

Bible Studies

Genesis - The Fall

Genesis Chapters 1 & 2 record that God created an idyllic world. The man and woman are in a Garden suited to their needs, pain, sorrow & natural disasters are unknown. God walks with them in the cool of the day. In Chapter 4 there is anger, jealousy, hatred, murder, vengeance and curse. There is struggle with the earth to survive, marriage degenerates to polygamy. If you did not know the account, you would wonder what on earth happened in Chapter 3, that allowed things to turn so ugly.

For some people, especially unbelievers, this is a big problem. How could a good God create a world, where floods and famines kill so many?

And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." Genesis 2:16-17

Is the tone of this verse freedom or restriction?

How many commands did God give?

What does this tell us about God?

When God said "you will surely die," was this a punishment or a consequence?

God gave one command, just one. God is not by nature a legalist. He does not make commands for the sake of it. God's nature has to do with grace not law. It is interesting that breaking one command opened the floodgates to all kind of sin and necessitated a whole system of commandments.

'You will die', is in my opinion, a consequence, not a punishment. (Ie, 'if you touch that fire you will get burned'. Not, 'if you touch that fire I will send you to your room'). This is true of many of God's laws.

The soul who sins is the one who will die. Ezekiel 18:20

For the wages of sin is death, Romans 6:23 This is still true.

A serpent that speaks?

Read Genesis 3v1-5

One of the names used for Satan in the New Testament is '*the tempter*', Matthew 4v3, 1 Thes 3:5. There can be no doubt who's voice is speaking to Eve. But the form of the voice is strange. There are two possibilities; Either the author of Genesis uses, 'the serpent' as a type of Satan. (Ie. there was no snake, it's just another way of saying Satan spoke to Eve.) Such a use is found in Rev 12:9. Or Satan used the snake as a disguise in much the same way, that God chose to speak through Balaam's donkey, Numbers 22v28-30.

The fact that the snake was later cursed 3v14 suggests the latter, however even here the snake could still be a cover for Satan.

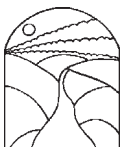
And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. 2 Corinthians 11:14-15

The events described in Genesis, were literal events they really happened. But they are also symbolic, they have strong meanings behind them.

If Satan told you to do something would you do it?

If Eve had known who was speaking to her would she have listened?

Temptation comes in many forms and guises. Satan will use subterfuge and guile when tempts us. He will try to look innocent and sound plausible. Deception is the key. As Eve latter pointed out "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."



People often describe Genesis 3 as recording the first sin.

But does it?

No, the tempters presence in the Garden tells us that sin was already alive and kicking in the angelic world. God gave man, as objects of His love and fellowship, freedom to sin. But He also gave the angels, described in Scripture as just servants, the same freedom.

What does this tell us about God?

Why do you think freedom is so important to Him?

Scripture tells us that Satan, or Lucifer (light bearer) as he was called was an arch-angel. One of just three who are named in Scripture (Michael & Gabriel). Instead of obeying God, pride filled his heart and he wanted to be like God. He rebelled and was cast out of heaven. He has been trying to frustrate God's purposes ever since. (Some reference that speak of this are; Isaiah 14v12-15, Ezekiel 28v12-17; Luke 10v18; Jude v6, 2 Peter 2v4, 1 John 3v8, 1 Tim 3v6).

Sin spread to the human world from the angelic world.

Where did sin come from?

Did God create sin?

He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he. Deutoronomy 32:4

It is unthinkable that God would do wrong, that the Almighty would pervert justice. Job 34:12

You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; Psalm 5:4

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; James 1:13

Does our sin enhance God's righteousness? Romans 6:1

God's righteousness is total He does not need us to illustrate it.

Systematic theology has debated the origin of sin & evil for years, there are many theories and not enough space here to expound them. Suffice to say that God did not create sin, but he did create the possibility of sin. Sin only exists when there is rebellion against God or his nature (righteousness). If God gave us freedom to rebel then He also opened the door to sin. We however walked through it.

Augustine taught that as evil is by nature negative, it does not have an origin in the normal sense of the word.

You could say sin has a voluntary origin, it is not inherent in the world or in man, but is a product of free will.

Would it be possible to truly obey God ,if we were incapable of disobeying him?

Would our love for God have any meaning, if we had no choice?

How would you feel about a world in which we were incapable of sin?

What would such a world be like?

Could God's purposes be achieved in such a world?

As humans, we resent any restrictions on our freedom. However if we did live in such a world, we would not complain. We would not be able to. If our response to God is to mean anything, we have to be free not to respond.

You are taking your dog for a walk in the park. You let it off the lead, it runs to play, you call it and it comes to you. It is being obedient, because it has the choice to ignore you. On the other hand if you have one of those spring loaded leads, you push a button, the spring is released, and the dog is pulled toward you. You cannot say it is being obedient, it has no choice. Our obedience means nothing if we can't disobey.

