_

Persia becomes the world power

\_\_\_\_\_

Jews return to their land

\_\_\_\_\_

Conquest of Alexander  
the Great of Greece

\_\_\_\_\_

Judah exiled to Babylon

\_\_\_\_\_

Israel exiled to Assyria

\_\_\_\_\_

K. Rehoboam

\_\_\_\_\_

No. \_\_\_\_

Crossing the Red Sea

\_\_\_\_\_

The Plagues

\_\_\_\_\_

The Burning Bush

\_\_\_\_\_

Reaching the Promised Land

\_\_\_\_\_

Moses kills an Egyptian  
and flees

\_\_\_\_\_

The first Passover

\_\_\_\_\_

Moses in the bulrushes

\_\_\_\_\_

No. \_\_\_\_

The Flood

\_\_\_\_\_

Cain and Abel

\_\_\_\_\_

Isaac

\_\_\_\_\_

Jacob

\_\_\_\_\_

Joseph

\_\_\_\_\_

Abraham

\_\_\_\_\_

Tower of Babel

\_\_\_\_\_

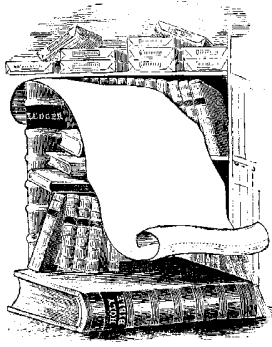
Adam and Eve

\_\_\_\_\_

SEE IF YOU CAN NUMBER THE FOLLOWING IN ORDER...

Elijah \_\_\_\_ Ruth \_\_\_\_ Sarah \_\_\_\_

Daniel \_\_\_\_ Moses \_\_\_\_ Nehemiah \_\_\_\_



## THE RELIABILITY OF THE SCRIPTURES

How do we know that the Bible is reliable? Haven't the stories been changed over the years as they were passed on, rather like the game, Chinese Whispers?

Let's do a comparison. In the Bible Society's video, *Out of the Memory Banks*, it tells us that we have ten documents from Julius Caesar, all copies of the original, and that the earliest copy we have is dated 900AD. We also have seven copies of Plato the earliest dating to 1200 years after the original. We take these documents as reasonable evidence of the events and ideas they report.

When it comes to the New Testament we have fragments from 60 to 70 years after the events, four copies from 250 years later, and some 13,000 copies altogether. These copies have been found all around the Mediterranean, and apart from the local spelling of place names, they are substantially the same, suggesting that they have been carefully copied from the originals.

But what of the original stories? Can we rely on them?

Just suppose I wanted to find out all about you, in order to write up an article. I would go to your family, your friends, the people you work with, people who have spent time with you and talked with you. Now, the Gospel accounts, in the case of Matthew and John, were written by the disciples, eyewitnesses of the events and listeners to both the public and private teachings of Jesus. They spent about three years constantly in Jesus' company. Mark and Luke both had access to these eyewitnesses when they wrote their accounts. The original New Testament letters and Gospels (of which we have so many copies) were all written within seventy years of Jesus' death and most within about forty years.

The Old Testament, was copied meticulously by the Masoretes. To ensure there were no mistakes they would count up words and letters in the original and then the copy. If mistakes were made, particularly in the name for God, they would go back to the beginning of the scroll and start again. The comparison of the Masoretic texts with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls bears out the painstaking care that was taken in the copying process.

Perhaps the most convincing evidence for the reliability of the Scriptures is in the reading of them. Although recorded by many different people, in different styles, over more than a thousand years, they have an authenticity and authority of their own, which shines through in the major themes which interweave from beginning to end.

In short, the best way to be convinced is to read them for yourself

# An Outline of the Old Testament

J.D. West

## 1. GENESIS

Creation > Noah > Abraham > Isaac > Jacob (called Israel) > Reuben Judah Gad Naphtal  
(His sons are the Simeon Issachar Asher Joseph\*  
twelve tribes) Levi Zebulun Dan Benjamin  
\* Joseph goes to Egypt > (His sons are Ephraim and Manasseh)

## 2. EXODUS (1440BC or 1290BC)

Flight from Egypt to the Promised Land (Canaan) under Moses  
The Law given at Sinai. **LEVITICUS NUMBERS DEUTERONOMY**

## 3. JOSHUA

Joshua leads the conquest of Canaan

## 4. JUDGES (after 1100BC) Period of 400 years of early settlement.

Judges were raised up to unite the tribes against invaders after Israel repeatedly turned from God

## 5. 1 & 2 SAMUEL (RUTH 1100BC)

Priest & prophet Samuel anoints the first king **SAUL**, then **DAVID**

## 6. 1 & 2 KINGS // 1 & 2 CHRONICLES

**King Solomon** succeeds David.

The kingdom split between Israel (North) and Judah (South) after Solomon's death in 930BC. Israel had a succession of evil kings. Judah's kings varied between good and evil (E) and except for Queen Athalia, followed the Davidic line.

**WISDOM BOOKS - JOB, PSALMS, PROVERBS, ECCLESIASTES, SONG OF SOLOMON**

### ISRAEL (North) Reign Prophets

Jereboam I  
Nadab 1 yr  
Baasha 24 yrs  
Elah 2 yr  
Zimri 7 days  
Omri 12 yrs  
Ahab 22 yrs  
Ahaziah 2 yrs  
Jehoram 12 yrs  
Jehu 28 yrs  
Jehoahaz 17 yrs  
Jehoash 16 yrs  
Jereboam II 41 yrs  
Zechariah 6 mths  
Shallum 1 mth  
Menahem 10 yrs  
Pekahiah 2 yrs  
Pekah 20 yrs  
Hoshea 9 yrs

Elijah

Elisha

AMOS

HOSEA

### JUDAH

### ☆ (South) Reign

Reheboam 17 yrs  
Abijah E/G 3 yrs  
Asa 41 yrs

Jehoshaphat 25 yrs  
Jehoram E 8 yrs  
Ahaziah E 1 yr  
(Athalia) E 6 yrs  
Joash 40 yrs

Amaziah 29 yrs

Uzziah 52 yrs

Jotham 16 yrs  
Ahaz E 16 yrs  
Hezekiah 29 yrs  
Manasseh E 55 yrs  
Amon E 2 yrs  
Josiah 31 yrs  
Jehoahaz E 3 mths  
Jehoiakim E  
Jehoiakin E 3 mths  
Zedekiah E 11 yrs



JONAH

JOEL ?

OBADIAH ?

ISAIAH

MICAH

ZEPHANIAH | JEREMIAH

### ----THE EXILE----

722BC Israel captive to **ASSYRIA**  
**NAHUM HABBAKUK**  
597 & 586BC Judah captive to **BABYLON**  
**LAMENTATIONS EZEKIEL DANIEL**  
539BC **PERSIA** the world power. **ESTHER**  
520BC **HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH**  
458BC Return of Jews to Jerusalem  
under **EZRA, NEHEMIAH** (432BC)  
**MALACHI** 400yrs to NT

### EVENTS BETWEEN THE OLD & NEW TESTAMENTS

334-331 BC Conquest by Alexander the Great. **GREECE** dominant.  
323-221 BC **EGYPT** & **SYRIA** dominate  
198 BC Syria takes Palestine from Egypt  
167 BC Antiochus IV (Syria) invades Jerusalem  
164 BC Judas Maccabaeus purifies the Temple  
63 BC Pompey est. a Roman Protectorate in Palestine  
27 BC Augustus becomes Roman Emperor

Books of the OT are in **CAPITAL** italics. Kings underlined denote a break in the lineage.



## TWO GREAT THEMES IN THE BIBLE

The Bible has many themes which give it structure. Understanding those themes helps us to read the Bible in the context of the overall purposes of God, revealed through them. Here we briefly trace the two major themes... COVENANT (testament) and KINGDOM

# Covenants: Creation



*The word covenant is not used too frequently these days. We are more likely to use expressions like, promise or agreement. We may think of examples like contracts and warranties, but these hardly come close to the richness of the solemn and binding agreements that God enters into with his people. Although it is too frequently devalued these days, the Christian marriage ceremony perhaps comes closest to describing the biblical concept of God's covenants.*

*Covenants of the Old Testament were also part of the cultural background. There were PARITY agreements or treaties made between equals, ROYAL GRANTS usually of land made to a subject, and SUZERAINTY TREATIES drawn up by a conquering king for the vassal nation. This last treaty spelled out the benefits of serving the suzerain, and the dire consequences of not doing so. God's dealings with Israel tended to take the form of a suzerainty treaty, but God also entered into Royal Grant covenants which had no particular conditions attached.*

*Covenant often arose from failure and death and marked a new beginning, often with physical signs as reminders.*

The concept of Covenant is evident in the Creation stories. God the benevolent ruler gives the fruits of the earth and places certain restrictions along with the consequences of disobedience. *Genesis 1-2*

# Noah



The promises to Adam and Eve, are repeated to Noah, with the sign of the Covenant—the rainbow. (*Gen 9:1-7*)

# Abraham



Following the breaking of the Covenant (The Fall) the consequences play out in *Genesis 3-11*. In *Genesis 12:1-3* God enters into a Covenant with Abraham and then with Isaac and Jacob. The Promises entail many descendants, blessings, The Land and the assurance that through Abraham and his descendants all the nations of the earth would be blessed. *Genesis 15* recounts the custom of “cutting a Covenant” which God gives as a sign to assure Abraham of the promise of Land. The condition for the Covenant was Abraham's faith and obedience.