If this is the case is it fair to blame God for the effects of sin?

Who should we blame?

Bible Studies

Genesis - The Temptation

Read Genesis 3v1-5

It is interesting to note Satan's technique when he comes to tempt Eve.

1

Did God really say "you must not eat from any tree in the garden"?

Is that what God said? Genesis 2v16-17

God said there was one tree they may not eat from. Satan generalises it to make it sound unreasonable. Satan shifted the emphasis from what God allowed, to what he forbade.



Tactic: Satan questioned God's Word.

He did not contradict God, that would have been to overplay his hand. He sowed seeds of doubt. *Was it really God, was that what God really meant? Maybe we can reinterpret this. Maybe God only meant Adam.*

How does Satan question God's word today?

The Bible is God's word and Satan is always trying to bring it into question. For example when the Bible says homosexuality is wrong, some people have tried to side-step this by saying what it really means is homosexual rape, is wrong. Others will tell you that the Bible is only a record of human effort to reach God. It does not originate in God, but in man, it might be helpful, but it is not authoritative.

How should we treat God's word?

How did Eve respond? Genesis 3v3

Does Eve quote God's command accurately? Genesis 2v16-17

Maybe God said more to them, than is recorded, but Genesis contains no stipulation not to touch the tree, just not to eat it's fruit.

Do you think it is significant that Eve exaggerated the command?

Firstly, I think while some people have a tendency to water down God's commands, others like to make them stricter, both lead to sin. Mark 7:8, Col 2v22, Mat 23v4

"Do not go beyond what is written." 1 Corinthians 4:6

The moment we start to doubt God's word, we are in trouble. Jesus told a parable to illustrate just this. When you hear God's word and obey it you are like a house built on rock. When you hear it only you are like a house built on sand.

2

"You will not die" the serpent said to the women.

Now the Serpent does directly contradict God, but he does more than that, he questions God's integrity and the consequences of sin.



Tactic: It doesn't matter, it won't harm you.

Satan denies the effects of sin and the reality of Judgement.

How does Satan deny the effects of sin today?

If there are no consequences for sin, there is no reason not to sin. Sin is disobedience to God. It is God who holds us accountable, He sets the standards. When people deny a personal God, they also deny any fixed standards of right and wrong. It all becomes a matter of opinion, relative and subjective.

How does sin do harm?

How does sin harm us?

Why does God prohibit the things we call sin?

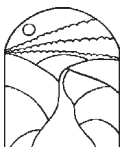
Did Eve die?

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Did she drop dead at the foot of the tree? No, God never said she would. She died spiritually, she lost the closeness of communion with God, that she had enjoyed and was driven from the Garden. The purity of her nature died, she lost an innocence which she could never regain. More over, from this time on 'death reigned.' Romans 5:14. A recurring phrase in the next few chapters is, 'and then he died'. The Bible does not tell us the Adam was immortal, but premature death, is a clear effect of the fall.

3

For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, you will be like God knowing good and evil.

Wanting to be like God, was what got Satan into trouble in the first place. Now Satan questions God's motives, in giving the command. God is trying to keep from you something good.

What kind of a God would want to keep something good from you?

Satan was in effect saying "if God really loved you, would He put all these constraints on you?" ***Would He?***



Tactic: Question God's motives, His love and His goodness, suggest you now better.

Satan appealed to an appetite in Eve, what was it?

Were all these desires of themselves wrong?

How does Satan use this temptation today?

Does God withhold anything good from us? Psalm 84v11

Did Satan correctly interpret the results of knowing good from evil?

We will never be God, but it is our calling to be like Him. Satan rather strangely suggested this could be achieved by disobeying God.

How can it be achieved?

One of Satan's tricks here, was to make things that are bad for you, seem desirable. Make you want, make you need, what will destroy you!

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Isaiah 5:20

Can you think of any ways that Satan still tries this trick?

Why do you think Satan tempted Eve first?

It was Adam who received the command, Eve only heard it second hand. Eve was the second made, was she more vulnerable to the attack?

What mistakes did Eve make?

When did Eve actually sin?

If she had realised what would happen would she have done it?

Is this any excuse?

Deception was Satan's key to success, it still is.

Read Genesis 3v6-7

Eve ate first, but the New Testament holds Adam responsible; 1 Corinthians 15v22

How did Satan tempt Adam?

Eve was deceived, but Adam sinned knowingly. Satan used different techniques for Adam and Eve, he tempted both of them at their weak points.

Why do you think Adam was susceptible to temptation from his wife?

How does Satan use other people to tempt up?

Matthew 18v6-7

Matthew 16v23 – What is the danger here?