# Moses



The deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt is the basis of God's claim over the fledgling nation, embarking on a wilderness journey to the Land promised to Abraham and his descendants. God's Promise was: You will be my special people and I will be your God. God's Conditions: Love the Lord your God with all your heart... have no other gods — The Commandments. The signs of this Covenant were many: The stone tablets, the Tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant and so on.

# David



God's promise to David: “Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever” *2 Samuel 7:16*

# Jeremiah



The continual breaking of the Covenant conditions by Israel, and the decline of the nation in division and then into Exile brought a revival of God's Covenant relationship, through the prophets: “The days are coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah... I will write it in their heart... for I will forgive...” *Jeremiah 31:31-34*

# Jesus



Paul records in *1 Corinthians 11:23-26* that Jesus, as he took the cup at the Last Supper, said, “This cup is the **new covenant** in my blood... as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”

Jesus, of the line of Abraham and David, who fulfilled the law given to Moses and was perfectly obedient to God, ushered in the age of the Spirit through his obedience, death and resurrection. Forgiveness and reconciliation into God's family, for all nations was now possible through God's grace.

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# The Kingdom of God

The Bible asserts that the superpowers of the world are puny alongside the power of God's Kingdom, and that we only hold our own destiny in our hands in so far as we have a choice - to respond to God's overtures to us, or to reject them. Whatever we choose, past, present and future are in God's hands, and it is that Kingdom which will prevail.

We often think of God's Kingdom as another name for Heaven. Of course Heaven is a major part of God's Kingdom, but the Kingdom is not just some geographical place. Rather it is anywhere that God rules, and it especially applies when *people* submit to God. We see God's Kingdom most clearly when God's authority and power are in evidence, and when people willingly submit as God's subjects.

Graham Goldsworthy in his book *Gospel and Kingdom* helpfully describes the Kingdom of God as,

**"God's people,  
in God's place,  
under God's rule,"**

but we might also add...

**"under God's provision"**  
since this King cares for his subjects.

Although the terms, Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Heaven are used frequently in the New Testament, it is *the principle* which is evident in the Old Testament.

## Creation



The Covenant of Creation reveals God who is Creator and also in charge. It is God who provides both the bounty and the boundaries. The Kingdom here is characterised by God's People (Adam and Eve) living in God's place (Eden) under God's rules and provision.

## Noah



Noah is obedient to God and builds an ark. God's people number eight. Preserved in God's place to begin again under a restated covenant

## Abraham



The obedience of Abraham leads him to God's place (The Promised Land) to eventually become a people under God's Kingship.

Nothing would jeopardise this Kingdom plan. Later in Genesis, Joseph's brothers found themselves serving God's purposes (Genesis 50:19-20) even as they tried to do away with Joseph.

## Moses



It is through Moses' leadership that God formed a special people to be examples of a good Kingdom, living in God's Land and with every aspect of life ordered by God, to remind them of their status in the world and their relationship with their deliverer and King. (Exodus 19:5-8)

## Joshua



After settling the Land Joshua calls the people to decide whom they will serve (Joshua 24:14-15). Their promise is to serve God. God's people living in God's Land, under God's rule and protection.

## Judges



The period of the Judges is a cyclic record of the tribes of Israel stepping out from under God's rule, serving idols, and suffering the consequences of invasion and loss. As they call out to God a deliverer is raised up by God and peace is reestablished.

## Kings



The request by Israel to have kings like the other nations to deliver them from external threats, is seen by the priest, Samuel as a failure to trust in God's Kingship. God's concession is that if the King will submit to him then all will continue to be well.

The Golden Age under King David and the early reign of Solomon bear witness to that promise. Here we see God's Kingdom on earth. But as Solomon turned to idols and the nation split North (Israel) and South (Judah) so most of the following kings went from bad to worse.

The prophets attempted to bring the people back to the Covenant promises, but to no avail. The end was Exile. The symbols of God's kingship over Israel destroyed—The Temple and Jerusalem. The Land was lost.

Books such as Daniel and Esther, set in the Exile, affirm that God is King even over the conquering nations. God's everlasting Kingdom would outlast the super-powers of the day. The Return to the Land was tangible evidence that God was at work.

## Jesus



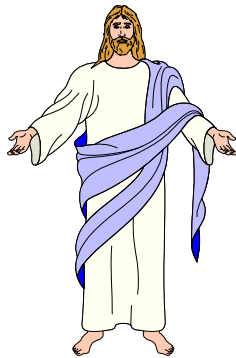
When God's time was right, Jesus came onto the scene as the perfectly obedient Son of the King. Jesus was God's person, in God's place, under God's rule, blessed of God. He was the servant King

Now, those who are his followers are also God's people, serving where God has placed them, seeking to be obedient to God, and "blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places". (Ephesians 1:3-10)

And it is in heaven where the Kingdom will one day be experienced by God's people in Christ, in all its fullness and glory.

# Part 8

## Now you see him more clearly The New Testament



While the Old Testament points towards the New and enriches our understanding of it. The New Testament brings the Old to light. The writer of Hebrews put it this way...

<sup>1</sup>Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, <sup>2</sup>but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. <sup>3</sup>He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. Hebrews 1

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are called the **Gospels** because gospel means good news. They tell of Jesus' birth, life, teachings, death and resurrection.

Although there is some debate about this, it is generally acknowledged that **MARK** wrote his Gospel first. Mark did not know Jesus when he was on earth, but knew the disciple, Peter, very well. We believe he received his information from Peter. He has nothing about the birth of Jesus, and only a brief account of the resurrection. He establishes from the start that Jesus is the Son of God.

Much of Mark is copied word for word in **LUKE** and **MATTHEW**, but they also copied from somewhere else, because they both have other material in common. We don't have that document, but it is called Q. Luke had still other material that is only in his Gospel (We call this source L) and Matthew has material that is unique to his Gospel (Called M).

Luke, like Mark, he did not know Jesus in person, but met Peter and other disciples. He recorded his purpose for writing...

<sup>1</sup>Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup>just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, <sup>3</sup>I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup>so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed. Luke 1

Luke was a doctor and includes extra stories about healing, Jesus dealings with women, and people who were the less fortunate of Jewish society. He tells Jesus' birth story from Mary's viewpoint and includes the shepherds. Matthew is thought to be the tax collector, also known as Levi, who became a disciple of Jesus. His Gospel is ordered in a very Jewish way. In the birth stories he writes from Joseph's perspective and includes the account of the Wise Men.

**JOHN** is thought to have written his Gospel in his old age. It is very different from the others. He opens by referring to Jesus as The Word who was God and was there at Creation. He selects some of Jesus' miracles as evidence that Jesus truly was the Messiah. John was a close disciple of Jesus. He states clearly his purpose for writing...

<sup>30</sup>Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup>But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. John 20



Luke went on to write **ACTS**. An account of Jesus' Ascension into heaven, The pouring out of God's Spirit at Pentecost, and the activities and spread of the early church, to the Samaritans and then to the Gentiles (non-Jews). It records the witness and death of Stephen and the persecution of the first believers, but the rest of it is taken up with the conversion and missionary journeys of the apostle, Paul. Acts is a valuable framework for understanding where the following letters fit in.

**Paul wrote to the churches in various places around the Mediterranean.**

To the **ROMANS** he wrote that salvation is by faith, not by obedience to the law.

To the **CORINTHIANS** he wrote two letters covering a wide variety of relational problems that the church faced, and including the great chapter on love, chapter 13.

**GALATIANS** is like a mini-Romans. Paul criticized them for returning to Jewish legalism.

**EPHESIANS** includes some wonderful prayers of Paul for the church at Ephesus. He deals with the importance of marriage, and speaks of the whole armour of God as a defence against Satan.

**PHILIPPIANS** tells of Paul's witnessing in prison, the example of Christ's humility, his own example and exhortations to Christian living.

**COLOSSIANS** covers prayers, the work and sufficiency of Jesus Christ and more encouragements to live out the Christian life.

In the two letters to the **THESSALONIANS** Paul, amongst the thanks and exhortations, includes information about Christ's second coming, the anticipation of which should not stop them from working.

Paul wrote two letters to the young leader, **TIMOTHY** to encourage him to remain faithful to things he has been taught, and to give him practical instruction on various issues, particularly concerning church order and leadership.

**TITUS** was also a church leader. Paul entreats him to remain true to sound doctrine and to urge right behaviour.

Paul's short letter to **PHILEMON** requests him to receive back his runaway slave, Onesimus, who had become very helpful to Paul.

The author of **HEBREWS** is unknown, but it reads like a sermon. The writer presents Jesus as the one who is greater than the angels, prophets, priests and sacrifices. The letter exhorts its readers not to turn aside from the Faith, and includes a fine passage about the nature of faith and those who were motivated to action by it.

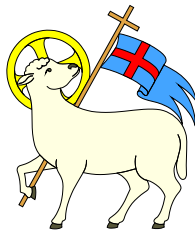
**JAMES** is a very practical letter, covering such issues as impartiality, faith evidenced by works, true wisdom, the problem of the tongue, and the power of prayer.

**PETER** wrote two letters (though some dispute that he actually wrote both that stand in his name). They particularly tackle the problem of Christians living in an unchristian world, the attitude

Christians should have towards the state, and the need to be vigilant against doctrinal error.

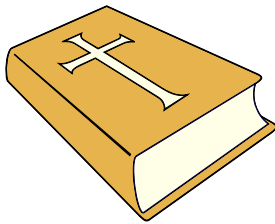
**JOHN** wrote three letters as well as his gospel. His main emphasis is to counter heretical teachings which were beginning to creep into the church. He calls for obedience, love and faith.

**JUDE**, like Peter and John, warns against false teachers



**REVELATION** is a very different book from the hand of John. His vision is written to encourage the churches to remain true to the end, despite persecution. Through symbolic visions and numbers, Jesus is seen to have conquered and God is shown to be in control of all things. In the end God's justice will be done and all things be made perfect. The final chapters of Revelation picture the return to the perfection of Eden at the beginning of the Bible – Paradise restored.

### WHICH TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE?



The Old Testament was written in Hebrew (with a few chapters in Aramaic) and the New Testament in the common Greek of the day. Before Christ a Greek translation was made of the Old Testament. This was known as the **Septuagint** and is still used by scholars to help throw light on difficult passages. For a long time the oldest Hebrew scrolls we had were from near the end of the first millennium, copied carefully by the Masoretes. Then, in the 1940s a shepherd boy discovered scrolls in jars in a cave near the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea Scrolls contained passages of the Hebrew Old Testament at least a thousand years older than the Masoretic texts, but they also bore out the care that the Masoretes had taken, because they were almost identical.

For a long time the church used Jerome's 5<sup>th</sup> Century Latin translation, and it took until the 1500s, with the Reformation and the invention of the printing press before people were able to read the Bible for themselves, in their own languages. In 1662 the King James Version (or Authorised Version, AV) was produced and became the accepted authority in England.

In the last century there has been an explosion in the number of translations as translators have tried to make the Bible more accessible and understandable to modern people. Today the Bible is translated into well over 2000 languages

Since Hebrew and Greek are the original languages every translation must therefore involve a little bit of interpretation.

Some translations translate word for word. This gives you more work in understanding the meaning. Other translations take the *meaning* of the original and give you the closest English equivalent to convey the same idea.

Take 2 Corinthians 6:12 for example

*Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels*

Now that is a fairly literal translation from the King James Version, but it may not quite convey the image that we want people to understand. Compare the same verse in the New International Version.

*We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us.*

The second one conveys the sense of the verse more readily.

## **SOME POPULAR MODERN VERSIONS**

**The New King James Version** has similarities to the old one, but the language is more contemporary.

**Good News Bible** (GNB) and **Today's English Version** (TEV) are similar. They use simple English and are easy reading for beginners. But they do a lot of interpreting for you, and may miss some of the richness and depth of a more accurate translation.

**New International Version** (NIV) provides a good balance between literal translation and providing the sense of the words. There is an excellent Study Bible in the NIV which gives copious help with difficult passages.

**The English Standard version** (ESV) is on the literal translation end of the spectrum

**The New Revised Standard Version** (NRSV) is very accurate, reasonably up to date and uses inclusive language (where the original text says "Man" it uses "Mortal" and "brothers" is conveyed as "Brothers and sisters," to include men and women – where that is what is meant).

**The Amplified Version** gives expanded meanings for key words. This gives greater appreciation of the text at times, though it is argued that some of the amplification may not be implied by the original context.

You are never going to find a perfect version. The closest are the original documents that we have, in Greek and Hebrew. Perhaps the best way is to find something you find easy to read and understand, and eventually compare with other versions, particularly when you want to clarify a passage.

### **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

When the Bible is read in an Anglican church the reader finishes with...

“For the Word of the Lord.”

And the response

“Thanks be to God.”

What does it mean when we call the Bible, “God’s Word”?

What would you say to someone who only reads the New Testament?

What would you say to people who believe that they can get all they need from the Bible in the Sunday service?

Take a look at the aids to Bible reading such as *Daily Bread*, *Every Day with Jesus*, *Bible Speaks Today*, and others.  
What do you think of them?

What might be the difficulties and advantages in studying the Bible with a group of people?

Read Article six at the end of the Anglican Prayer Book.

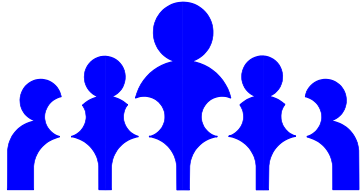
# Part 9

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## MEETING

## THE PEOPLE

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If you are confronted with the word, “Church” what do you think of?

What are the positives and negatives in your image of “Church”?

Sometimes we think of the church as some vague institution and we say, “Why doesn’t the church do this or that.”

At other times we are referring to a denomination such as Anglican or Baptist or Uniting.

Then again, there is the building. “I’ll meet you at the church,” we say.

Look up the Bible Verses and write down what church seems to mean in these contexts.

Acts 8:1

1 Corinthians 1:1-2

Matthew 16:18

Acts 20:28

1 Corinthians 12:28

What is the church likened to in these references?

Colossians 1:18

1 Corinthians 12:12

1 Peter 2:4-5

1 Peter 2:9

1 Peter 2:10



You often hear people say, “I don’t have to go to church to be a Christian.” There may be a grain of truth in that, but it is mostly an excuse. Other questions need to be asked, such as:-

Do you think God wants you to go to church?

Do you think you will grow as a Christian if you don’t go?

and

What are the advantages of going to church?

Let me give some good reasons why staying away from church isn’t an option for Christians.

Write them down...

*Hebrews 10*

<sup>24</sup>*And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds,*

<sup>25</sup>*not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

*1 Corinthians 12*

<sup>4</sup>*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup>and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup>and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. <sup>7</sup>To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

*Acts 2*

<sup>41</sup>*So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. <sup>42</sup>They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup>Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. <sup>44</sup>All who believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup>they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup>Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup>praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*



## Luke 11

<sup>1</sup>*He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."*

The example is often given of the brightly glowing coals in a fire. Pick one out and it quickly goes black again. So when we remove ourselves from the fellowship of other believers we can expect that we will grow cold.

Another example is of geese flying. When they stay in formation they fly 70% faster than a single goose. Their honking is an encouragement to those who start to flag. Because the Christian life is not a bed of roses, we need one another if we are to truly make progress.

And there's another thing. You may not feel that you have much to contribute towards a church community, but just by being there in the worship, you encourage others to continue attending, particularly if they are in your age range. More people means better singing and better response. Your presence makes a difference!

## DENOMINATIONS

These days you will find a wide spread of both belief and practice in most denominations, and the lines between them, once drawn very clearly, now tend to be somewhat blurred. Anglicanism, in particular, prides itself on the way it accommodates a variety of people with greatly varying points of view, often agreeing to differ for the sake of unity.

### Spectrums Within Church Practices

**High Church** or **Anglo-Catholics**, as the name suggests, tend towards Roman Catholic practices and beliefs.

**Low Church** is a more simple form of worship practiced often by evangelicals.

**Fundamentalist Evangelicals** at one end of the evangelical spectrum, take the Bible very literally, particularly the Creation accounts and aspects of the book of Revelation.

**Conservative Evangelicals** also believe that the Bible is the Word of God, but interpret it against its historical and literary background. Both groups of evangelicals believe that salvation is by grace through faith alone.

**Liberals** at the extreme, see the Bible as a human and very fallible book which is useful, in that it tells of people's experiences of God, but has no force or authority other than those parts which the interpreter finds authoritative. As you can imagine, beliefs vary greatly from person to person.

**Charismatics** emphasise the work and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Experience is often high on the agenda in their worship.

It is of course, possible to have a few combinations of these, especially mixing and matching belief and worship patterns. One defining factor in Anglicanism is that they are a people of the book, that is, the Prayer Book. However you will find that in some quarters even this is being abandoned. Another is the ordering of Bishops priests and deacons.