Romans 14v21

Titus 2v7

There is a camaraderie of sin, if I sin and then get you to commit the same sin, it takes the pressure of me.

What do you think is the most important thing you have realised in this study?

Bible Studies

Genesis - The Consequences

The Bible describes Jesus as, *the lamb that was slain from the creation of the world* Rev 13:8. This means that right from the act of creation, God knew Jesus death would be necessary. Therefore, He knew man would sin.

Why then did he put the tree in the Garden?

Obedience that goes untested, is not true obedience. Faith that is untested, is no true faith.

In the Garden Adam had purity of innocence, but is this the same as purity of holiness?

For us to be pure, our purity must be tested and maintained.

Freedom of choice is essential for us to grow spiritually and morally.

I also believe that our freedom is an essential part of God's defeat of Satan. When we chose to obey God, when we have the choice to disobey, God is proved right.

Read Genesis 3v6-7

When Eve bit into the fruit, she did so expecting some wonderful result. Instead something in her did and she became aware of what she had done.

Sin sprang to life and I died. Romans 7:9



There eyes were opened and they realised they were naked.

They became aware of sin and guilt.

They became slaves to sin. Once sin was awakened it could not again be restrained.

Their innocence was stripped from them. Up to this point, they had known what sin was only intellectually, now they knew it by experience.

How do you think they felt?

For as in Adam all die, 1 Corinthians 15:22

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned— Romans 5:12

The effects of the sin were not confined to Adam alone, the innocence that he had lost, he could not now pass on to his offspring. He could only pass onto them his fallen, corrupt nature. We call this original sin, or, original pollution. All this really means is that we are born as slaves to sin. Something human history since that time proves. Our nature is tainted.



They tried to cover their guilt by fig leaves.

Apples are not indigenous to the Middle East, Jewish tradition says the tree was a fig tree. Figs stand for sin, if you pick them wrongly, a sticky residue is left on your hands.

How do you think this is a like sin?

Why do you think Adam and Eve tried to cover themselves?

In what way do we do the same?

Ever since this time, man has been trying to find his own way to deal with sin. Denying it, redefining it, trying to cancel it out with good works, trying to do penance for it.

How effective do you think fig leaves would be as a fashion garment?

That is just how efficient our attempts are to deal with our own sin.

Read Genesis 3v8-13



Communion with God was broken.

Who hid God or man?

Why did he hide?

God came looking and calling for man, He knew what had happened but He still came.

What does this imply and what is it symbolic of?

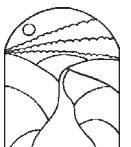
Man was created to be in communion with God. There is, as someone said, a God shaped hole in each of us. This is why there has been no known indigenous culture

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in the history of mankind that has not believed in some kind of a god. Separation from God is spiritual death. That is why the NT describes unbelievers as dead in their sins. Ephesians 2:1.

How is this communion with God re-established?



Both of them tried to deny responsibility.

'It was Eve's fault'. 'It was the snakes fault'.

Have you ever heard this line?

What excuses do you use?

Whose responsibility is sin?

“sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.” Genesis 4:7

What does this verse mean?

Read Genesis 3v14-19



The curse was enacted.

Who was cursed?

There are four recipients, the Snake/Satan, Eve, the earth, and man.

What were the consequences for each?

The snake lost it's dignity.

Eve experienced the pain of child birth and got to live in a male dominated world.

Does this mean male supremacy is right? Galatians 3:28

The earth to was cursed, this is where the severity's of nature and it's hostility to man comes from. (Natural disasters are 'Acts of Man', not God). The NT describes it as groaning, subject to frustration. Romans 8v18-25

Finally man is cursed. Life will become hard work, and death will be his destiny.

In this curse the future is predicted. “He will crush your head and you will strike his heel”

What does this refer to?

God could have left man to his own devices, instead He promised a way that man could be bought back to God. This way was Jesus.

Read Genesis 3v20-24



God made clothes for Adam.

Where do you think God got the skins from?

It looks like the skins were more than just, clothes more practical than fig leaves. It looks like God is doing something symbolic.

What do you think it was?

Did God continue to have fellowship with man after the fall? Genesis 5v21

It looks like this was God's way of atoning for, or covering over Adam's sin. Many believe this is the first reference to sacrifice in Scripture.

For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. Leviticus 17v11

This is another pointer to the restoration, Jesus would bring, through his final sacrifice.



Adam and Eve are banished from the garden.

There can be no going back to the way it was. The way to redemption is forward, to Christ, not back to the tree. This is also symbolic of the fact that sin separates us from God. We cannot force our way back, God must reach out to us.

All this is intended to explain how the world got to it's current sorry state.