#### **Other denominations...**

**Australian Christian Churches (formerly Assemblies of God)** and Pentecostal Churches usually follow the evangelical charismatic line, but where experience is very highly emphasized some can be quite liberal in their interpretation of Scripture.

**Baptist Churches** tend to be evangelical and generally believe in believers baptism rather than the baptism of infants.

**Lutheran Churches** are evangelical, and somewhat Catholic in their beliefs about the presence of Christ in the sacraments of Holy Communion.

**Presbyterian Churches** are largely in the reformed tradition (see below).

**Reformed Churches** follow the Calvinistic line, which involves salvation by grace, through faith, and the belief that people are predestined to go to heaven by God. Not all go so far as to say that God has predestined the rest to hell.

**Roman Catholic** practice differs from the protestant denominations listed here in the area of prayers to the saints, prayers for the dead and more particularly the belief in the actual presence of Christ in the bread and wine. When the priest presides over Holy Communion (or The Eucharist) he is sacrificing Christ on the altar.

**The Uniting Church** is a combination of Presbyterian, Congregational and Methodist Churches. As you may imagine, like Anglicanism it embraces a range of beliefs. A major factor since its inception in the 1970s has been its social voice.

The above is a very simple outline of the denominations. If you really want to get an accurate picture, don't just depend on what a particular church has traditionally believed. It may be very different from the norm and may have shifted its stance over the years. Instead of jumping to conclusions, ask someone involved to talk about his or her beliefs.

Does this all sound rather confusing? Well it can be, though you will find that many churches can come to agreement on the most important beliefs about Jesus' death and resurrection, with new life being a gift of grace from God. Even so, how do you choose a church to attend?

I think that the bottom line is whether the church takes the Bible seriously, teaches it and helps you towards a deeper and more lasting relationship with God, through Jesus Christ. At first you need a place where you can be taught well and encouraged in your faith, but as you grow stronger, don't just look for a place where you will feel comfortable, but a place where you can serve God. Ultimately you should pray that God will lead you to the place where he wants you.

### **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

What would you say to someone who said that church was just for hypocrites?

What do *you* look for in a church?

What would you like to change in the church you are in?

What do you like most about it?

Have a talk to someone from another church nearby, and find out some of his or her beliefs

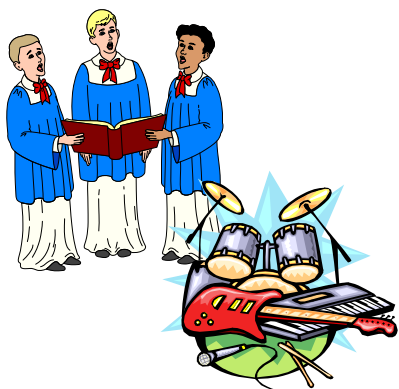
What questions do you still have about church?

# Part 10

## Words & Actions

The word worship comes from *worth*-ship. It means that God is worthy of our praise and thanks. That praise and thanks is expressed in various ways during a church service. The liturgy (the Prayer Book order of service) provides opportunity for balanced worship. Let us remember from the outset that worship is not a spectator event, nor is it meant to be entertainment. I am sure that God would want us to enjoy being in his presence together, but connecting with him is our first priority, and at times that could be confronting and very challenging!

Let's begin by taking a look at the Holy Communion Service as an example. We often start with hymns or choruses which praise God for who he is and things he has done. We may acknowledge our responsibilities towards him in a statement of the two great commandments, and then pray for the Holy Spirit to inspire us and help us to worship as we ought.



### MUSIC

I don't think that there is a right or wrong style of music, though there may be styles of music that are inappropriate to a particular age range and setting. It just depends what the aim is.

Do we want people to be quietly meditative, or outwardly expressive in their praise? Is the music for the members of the church, or is it to help attract new members? Does it help people to connect with God?

Obviously the words will be important. Repetitious verses, light on content, should be used sparingly, and hymns with obscure language either need explaining or rewriting. The Psalms can be a good guide, in that they show us how to praise God, and speak of our relationship to him.

What are some of your favourite hymns or choruses?

What is it that you like about them?



### THE PRAYERS

This is something which the Anglican Church does well, provided that the congregation is tuned in and thinking about what is being said. Because they are using a Prayer Book the whole of the liturgy within it is virtually a prayer, from the opening greeting, "The Lord be with you," to the closing blessing "The peace of God... keep your hearts and minds..."

Look up a Communion Service in an Anglican Prayer Book. Using the next page write down the title of each prayer (the rubrics – usually red italics – may help you). Also write a line to explain what you think is the function of the prayer.



THE PRAYERS OF THE HOLY COMMUNION SERVICE

PAGE \_\_\_\_\_



**The intercessions**, as the name suggests, is the point at which the church speaks on behalf of those who have need of God's help. One person prepares those prayers, but the whole congregation is to join in their intention that God should act in response to them. Having the congregation say responses helps them to stay with the leader. The outlines given in the Prayer Book provide for a wide range of prayers for the church, the nation and the world, allowing for current events and needs to be mentioned and addressed.

Can you think of ways which would help the congregation to participate and concentrate more during intercessions? How might we prevent people reading the Prayer Book in a parrot fashion?

Not only do we want to speak and sing to God, we want him to speak to us. One opportunity is through the reading of the Scriptures and their explanation in the sermon or address

### THE SERMON

There are different ways of preaching.



One way is to **explain a passage of Scripture's** original meaning verse by verse (exegesis), interpret its meaning (hermeneutics) and show how it applies to a people today (homiletics).

If a whole book is preached over a number of weeks then this approach provides solid systematic teaching which doesn't allow the preacher to dwell on his or her 'hobbyhorses'.

Another is a **thematic** approach where a particular topic (say The Kingdom of God or Creation) is explained by reference to a number of Bible passages, and then applied to the listeners. This may help people to gain an overview of the Bible and understand passages in their biblical context.

A third way of preaching is to take a current **topic** (say marriage, genetics or an event which is in the news) and expound the Bible passages which apply. Through this method people learn to apply the Bible, and see its authority and relevance to the world today.

Preaching programs will often embrace each of these approaches, though it is often thought that the first should receive the most emphasis.

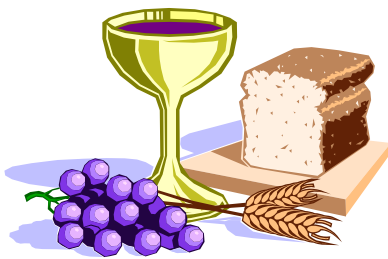
A good sermon will usually

- be biblical.

- make a few clear points, each one illustrated.

- have a clear aim (to encourage people in their faith, to move them to repentance, to witness, to love one another, to pray more, to appreciate God, or whatever.).

- move the listener to action.



### HOLY COMMUNION, EUCHARIST, LORD'S SUPPER

In Anglicanism they talk of meeting God in word and sacrament. By sacrament we are usually referring to Holy Communion, often called the Eucharist (the Greek, *eucharisto*, means *I give thanks*), or the Lord's Supper. What do we mean when we take the bread and wine?

Let me tell you a parable.

*Just after World War II a German family were living in a chalet in the south of France. One summer's day there was a terrible earthquake and the house collapsed burying the family under the rubble. A young Frenchman, riding his bike to a picnic saw the house fall, and quickly rode over to see if there was anything he could do. The family was still alive, but injured and trapped in the swirling dust under the unstable heap of stones and timber. There was no help for many kilometres and so the Frenchman began carefully moving parts of the wreckage until he could crawl underneath to where there was just one large beam between him and the people. Dragging his picnic basket in, he passed its contents, a bottle of wine and a French loaf, through to the husband, wife and three children, talking to them in their own language, while he worked on levering the beam out of the way. While he worked the ground shifted again, bringing down a shower of debris. By this time he had manoeuvred himself under the beam and was able to lift it enough for the Germans to crawl out. As they did so the earth tremors increased, the husband dived to safety, but the Frenchman was caught as stones from the house fell and crushed him to death.*

*On that day each year, the German family would gather for a picnic at that spot. And as they sipped the wine and ate the French bread they remembered how a man who once they regarded as an enemy, had become more than a friend, a saviour, giving his life for them.*

The prayer book talks of a sacrament as “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, given to us, ordained by Christ himself.” The Reformers talked about “visible words” meaning that we hear God's word in the reading and exposition of the Scriptures and we see it in the sacraments.

When Jesus had his Last Supper with his disciples he gave them bread and wine and said...

*"This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood..." Luke 22:19-20*

The various Christian traditions attach various degrees of meaning to Holy Communion.

The Salvation Army does not have it at all. They argue that it is what it points to (ie the sacrificial death of Jesus on our behalf) which is important.

Others of a Zwinglian tradition (Zwingli was a reformer) see the Bread and the Wine just as symbols, reminders, but with no more significance than that.

Most Anglicans believe (and the Prayer Book suggests) that Jesus is especially present with his people when they partake of the bread and wine. They would want to go further and say that we actually "feed on Christ"- that we particularly connect spiritually with him at that time.

Roman Catholics believe that the bread and wine in their substance turn into the body and blood of Christ. The bread and wine may therefore be worshipped as Christ and the priest then sacrifices him on the altar for our sins. When people partake of the bread and wine they more literally partake of Christ - though faith is still an essential ingredient for the participant.

Protestant Christians, particularly at the Evangelical end of the spectrum, refer to Scriptures which state that Christ's sacrifice of himself was a complete once-for-all, unrepeatable event, and see the word *Altar* (a place of sacrifice) for the *Communion Table* as a misnomer.

As with many beliefs there are a variety of positions taken between the extremes.



## OTHER SACRAMENTS

The other major sacrament recognised by the Anglican church is baptism.

Baptism is like the crossing of a river. It marks a boundary between the old way of life and the new. Once we went our own way, served ourselves, and lived as though God did not exist. Now we have turned away from that sinful attitude (repented) and turn towards Christ. We go under the water, dying to the old way, and come out of the water, rising to the new way. It is the outward sign of the inward new birth through the Spirit, accompanied by the washing away of sin. Baptism is a public declaration of the intention to be a Christian.

Once again there are some variations in belief as to what actually happens during baptism (particularly infant baptism). Some would argue that a child under the care of Christian parents, takes their faith, demonstrated in baptism, until he or she is old enough to confirm the promises made on his or her behalf. Others believe in baptismal regeneration. That is, that the act of baptism makes the child a Christian, who receives the Holy Spirit at that moment, regardless of anything else. Some believe that baptism should only be performed on adults who have come to faith.

At the very least it must be said that baptism is a powerful sign of God's grace following repentance, and of the transition into God's Kingdom and family. Jesus was himself baptised and commanded his disciples to do the same in *Matthew 28:19*.



The Roman Catholic Church recognises other sacraments. Namely:-

Confirmation

Penance

Anointing

Marriage

and Ordination

It's easy to think of worship being confined to a church service, but in a sense we may even think of the church service as a sacrament. It focuses and summarises what should be our *daily* walk, communion, praying and learning from Christ. *Read Romans 12:1-2*

### **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

What do you think are the advantages of traditional and contemporary worship styles?

What do you think is important in a sermon?

Take a notebook to church.

Pray beforehand for the preacher yourself and others who will hear the message

Write the reference. Take notes of the main points with any illustrations. What was the main aim of the sermon?

What do you think the preacher wanted you to do as a result of hearing it?

Did taking notes help you to remember more of what was being said?

What do you think the sacraments (including the extra Roman Catholic Sacraments) are a visible sign of?

What is worship according to Romans 12:1?

What other questions do you have about worship?

# Part 11

## Talking To God



I once sat down next to a Chinese lady who was also flying to Hong Kong. I said, "Hello," and started to ask her about herself and the purpose of her journey, when suddenly it became obvious from her own words that she didn't understand a word I was saying. Even though she smiled very brightly, there was no further communication for the rest of the flight! I learned nothing about her, and she learned nothing about me.

It's a strange thing that the most important part of our whole relationship to God is prayer (talking to God), and yet it is the very area that is most neglected in the lives of Christians. The consequence is that we hardly get to know God, and nothing very significant happens in our Christian lives.

Of course it can be a problem talking to someone you can't see, and who you can't usually hear, not out loud anyway. We often hear excuses: I find it hard to concentrate, My prayers seem to bounce off the ceiling, I'm just not very good at it, I don't seem to be able to find the time, I don't feel worthy enough and so on.

Jot down here some of the difficulties you have with prayer...

Sometimes the difficulties we have with prayer occur because we are concerned with our technique, and forget what prayer really is. In the end it is about being **aware of God's presence**, talking to him and trying to listen to what he is saying to us.

In many ways there are parallels with the relationship with a spouse or good friend. I can drive along in the car with my wife. I enjoy her company and even when we are not talking I am aware that she is there. Sometimes the conversation is sporadic. We comment on this and that. At other times we may have a serious and long conversation about a particular topic or problem. Then again there are the intimate conversations. At the end of the day we will often sit down for a while and talk about what we each did during the day. We may unburden ourselves about some of the people we met, and the things they said or did to us. This may involve exchanges of advice, sympathy or encouragement. Every now and then we may argue over some matter and the relationship may become rather cool for a while. But we survive those times, because after a short time we start talking again. We don't enjoy the silent treatment.

Now this can be very like our prayer life with God. It's good to have a special time to sit and be aware that God is there, and then to be able to talk to him at length. Those conversations can involve a whole range of things. At other times you can talk to him on the run, while you travel, before you speak to people, as you have to make decisions, or just as things occur to you. Prayer can be the most natural thing in the world. Our whole life can be one of prayer.

## ASPECTS OF PRAYER

### The formal aspects

It is good to have a daily time when you can sit down with God and talk to him at some length. The more you do this the more your prayer life develops, and along with it, your whole Christian life and witness.

Take time to be quiet, away from distractions. Prayer at the beginning of the day can help the business of that day to fall into place. When we think we don't have time to pray we often find that we waste a lot of the day as things fail to work out well.

So then how do you pray? Well, that was a question the disciples asked Jesus. "Teach us how to pray," they said. And Jesus replied, "Pray like this...

*Our Father in heaven  
Hallowed be your name  
Your Kingdom come, your will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread  
And forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil..."*

What is Jesus suggesting we do first?

What sorts of things are we to pray for according to the third and fourth lines?

What sorts of things are we encouraged to ask for in the fifth line?

Do you think that it only means physical bread?

When we ask God to forgive us for the wrongs we have done, what does he also expect of us?

*Save us from time of trial* (previously translated, *lead us not into temptation*) is an appeal for help especially at a time when we may be tempted to give away our Faith. But it has a secondary meaning, which is, *save us on the Day of Judgement*, the ultimate time of trial, if you like. The final line then expresses a similar idea, in deliverance from evil.

In your quiet time, then, praise and thank God for who he is and what he has done for you. Don't be afraid to ask him for the things you need and the circumstances you will face during the day, your own spiritual growth, and for the needs of others. Confess your sins to him knowing that he is ready and willing to forgive you, and ask him to strengthen you when you are tempted to go down the wrong path.

Try writing a short prayer to that effect here, using this framework.

Father, God, thank you for

.....

Please give me

.....

I pray that you will help ..... so that

.....

I am sorry for

.....

Please forgive me.

Help me to

.....

I ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen means *truly*. It shows that we want what we have prayed for to really happen, and that we expect that it will.

Sometimes when we pray for things and people, God will answer straight away. Sometimes he says, "Not yet." And sometimes he will say, "No." However we must pray knowing that God hears us, and will act in the fairest and best way possible for all concerned.



The more time we spend with God, talking to him, and listening to him through the Scriptures and through our thoughts and feelings, the more attuned we become to God's will in particular circumstances. There are people who pray very definitely and confidently for (say), someone to be healed, because they are convinced that this is the will of God in that situation. Nevertheless, pray confidently, knowing that God loves you and cares for you, and loves to hear your voice communicating with him. Pray specifically too, for that will help you to give praise and thanks to God when you see your prayer answered. If you pray for everyone in hospital, it will be hard for you to see God working in response, but if you pray for Aunt Maude to recover quickly from her operation, then there will be something measurable you can see. And remember, don't only pray for Aunt Maude's sore finger. Pray too **for her spiritual growth and that the fruit of God's Spirit may be seen in her**. When you see God answer prayer, remember to thank God. Keeping a prayer diary may help you to keep a record and encourage you to pray further.

### **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

Where is the best place for *you* to pray?

When is the best time of day?

What is the best position? (Kneeling, lying down, sitting etc) What does body language convey about what is going on in your mind?

Why is listening to God important when you pray?

Why pray if God knows what you want already?

Should we just pray once, or keep praying?

Read *Luke 18:1-8*

What do the following teach us about prayer?

*Matthew 5:44*

*Matthew 6:5-6*

*Luke 5:15-16*

*Luke 18:9-14*

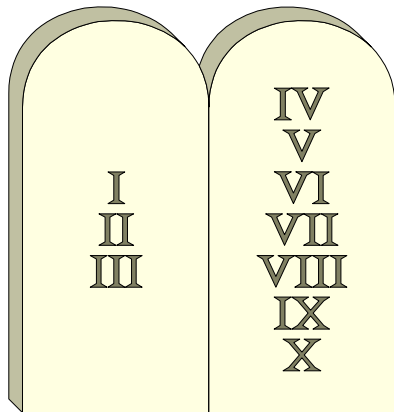
Pages in the Prayer Book which have collections of prayers

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What other questions do you have about prayer?