But there is hope. We have noted before in a Bible study that the last 3 chapters of Revelation, parallel the first three chapters of Genesis. We find what Adam lost, Christ restores.

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

Read Revelation 21v1-5 & 22v1-4

Bible Studies

Loyalty

O LORD, God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel, keep this desire in the hearts of your people forever, and keep their hearts loyal to you. 1 Chronicles 29:18
their hearts were not loyal to him, they were not faithful to his covenant. Psalms 78:37

Loyal is not a frequently used word in Scripture. The NIV uses it to translate the word }wkn, (Na-Hon) which means *to be right with*. Another word which contains the idea of loyalty is }man, (Na-Ah-Mean), this is usually translated, as it is above, Faithful.

What is the difference between Faithfulness and Loyalty?

This is a hard one, the first word used to describe faithful in my dictionary it loyal, and the first word to describe loyal is faithful. Loyalty includes the idea of devotion. You tend to be faithful in doing something, but loyal to someone or something. You may vote for a party loyally but not be faithful to its beliefs.

The word }man, come from family of verbs with the root meaning to believe. It is the same root that we get Amen (}ma) from. To be loyal (}man) is the passive form of the verb (}mam) Ma-Ah-Mean to believe. Another word (jnma) means faithfulness.

What link do you think there is between loyalty and belief?

What is Loyalty?

If you are loyal to something or someone how will you act?

Loyalty implies ownership. Ownership is when you take something and treat it as belonging to you. If you are loyal to a sports team, then it is because you identify yourself with them. You are likely to talk about *us* rather than *they*. No one ever heard a crowd of supporters shouting “*They won the cup*”.

We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God.” Joshua 24:18

“As for us, the LORD is our God, and we have not forsaken him. 2 Chronicles 13:10

For this God is our God for ever and ever; Psalms 48:14

For he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Psalms 95:7

In that day they will say, “Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.” Isaiah 25:9

They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, “They are my people,” and they will say, “The LORD is our God.” Zechariah 13:9

What kind of ownership is shown in these verse?

What things result from this ownership

Do you think ownership is important?

If you cannot see God as your God, Church as your Church, Youth group as your Youth group etc.

What is likely to be result?

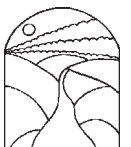
If someone is loyal, what else will they be?

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Who should we be loyal to?



In what way should we express our loyalty to each of these?

People (young) show amazing loyalty to Musicians, movie stars, Sportsmen/women etc.
Why do you think this is?

Sometimes we have divided loyalties, we know we must be loyal but who to?
Can you place the list of people/things we should be loyal to in order?

I am quite mistrusting of these orders, they tend to be artificial. In truth, circumstances change the order. They also tend to create false conflicts. Eg 'I must always put God before family'. Often putting family first, is putting God first. **1 Timothy 5:8**. The conflict is artificial.

Sometimes it is very important to know who has priority demands on our loyalty and who doesn't.

**In what kind of a relationship does Loyalty arise?
In what kind of a relationship is loyalty not going to arise?**

Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.
Philippians 4:3

What kind of effect do you think having loyal people around had on Paul?

It is one of my basic philosophies that you always root for the home team.

If we are loyal to someone and they fail us what should our response be?

Of course it depends on the circumstances, When a position is adopted that is contrary to God's word, loyalties will have to be broken. At other times loyalty has to remain, even against disagreements. Would you give up on your children because they behaved badly? Does God give up on you when you do the same?

An American writer made the statement; "My country, right or wrong" We could adapt it, for the sack of argument, would you agree with;

My Children, right or wrong?

My Church, right or wrong?

The question is where do you draw the line?

**Can you explain King David's strange behaviour in this passage?
Read 1 Samuel 24v1-7**

An offended brother is more unyielding than a fortified city, and disputes are like the barred gates of a citadel. Proverbs 18:19

How highly do you think God considers loyalty

Do you think people have the right to expect loyalty?

Who do think you should expect loyalty from?

Does God have the right to expect loyalty from us?

Bible Studies

Abraham the call

“Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him he was but one, and I blessed him and made him many. Isaiah 51:1-2

The New Testament describes Abraham as the father of all who believe, Romans 4v16. He is certainly one of the great characters of the Bible. He is an example to us of how to live before God.

Read Genesis 11v27-32

What was the spiritual status of Abram's family? Josh 24:2

Do you think Abram knew about God?

In all probability, there was some residual knowledge of God in Ur. Abram may well have worshiped God as one of several gods.

The City of Ur is by the Persian Gulf. It was a wealthy city and a centre for trade and commerce. Among its ruins are several Ziggurats (step pyramids) used in the worship of the moon.

What is the first material fact we learn about Abram & Sarai?

Do you think this is significant?

Why do you think God called Abram

Historically what was the results of Abram's call been?