# Part 12

## walking the walk



I remember when I first attended high school, we were given a talk on what the school expected of us in terms of behaviour, uniform code and attitude, both inside and outside the school. We were told in no uncertain terms that while we wore the school uniform we were representing the school and what we did for good or bad would reflect on the rest.

When God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, he told them that they would be his precious possession, his own special people. But he also expected certain behaviours and attitudes from them. As his people, they were his representatives in the world. What they did, for good or bad, would reflect on him as their God. But they also needed guidelines so that they would know what was appropriate behaviour for a people who were set aside as holy for God.

The Israelites were given many rules and regulations to remind them that they were special. Many of the instructions had to do with the sacrificial system, the priests and the Tabernacle and Temple, and they no longer apply to us directly. However one set of rules seemed to have carried over into the New Testament, and have provided us with broad guidelines of behaviour ever since. The Ten Words, or Commandments, show us how we are to relate to God, within our families, and towards others.

**The Ten Commandments** can be found in Exodus 20:1-17, and in Deuteronomy 5:5-21.

Find them also in the Prayer Book on page \_\_\_\_

### 1. GOD IS FIRST

See *Matthew 22:37-39*

### 2. NO IDOLS

What is wrong with idols? See also *John 4:24*

What are the idols people worship these days?

### 3. GOD'S NAME

Why do people use the name of God and Jesus as swear words?

In what other ways can we take God for granted?

### 4. THE SABBATH

What does Jesus teach us about the Sabbath in *Mark 2:27*

The Jewish Sabbath goes from sunset on Friday to Sunset on Saturday. No work was to be done during that time. The Scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day gave detailed regulations on what constituted work.

At one time Sunday was regarded as a day of rest and only essential services worked on that day. It has been shown that people work most productively when they have one day's break in seven. How might a Christian observe the "Sabbath" these days?

## **5. HONOUR PARENTS**

From the following what should be our priorities in whom we honour?

*See Matthew 15:4*

*Ephesians 6:1-4*

*Matthew 10:37*

How has family life changed over the years?

## **6. DO NOT MURDER**

How does Jesus expand on the Old Testament Law?

*See Matthew 5:21-24*

*5:39-48*

*15:18-19*

*26:51-53*

Do you think this should apply to:-

War

Capital Punishment

Abortion

Animals

Euthanasia



## **7. DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY**

How does the New Testament add to the law about adultery?

*See Matthew 5:27-28*

*1 Corinthians 6:12-20*

*Ephesians 5:3-4*

What do think the Bible might indicate concerning trial marriages and de facto relationships?

## **8. DO NOT STEAL**

*See Mark 10:19*

Apart from the obvious, what other activities may constitute stealing?

## **9. DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS**

*See Leviticus 19:16*

*Matthew 5:33-37*

*Matthew 15:19*

What are the dangers of gossip?

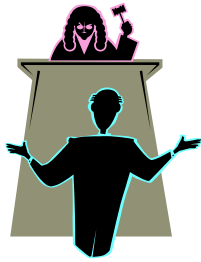
## **10. DO NOT COVET**

*Luke 12:15-21*

What is the problem with wanting things that others have? What does such an attitude do to relationships?

How does *Romans 13:9* sum up the Commandments and their purpose?

Where do all the sins listed come from? See Mark 7:17-23



One problem with laws is that people can be tempted to resent them, and only do the very minimum. The Ten Commandments were to be embraced willingly as a way to ensure good relationship, but what they also did was to emphasize for us how much we fail. Paul lamented this fact in Romans and noted how we all fall short of God's standards (*Romans 3:23*). Since we cannot keep the law by our own efforts Jesus died in our place, so that we are justified in God's sight, not by the keeping of the law (which none of us do properly) but by faith in Jesus Christ. It is by grace that we are saved, through faith, and not by works of the law (*Ephesians 2:8-10*).

Nevertheless, God wants us to strive to live as disciples of Jesus Christ, not because we have to, but because we want to please God who has shown his great love towards us.

The New Testament is full of exhortations to live out the Christian life.

Have a look at the examples below, and note some of the advice to us...

*Romans 12 verse 3 and verses 9-21*

What are some of the big decisions you have made or will have to make?

What criteria do you use to come to a good decision?

# Part 13

## A TIME TO DECIDE



### Making a decision about following Christ.

Rejecting or accepting the Christian Faith without information is blind faith. It is uninformed and often results in a closed mind. The Christian faith is based on belief in certain facts:-

That Jesus is the Son of God and has all the authority of God

That he died in our place and took the penalty for our sins

That he rose again and is with God today

That there is nothing we can do to earn forgiveness or a place in heaven, we can only accept what Jesus has already done for us

*"What a well-informed Christian would want to claim, is that to be a Christian is the **most reasonable** thing in the world. Faith in Christ, while not answering every question in our minds makes more sense of the world and gives greater meaning to life than any other option."*

*(Count me In by Kevin Giles)*

In the big decisions of life you never really have all the information. If you put off getting married until you knew everything about your partner and were 100% sure, the event would probably never happen. What we do is to get to know the person as well as we can and when we believe that this is the right person we make the commitment. It's similar in the Christian life.

Just because you **have** many of the facts about Jesus doesn't necessarily mean you will choose to follow him. It is a wise and reasonable choice to make and it will affect the rest of your life. It involves very real commitment and counting the cost.

Read *Mark 8:34*. What did Jesus say the cost would be?

What do you think he meant?

What difficulties do you see personally in being a follower of Christ?

Remember that you are either a member of God's family, or you aren't. If

I asked if you belonged to the Robinson family you would answer either "yes" or "no" rather than "I'm not sure" or "I hope so". Whether you are married or not depends whether you have said "I do" or "I will" to the marriage vows.

**Whether you are a member of God's family depends on whether you have said "yes" to the invitation to follow Jesus.**

Once we are members of God's family God doesn't throw us out when we make mistakes (great or small) though we can mar the relationship until we ask for forgiveness. We can be good or bad members of God's family and better at some times than others, though **God wants us to be the best we possibly can.**

Look up *1 John 5:11-13*

Why does John write?

What is his testimony?

Whoever has the Son....

Whoever does not have the Son of God ....

**Take time to think**

**Where do you stand in your relationship to God?**

Do you know that you are a member of God's Family?

If so, on what do you base that assurance?

If you are not, is there anything that now prevents you from taking that step (uncertainty about something, too costly a step, still some doubts?)

If there is nothing stopping you, you might like to make this prayer, or something like it, your own...

*Dear God, I have made a lot of mistakes and I have been trying to run my own life without your help, please forgive me. I now want to follow Jesus. I believe he died on the cross for my sins and rose again to give me eternal life. Please come into my life and help me every day to trust you and live the way you want me to.. Amen.*

If you have prayed that prayer it is important to tell someone. It helps you to affirm your commitment to being a follower of Christ. Of course, if you are going through with your Confirmation you will stand up in front of the congregation to make the affirmation. Just the same, it is good to tell other people as well.



## MAKING DECISIONS AS A CHRISTIAN.

The decisions we make range in importance from choices about ones job and marriage to sorting out which colour socks to wear. Mind you, even the trivial decisions can sometimes have unforeseen effects. I've heard of a preacher being criticised for wearing brown shoes instead of black! So how do we make good decisions? How do we find guidance in the ways that God wants us to go?

Let me suggest some thoughts on the matter...

### 1. PRAY and SUBMIT

This should be the overarching activity of your life. As I was growing up, there were certain things that I didn't have to ask my parents about. I knew what their reply would be. After all, I had lived with them all my life. They showed and taught me things so that I knew right from wrong. So with God, when we spend time talking with him, we get to know what he is like, and as we have discussed earlier, the Holy Spirit transforms us to be more like our Father in heaven. We get to know the mind of God better and better. Two of the best things you can pray is for the Holy Spirit to fill you, and for wisdom.



Having said all that, as a child, knowing what was right and doing it were sometimes two different things! If you want to make right decisions, you have to be prepared to listen with an open mind and **obey** what God tells you. It can be very easy to talk ourselves into going the way we want, rather than the way *God* wants.

Paul wrote in *Romans 12:1-2*

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to **present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.***



### 2. READ THE BIBLE

The Bible is God's Word to us. Over some issues it shows us quite clearly what is right and what is wrong (Do not murder, for example). In this respect, remember that the New Testament will be our main guide (Do not murder is re-affirmed in the New Testament). Where the Bible doesn't directly speak about an issue, it presents principles which can be followed and applied. Abortion on demand is not mentioned in the Bible, but the command not to murder could be applied as part of an overall principle that life is precious and belongs to God.