It seems to me that Abram's call fits quite nicely into the frame work of Genesis. Man's fall required that a way be found to deal with his sin and rebellion. Genesis 6-9 describe how God destroyed sinful man from the face of the earth, yet sin persisted. One of the things God wanted to demonstrate, was that this simplistic solution was not going to be effective. Dealing with sin by destroying sinners was never going to work. When God called Abram, he started a process that would culminate in the Cross and reach though the years to this very day.

Central to this plan is God's calling of the Jewish nation. Abraham is considered to be the first Jew.

What reason is given in this passage for Abram's family to move from Ur to Haran?

Who takes the initiative?

According to Acts 7v2-3 what happened?

We do not know the exact details of this first call in Ur, was it to Abram or Terah? Did God appear to the whole family? What is significant is that they left Ur in accordance with God's word.

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. Hebrews 11:8

Why did God want Abram to leave Haran?

1

The obvious reason was that the promises to Abram were tied in to the Promised Land. God had to get Abram geographically into the right place. Mesopotamia was not the promised land, nor was Haran.

2

Secondly, Abram had to be away from the influences of his family idols and the culture he was familiar with, he had to be separate and open to the new way of life that God would teach him.

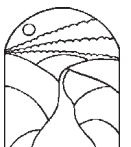
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Thirdly he had to leave what was safe and dependable in order to live a life of faith. It was a test of his obedience.

What would have happened if he had stayed?

What is significant in the statement that he did not know where he was going?

God's revelation of his plan for our lives is invariably progressive. God expects us to take the first step, before he reveals the next. We have to step out in faith. It requires us to trust that God knows what He is doing.



Read 2 Corinthians 6v17

What things do we have to leave?

Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." John 8:11

At time we may physically have to remove ourselves from an environment that will pull us back into the world. Most of the time it is things like lifestyles, ways of thinking, or sins that we have to leave.

What happens if we don't?

When they reached Haran they stopped. No reason why is given, although a hint may be found in Acts 7v4 **What is it?**

It looks like it was Terah that was unwilling to move on. Maybe he had gone as far as he felt he could.

What spiritual lesson is there in this?



Terah stands for all those who go half way and quit.

Matthew 13v20-22

The danger is that we are prepared to go so far with our faith, then, because of fear, tiredness or apathy, or just because we get comfortable, we stop.

We served God hardout when we were younger, but now we just mark time.

Once we were always looking for an opportunity to serve God, now we can't be bothered. Once we wanted to grow spiritually, now we are quite comfortable with where we are at. And there is always a good reason why.

What would have happened if Abram had stayed in Haran?

The same thing will happen to us, we will vegetate, and we will not come into the fullness of what God has for us. We will not get to know God as we should. We will miss out.



A note on the age of Abrams father. You might have noticed a problem with chronology here. If Abram was born when Terah was 70 and he died at 205, that would make Abram 130 when he left Haran. We know from the rest of the account that he was about 75. There are two possibilities, maybe Abram was not the oldest son, just recorded first because of his pre-eminence. Or 205 is a copyist error, some manuscripts record his age as 140. This is possible, if Abram was born when Terah was 130 (205-75) Abram would hardly be surprised to have a child himself at the age of 100.

Read Genesis 12v1-9

Haran was a great place to stop. It was the last centre civilisation before the sparsely populated areas of Lebanon & Canaan. It provided good pasture land. They also worshiped the moon (Nanna). It was on the trade routes.

What happened to Abram in Haran? Genesis 12v5

In Haran God renewed his call to Abram.

What Grace do you see in this renewed call?

Does God give up on you when you stop?

The delay had not stopped God's call or his plan. Peter also experienced a two fold call. Luke 5v10, John 21v19. God is gentle with us, He takes us as far as we can go. Then when we can go further God takes us further. God always challenges where we are comfortable. He always wants to take us on. **Are you ready?**

What promises did he make in Ur?

What promises did God make to Abram in Haran?

How have these promises been fulfilled?

The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." Genesis 12:7

What did Abram do when he arrived in Canaan?

What do you think this signified?

Abram was worshipping God, but he was also receiving the promise and thanking God for it.

Do you need to respond to God's promises to you?

How might you do so?

Bible Studies

Abram in Egypt

At God's command Abram arrives in the Promised Land. He moves south, camping first at Shechem, then Bethel and finally settles in the Negev.



Read Genesis 12v10-20

This is one of three serious famines that Genesis records within the time of the three patriarchs. The famine was a natural event, but maybe it was also a way to test Abram's faith. This is also the first event that is recorded once Abraham reached the promised land.

How do you think this famine affected Abram?

It must have made Abram question what was going on. Had he done the right thing. Could he really trust God. Things must have got harder the longer the famine went on, he stood to lose all he had built up. Then there was the lives of those who relied on him, (servants etc). Finally he chose to move to Egypt.