### 3. TALK IT OVER WITH SOMEONE WHO YOU RESPECT AND WHO KNOWS THE BIBLE

Sometimes you may not know where to find the answer in the Bible. Talking it over with a few people who can show where to look may help



here. Where the decision is not over a moral issue, but may be to do with considering taking on a role in your church, talking to godly people who know you and will give you an honest assessment can be invaluable.



#### **4. CONSULT YOUR CONSCIENCE**

Not all decisions are of the black and white variety. Even the abortion question has some slightly grey areas. In moral decisions, after praying, looking at the Scriptures and discussing with others, look into your heart. If you don't feel at peace about a course of action, don't do it. When it comes to decisions over whether to take on a job, live in a certain place, make an expensive purchase or whatever, wisdom (including the wisdom of others) will not always tell you what is around the next corner. In which case the following may also help...



#### **5. PUSH THE DOOR AND PRAY**

If you have to make a choice between two courses of action that are equally valid then consider that God may indeed be allowing you to make the choice you want. When God provided for Adam and Eve he told them that they could eat from any tree in the garden... except for one. That gave them a lot of choice which they didn't need to agonise over. When it comes to areas of service, where you should live, what job you should do and so on, exercise some wisdom, make a choice, and move in that direction, while asking God to shut the door if that is not the way he wants you to go.



#### **6. DON'T GET BOGGED DOWN**

There was once a man who woke up and prayed about what time he should get out of bed. He got no answer, so he stayed there until he felt moved to rise. Then he had to pray about each item of clothing he should wear, whether to have breakfast, and if it should be toast, muesli or indeed both. Needless to say, his days were most unproductive, because he rarely got to deciding whether to go out of the house. Now that's extreme, but as Christians we can get terribly bogged down over this whole question of guidance, and in the end I think it comes back to the first point. If you are living in relationship with God, and you ask his Spirit to fill you at the beginning of the day, and lead you to do and say the right things, then by and large, you will find yourself taking the right decisions without all the agony. You'll still have to stop to consider the big questions, but life will flow in a balanced way.

## **SOMETHING TO CONSIDER**

Read *John 15:1-11*

How might these verses bear on the question of guidance?

How did the following people find guidance?

Can their examples apply to us and if so how?

David

*1 Samuel 23:1-2*

*Psalms 119:9-16*

Joseph

*Matthew 2:13-15*

Jesus

*Luke 4:1*

The Disciples

*John 16:12-13*

The Early Church

*Acts 15*

Paul

*Acts 16:6-10*

# Part 14

## TELLING THE STORY



Before Jesus returned to heaven he left his disciples with a commission; what we call The Great Commission, and since Jesus promised to be with them to “the end of the age” we take it that the commission still applies to the Church today. It also applies to you if Jesus Christ is your own Saviour and Lord, for you are then part of the Church.

*Matthew 28*

<sup>18</sup>And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Write down the three things that Jesus’ followers are expected to do...

M \_\_\_\_\_

B \_\_\_\_\_

T \_\_\_\_\_

The making of disciples happened in a very dramatic way in Acts 2. Read the passage and note some key elements in the process.

The disciples were filled with the Spirit.

Peter told the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

He made the declaration...

<sup>36</sup>Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

He told them how they should respond...

“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup>For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.”

He persuaded them of the truth of what he was saying...

<sup>40</sup>And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”

The disciples continued to teach the new believers (v42)

Are you now expected to stand up on your soapbox in the nearest shopping mall and preach about Jesus? Well, not necessarily. We are not all called to be preachers, but we are called to be ready to give an account of our faith...



*Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; <sup>16</sup>yet do it with gentleness and reverence.*



So, when someone demands of you why you have the assurance of eternal life, what will you say? How will you reply to the enquirer who asks, “How do I become a Christian?”

To begin with pray quickly and quietly for the help of God’s Spirit, then you might just tell how *you* became a Christian. The prayer you prayed. You may also need to give a fuller explanation and refer the person to some Bible verses.

An outline like this may help:-

1. God is our creator and made everything good. (Genesis 1)
2. People turned away from God (Genesis 3)
3. Everyone has sinned and fallen short of God’s standard (Romans 3:23)
4. There is nothing we can do to improve our relationship with God (Ephesians 2:8-9)
5. God wanted us to know and love him, so he sent Jesus to take our sins upon himself (John 3:16) and rise again.
6. We need to receive the gift of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38)
7. We need to entrust our lives to Jesus and agree to follow him

By referring the person to the Bible verses, it shifts the emphasis away from simply what you believe to what the *Bible* says about the matter. You don’t have to stick to a rigid format, but having a grasp of the basics is very helpful. Don’t forget to give the enquirer room to comment and ask questions, and if you don’t know the answer, tell him or her that you don’t know, but will try to find out. In the end telling about Jesus should become as easy as gossiping about good news – which is what it is!

If you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, why not find someone who is not a Christian and ask him or her if you can give a presentation of the Gospel as a confirmation course exercise. Who knows, if you pray about it before hand, you may have the privilege of leading that person to Christ!

### **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

Read about the witnessing of some early Christians.

What are the main points of information that they include in *their* presentation of the Good News?

*Acts 3:12 to 4:4*

*Acts 4:5-12*

*Acts 17:16-32*

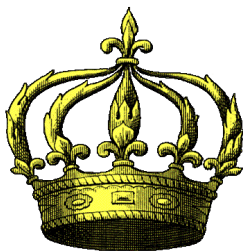
*Acts 26:1-29*

# Part 15

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## THE ANGLICAN ANGLE

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It has often been said that you are a Christian first and that your denomination comes second, and I believe that is true. Paul declared to the Corinthians who had various factions in their church, *"For as long as there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? For when one says, 'I belong to Paul,' and another, 'I belong to Apollos,' are you not merely human?"*

*What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labour of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building." (1 Corinthians 3).*

Different denominations emphasise different aspects of worship and belief. Hopefully we can learn from one another and so enrich our own traditions. It is also helpful to see where our own tradition has come from and some of the peculiarities in what we do.

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH.

The Anglican Church was one product of the Reformation. Up to that time the Western Church was all one – catholic in the sense of one belief and Roman Catholic in the sense that it was based around Rome and the papal authority. It was Martin Luther who brought things to a head when, concerned about the abuse of payment for the pardoning of sins (indulgences), he called on the church to reform. On 31<sup>st</sup> October 1517 he pinned up his 95 theses decrying the use of those indulgences, and the Reformation was born. Luther had realised that salvation was by faith and not by any works of human beings – good news to a populace that died young from various diseases and for whom their eternal salvation or damnation was an ever present concern. Luther offered the Scriptural assurance of sins forgiven, and soon had a large following. Although he had never intended it, the church split and the protest-ants started what developed into further splits in the Protestant Churches. There were a number of other notable European reformers such as Philip Melancthon, Martin Bucer, Huldreich Zwingli, John Calvin, and Theodore Beza, who you can read about in a history of the period, (*The Lion Handbook – The History of Christianity* is a good starting place).

The important thing for us is that the ideas began to infiltrate into England at a time when Henry VIII in 1534 proclaimed himself head of the church in England, because the Pope would not sanction his divorce of Queen Catherine. The break paved the way for Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, under King Edward VI, to write the *Articles of the Church of England* and, in 1549, a Prayer Book, which he later clarified in 1552. Cranmer followed Luther in declaring that Justification is by faith, but met with tough opposition from the Catholic Mary when she acceded the throne (1553-58). Mary had Cranmer and some 200 others burned at the stake, but in doing so she engendered opposition that actually strengthened the will of the Reformers. When Elizabeth followed as queen, she saw the value of uniting the nation under the banner of the Church of England with one Prayer Book (restored in 1559 with minor alterations) which not only provided teaching, through repetition of use for those who couldn't read, but also regulated worship throughout the country. It was a stormy time with opposition from within and from overseas, but Bishop John Jewel's *Apology* and Richard Hooker's writings helped to establish the reasonableness and Scriptural authority of the English

church. The Act of Uniformity of 1662 saw the third major revision of the *Book of Common Prayer*.

It was this book which found its way to Australia and was used until 1978 when *An Australian Prayer Book* (AAPB) was introduced for use *with* the 1662 edition (though in practice it substantially replaced it). Not long after, the Church of England became known as the Anglican Church in Australia, and later *A Prayer Book for Australia* (APBA) was adopted by most Anglican dioceses from 1995 onwards.



## THE CHURCH YEAR AND COLOURS

The church year is determined by the seasons and the lectionary readings.

The **lectionary** is a list of Bible readings on a three year cycle (A, B, C) and provides for special occasions such as saints days, harvest thanksgivings, and seasonal readings, as well as day to day readings for Morning and Evening Prayer and Holy Communion Services.



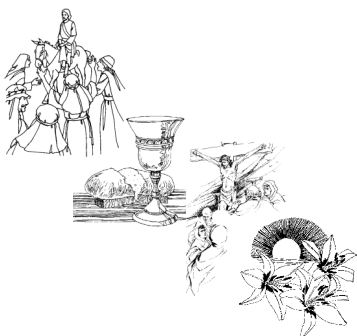
The church year begins with **Advent**, four Sundays prior to Christmas. The colour is violet, a colour of preparation, in this case for the celebration of Christ's coming into the world at Christmas, but also to remind us that Jesus is to return, and that we need to be ready for that event.



**Christmas** is white (what else!), and is followed some weeks later by **Epiphany** (green) which means *appearing* or *manifestation*. In this case it celebrates Jesus being revealed to the Gentiles, with the Bible readings including the discovery of Jesus by the Wise Men - non-Jewish foreigners from the East.



**Lent** begins with Ash Wednesday, and includes 6 Sundays prior to Easter. Violet indicates that it is a time of preparation and penitence. People in Bible times used to put ashes on their heads as a sign of grief and repentance. Lent is a "time out" from the year to consider our walk with God, our need to make amends and to change our ways by God's grace and Spirit. Traditionally people have given up things for the Lenten period, but I would suggest that if you do, then choose to give up things which you need to give up permanently, and perhaps more significantly, start to *do good things* that will stay with you through your life. Giving up chocolate may help to remind you that this is a special time of the year, but asking God to deal with your bad temper, your pride, greed, lust, laziness or selfishness will be of far more benefit in the long run. Lent holds up the challenge to deny yourself, to take up your cross and to follow Jesus.



The last Sunday of Lent, one week prior to Easter, is **Palm Sunday**, recalling Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on a donkey, with the crowds throwing down palm fronds and praising God for his Messiah. Palm Sunday ushers in **Holy Week**, the Last Supper on **Maundy Thursday** and the Crucifixion on **Good Friday**. **Easter Sunday**, in white, then celebrates a new week and a new beginning with Christ's Resurrection from the dead. (Maundy either comes



A deacon may then be ordained as a **priest** and can preside over Holy Communion. Priest in this sense has more to do with a presbyter (elder), rather than the Old Testament type of priest who offered sacrifices.

**Lay people** are non-ordained members of the church. However they are also called to exercise priesthood (*See 1 Peter 2:9*)

In short then the Episcopal system looks like this:-  
(Fill in the names of those you know in your area )

Archbishop of Canterbury

The Most Reverend \_\_\_\_\_

Primate

The Most Reverend \_\_\_\_\_

Archbishop

The Most Reverend \_\_\_\_\_

Bishop

The Right Reverend \_\_\_\_\_

Archdeacon

The Venerable \_\_\_\_\_

Dean (Rector) of the Cathedral

The Very Reverend \_\_\_\_\_

Canon of the Cathedral (There may be a number on the governing board of the cathedral)

The Reverend Canon \_\_\_\_\_

Area Dean

The Reverend \_\_\_\_\_

Rector, Priest-in-Charge or Deacon-in-Charge of your parish

The Reverend \_\_\_\_\_

Assistant Priests

The Reverend \_\_\_\_\_

Deacon in the parish

The Reverend \_\_\_\_\_

Rector's Churchwarden/s (appointed by the Rector)

\_\_\_\_\_

People's Churchwardens (elected by the parish)

\_\_\_\_\_

### EXPLORING THE PRAYER BOOK FURTHER

If you are still using An Australian Prayer Book (1978) you will find all the collects, readings, prayers and so on, in the one book. The 1995, A Prayer Book for Australia has a shorter edition and only the full book includes the pastoral services.

**Try these things...**

1. Look up the Daily Services and this week, if you don't already do so, try using them as part of your daily prayer pattern, morning and evening. Share any comments you have on them.

2. Look up The Catechism, a series of questions and answers (found in the AAPB and the full version of the APBA). Look at the answers only after attempting the questions. Do you agree with all the answers?

Jot down any questions you have.

3. Write down the types of extra services included in the full prayer books.

4. Look up the service you will use for confirmation...

Write down your four responses under THE DECISION

I \_\_\_\_\_

I \_\_\_\_\_

I reject \_\_\_\_\_

(write in what you are rejecting)

I renounce \_\_\_\_\_

What will you do in response to the Bishop's final question?

With God's help I will \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Find the Apostles' Creed and read it carefully...

Is there anything in it you have trouble with or don't understand?

Read through the rest of the service

Are there any questions you still have?

I have decided to go through with confirmation and to keep the promises I will make

Signed

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#### **FURTHER STUDY AND QUALIFICATIONS**

What you have read during this course has been but a brief introduction to all that Christ has to offer and that the Scriptures reveal. You can gain further knowledge and insight by reading good books and meeting in a Bible study group. You may want to delve further and more systematically into the topics raised above, in which case there are Bible and Theological Colleges which offer structured courses.

There are:-

Certificates in theology and other related subjects

Diploma of Theology (DipTh)

Licentiate of Theology (ThL)

Bachelor of Theology or Divinity (BTh or BD)

Master of Arts or Divinity or Theology (MA or Mdiv or MTh or MATHeol)

Doctor of Philosophy or Theology or Ministry (PhD or ThD or DMin)

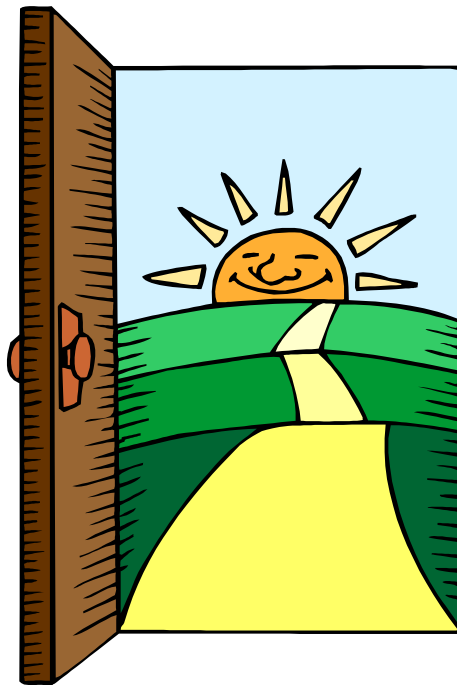
Remember that knowledge alone is not enough. Your daily walk and commitment to Jesus Christ, your prayerful reading of the Scriptures, your communion with God in prayer and your meeting with others in worship are the means by which you will grow.



And so in the words of the final blessing in the Prayer Book...

*Go forth into the world in peace;  
be of good courage;  
hold fast that which is good;  
render to no one evil for evil;  
strengthen the faint hearted; support the weak;  
help the afflicted;  
give honour to all; love and serve the Lord,  
rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit;  
and the blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
be upon you and remain with you always. Amen*

© A Prayer Book for Australia p93



## USEFUL BOOKS

Not all books in Christian bookshops are worth reading and of those that are, not all are worth buying. The most useful books, in my opinion, are the reference books that you will dip into in order to help you to understand and appreciate the Scriptures. Here is my short list...

### BIBLE:

*The NIV Study Bible* (or especially the *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*)

It contains maps, charts, pictures, introductions to Bible books and brief but helpful explanations of the text.

### COMMENTARIES:

*The New Bible Commentary* (IVP).

A one-volume commentary on the whole Bible.

*The Wiersbe Bible Commentary* (Old Testament).

Wiersbe's commentaries read like a talk. Very readable.

*The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Volumes 1& 2) Also by Wiersbe.

Covers the whole New Testament.

*The Tyndale Series* (IVP) Commentaries. For more depth on individual Bible books.

### OTHER BOOKS:

*How to Read the Bible for All it's Worth*, Fee and Stuart.

An introduction to biblical genre. Reading the Bible in the context of it's style of writing, so as not to distort the meaning.

*Gospel and Kingdom*, Graeme Goldworthy.

Read it all. It will help you to read the Bible with the big picture in mind.

*Exploring the Meaning of Life through Great Themes in the Bible*, John West.

Email: [johnwest@outlook.com](mailto:johnwest@outlook.com) for a copy

Big picture, overview of the Bible, drawing on its major themes.

*Issues facing Christians Today*, John Stott

Well thought out concise answers to pressing topics.

*The Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Three Volumes, IVP).

Articles on Biblical words with maps, pictures and charts.

*The New Bible Dictionary* (One Volume, IVP)

As above but without the pictures.

*Systematic Theology*, Wayne Grudem.

When you want an article which gathers information on God, Jesus, the Spirit, the Trinity, Heaven and Hell and so on. In other words it's about Christian Beliefs (Doctrine).

### BIBLE COURSES—For further down the track:

The Bethel Bible Series.

The whole Bible over two years. 56 studies. Inexpensive. One of the best things I ever did to open up an understanding of the Bible and bring it to life.

The Preliminary Theological Certificate (PTC). Relatively inexpensive, through Moore Theological College.