It is interesting that when Isaac face the same situation, God specifically told him not to go to Egypt. Genesis 26v2. It is not recorded that Abram consulted God. Did his doubts get the better of him?

What plan did Abram hatch on the way to Egypt?

Why did he do this?

He did this because he was frightened! Fear can keep us from harm, it can also turn us towards God for protection. Fear can also blind us and destroy our trust in God. God had promised to make Abram into a great nation, *to bless those who blessed him and curse those who cursed him*. But in the face of a perceived threat Abram forgot all this and relied on deception.

What was Abram afraid of?

Egypt was often a refuge for foreigners during times of famine. Such refugees would be treated with suspicion and were open to exploitation. It is quite possible that Sarai was a kind of hostage to ensure Abram's good behaviour.

What consideration did Abram show for his wife?

This is incredible, Abram is fully prepared to let his wife become a part of Pharaoh's Harem to protect himself, moreover he cherishes the prospect of profiting from this exercise! Effectively he is treating Sarai as a prostitute. At very best he was treating her as a chattel.

What implications did this have for the promise God had given Abram?

What do you think Satan was trying to achieve through this?

Just look at what could have happened, once the deception was out Abram really would be in danger of his life. Think of the division it would have caused between Abram and Sarai, that is assuming Sarai ever escaped the Harem.

How would you describe Abram's behaviour?

The very best light we can put on Abram's actions, was that he assumed that God would protect her. This is not the action of faith but presumption.

Why would Abram do a thing like this?

Fear blinded faith and led to sin, what is more once this course was embarked upon it could not be escaped. Abram painted himself into a corner.

The heroes of the Scriptures were ordinary people just like us. James 5v17. They failed as we do, they had to grow in faith, as we do. We can learn from their mistakes.

Can fear lead us to sin?

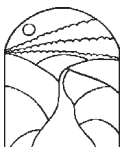
With the benefit of hindsight (and the comfort of our armchairs) what should Abram have done?

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How did God step into the situation?

Why do you think God did this?

How do you think Pharaoh discovered the ruse?

Who know what would have happened if God had not stepped in. God protected Abram even though he didn't deserve it. God was also protecting His plans for the future. As for how Pharaoh knew, maybe it was a dream, maybe a smart guess, or maybe God manipulate his pagan divination (like Balaam). Maybe Sarai was the only one who didn't become ill.

Why do you think Abram is silent when Pharaoh rebukes him?

Pharaoh could have had Abram killed and his goods confiscated. But God is gracious to Abram and he is sent on his way with all his goods, even those he has acquired through his deceit. Possibly Pharaoh is frightened of further effects if he harms Abram.

It would be nice to think that the story ended here. But it doesn't

2

Read Genesis 20v1-18

It is possible that this account is out of chronological order. It happened in the year between God's promise of a son and Isaac's birth. The three months this gives the account do not seem long enough for the events recorded. Moreover, Sarah is 90 years old! (This time no mention is made of her beauty). It is possible, once again that she served as a guarantee for Abraham's behaviour or even that it was an attempt by Abimelech to ally himself, through marriage, to a man as powerful as Abraham. Others have suggested that the miracle that enabled her to conceive also regenerated her youth. Any single women would have been seen as open to the kings advances.

How could Abraham make the same mistake twice?

Why should Abraham have done better this time around?

We have a nasty habit of returning to our previous sins. What is more, Satan will always tempt us at the place we have fallen before, where he knows we are weak. Could it be significant that Abram profited from his deception?

It is also true that God brings us back to our mistakes to see if we have learned from them.

What similarities and differences are there between these two accounts?

How did Abimelech discover Abraham's deception?

What effect had Sarah's presence in Abimelech's house had? v18

How did God override the situation? v6

How is Abraham described? v7

Why did God protect Abraham?

Why did God protect Abimelech?

This time when Abraham is rebuked he defends himself.

Abraham replied, "I said to myself, 'There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.'" Genesis 20:11

Was he right?

Abraham goes on to explain that it wasn't really a lie because Sarah was his half sister. Hurian culture considered marriage to a sister a good thing. Wives were even adopted as sisters to enhance their status.

Does this mean he was telling the truth, and was therefore innocent?

Even if it was the truth, his intention was to deceive. The old proverb goes, "nothings good that uses bad". The end does not justify the means.

Who comes out best in this story?

Abimelech makes restitution and treats Abraham well. Later he makes a treaty of friendship with Abraham. Genesis 21.

Why do you think God told Abimelech to have Abraham pray for him?

This is the first reference to prayer in the Scriptures.

That Abraham would pray for Abimelech ensure his safety and dignity. It also formed a bond with Abimelech and showed Abraham his responsibility for those he had endangered.

Bible Studies

Abram & Lot separate

Genesis 12v8 says Abram pitched his tent. Abraham lived his entire time in the promised land living in a tent, periodical he would move camp. In Genesis 14v13, he is called Abram the Hebrew. The origin of the word Hebrew (yrbu) is to move from place to place, to be a wanderer, it is also the root of the word Arab.

By faith [Abraham] made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. Hebrews 11:9-10

Why do you think it was important that he lived this way?

It would have been easy for Abraham to settle into the Canaanite village and into Canaanite culture. But God wanted him to stay separate. In the land but not of it. Abraham's eyes were on the future. God has called us to live our lives the same way. Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. 1 Peter 2:11

Abram nomadic lifestyle also symbolised that he had not yet received what was promised



Read Genesis 13v1-4

How had Abram behaved in Egypt?

He now travels through the land until he comes to Bethel, where he had first built an altar to the Lord.

Do you see any significance in this?

Abram had blown it. He now retraces his step to the place where he had trusted God and been right with Him. He is making a deliberate effort to get things back in order after his sin.

Is there a lesson for us here?

Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. Revelation 2:5 To call on the name of the Lord, means to worship and honour Him. Abram did this by sacrifice, but also by obedience and reverence. The altars were a public declaration of his faith in God.



Read Genesis 13v5-7

What was the problem?

Who quarrelled?

What was likely to happen if nothing was done?

Why did Abram act?

Both Abram and Lot had become wealthy. Their herds were too large for the land around them. The quarrel was not between Abram & Lot but between their servants. If it was left unresolved, it would have escalated and bloodshed or a family rift could have resulted. James 4v2. It is interesting that both chapters 12&13 deal with attacks on the family.

And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; 2 Timothy 2:24

What can we learn from Abram's actions?



Read Genesis 13v8-13

What solution does Abraham propose?

What goal does he have in mind?

Abram was older and senior to Lot, according to custom the right to choose was his not Lot's.

Why do you think he gave Lot the choice?

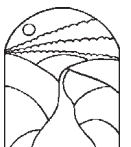
Abram put his family relationships before his own prosperity. It was important to him that they separate on good terms. Abram was generous to others, he put Lot before himself. We live in a rights orientated society, everyone has rights. Hard fought rights. Before God we have no rights. The rights we hold so dear, need to be laid before his feet as an offering. Spiritual maturity and growth, as well as advancement in God's kingdom come from such surrender.

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Consider the following verses:

Luke 14:8

Matthew 18:4

Philippians 2:7

What rights do you have?

If you hold on to your rights, then you cannot grasp God's promises.

What might have happened if Abram had asserted his rights and chosen Jordan?

Today the plain of the Jordan is arid and lifeless. According to this, prior to the destruction of Sodom, it was green and prosperous. There is Palaeolithic evidence to support this. The hill country supported scant vegetation, requiring constant travel in search of pasture.

What did Lot base his choice on?

What did Abram base his actions on?

This is a very different Abram from the one who went to Egypt!

Most of the time prosperity drags us the other way, we become selfish and materialistic. Our wealth leads us into conflict and competition with those around us and we forget God. For Abram it had the opposite effect.



Lot: *"The choice is obvious, Jordan is fertile, I will become even richer"*
Based his decision on what he could see on his own self interest and greed.

Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan. Genesis 13:10

For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. 1 John 2:16



Abram: *"My prosperity depends on God, not the quality of the land. My faith in God and my family are more important than my standard of living"*
Based his decision on faith, put God and his family first.

There was a hidden danger in Lot's choice. The cities of the plains were notorious for their evil. Soon Lot would give up his nomadic lifestyle and settle for the easy life in Sodom. This decision cost him all his riches and nearly his life. While he maintained his faith in God, (2 Pet 2:7) his spiritual life clearly went down hill. This is in clear contrast with what we have seen of Abram the Hebrew's lifestyle.

Do you see the irony in the choices and their outcomes?

Why didn't Lot take into account the danger of living near evil Sodom?

For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. Matthew 7:13-14

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? Luke 9:24-25

What kind of attitude must we show to prosperity?

What was Abram's attitude to his wealth?



Read Genesis 13v14-18

How did the Lord view Abram's actions?

What did the Lord do as a result?

Abram took the lesser land and got given the whole lot!

Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you." Genesis 13:17

Walking the Land was claiming it as his, Deuteronomy 11v24.

When Lot *looked*, v10, it led to temptation, when Abram *lifted up his eyes*, v14, it led to faith. You have got to look at the right things!

What lessons does this story have for us today?



How might we need to put others first?

How might we have to be prepared to accept second best?

How might we have to put faith before material gain?

Bible Studies

Abram rescues Lot

Read Genesis 14v1-12

What was the political situation in the land of Canaan?

The land was under the dominance of Kedorloamer, from Elam, in modern day Iran. It had been this way for 12 years. The mineral rich cities of the valleys had to pay tribute to Kedorloamer. In the 13th year they rebel and in the 14th year, Kedorloamer return to re-establish their control and punish the rebels. The five kings of the valley, led by the king of Sodom, line up against Kedorloamer and his three allies, in the Jordan Valley. It is a rout and the kings of the valley are defeated. As they retreat some of the men fall into the tar pits. This is the bitumen for which the area was famous. (the Romans called the Dead Sea, *Asphaltites*). The rest flee to the hills, leaving Kedorloamer to plunder the cities. They carry of as much loot as they can, this includes captives. Among them is Lot Abram's nephew.

How did Lot get to be in Sodom?

Do you think moving to Sodom was a good idea?

Do you think God was pleased?

I doubt he moved to Sodom straight away, and I expect he had good excuses to justify his presence there. We tend to deny *cause and effect* in such things, the unfortunate outcome is *just chance*, it has nothing to do with choosing to be in the wrong place.

Can you think of any modern day examples?

The separation between Abram & Lot is having unexpected consequences. The different choices they made, account for the different positions they now find themselves in.

Read Genesis 14v13-16

Abram is at Hebron, well out of harms ways. When he hears the news there are a number of attitudes he can take.

- It's his own fault he shouldn't have been living there.
- This is God's judgement on his folly.
- Thank goodness I am safe.

How did he respond?

Abram planned a daring raid.

What do you think enabled Abram to be so bold?

What made him think he could succeed where the 5 kings had failed?

Who many people went with Abram?

If you answered 318, you are wrong! (along with several commentaries and not a few preachers) Verse 24b makes it clear that Aner, Eshcol and Mamre, Abram's allies, and their men went with Abram. If Abram had 318 men capable of fighting his household must have swelled to around 1000 people.

The rather strange route Abram took was once used to discredit the authenticity of Genesis. A series of cities have been excavated along this course, which we now know was a major caravan route. Abram took the motorway!

In all Abram travelled over 300Km He catches up with them near Dan. Abram divides his men and surrounds their camp, he then mounts a surprise night attack.

This is similar to how Gidian defeated the Midianites

Kedorloamer had no reason to expect any attack, as far as they knew they had triumphed. A running battle ensues, which reaches up beyond Damascus. The Goods and the hostages are recaptured and Abram returns homeward.

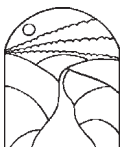
What characteristics does Abram show that we haven't seen before?

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Lot needs rescuing, Abram is able to rescue.

What accounts for the difference in their positions?

It was Abram's separation from Sodom and the plain, that enabled him to mount this rescue. Lot's closeness only made him a part of the problem. The rescue could only be effected from Abram's position of freedom and separation.

What spiritual lesson can we learn from this?

We are called to be in the world but not of it. Jesus associated with all kinds of sinners, but he never became like them. You can't pull a person to safety if you are in the same hole they are.

If your friend or brother, got caught up in some sin what would you do?

Jude v22-23, Galatians 6v1.

In what kind of situations might you need to mount a rescue?

Read Genesis 14v17-24

Two kings meet Abram on his return. The contrast between them extreme.

Who are they?

Which of them arrives first?

Which of them does Abraham speak to first?

What offer does the king of Sodom make to Abram?

Why does Abram reject the offer?

What would have happened if he had taken the riches?

Abram did not want to get rich at others expense. I don't think it is just that he wanted to rely on God alone for his wealth. I don't think he wanted any ongoing involvement with Sodom, Such a gift was likely to end up having strings attached to it. It may even have created some kind of an alliance. For that matter he did not want their antagonism or jealousy either. ("That Abram took all our wealth")

Is there a lesson for us here?

You may have noticed that Abram has come to a decision, before he speaks with Bera. Does this have something to do with his conversation with Melchizedek.? Abram is being face with a choice. There are two kings they represent different alliances, different claims on his life.

Who does Melchizedek represent?

Who does Bera king of Sodom, represent?

Which alliance does he take?

Do you think it is significant that the decision was made before he spoke to Bera?

It is ironic that while one offer stands to make Abram rich, the other requires him to give away wealth. (It is not clear if the tenth was of the plunder, or of Abram's possessions)

What does this tell us about Abram's attitude to money?

Did Abram give a tithe because he had to or because he wanted to?

This tithe is obviously an act overlaid with mean.

What was Abram doing when he gave a tenth to the priest and to God?

First of all, he was giving thanks to God for the victory. Secondly, he was also acknowledging Melchizedek as true priest and supporting him. He was responding to the blessing spoken upon him. 1 Corinthians 9v11-12

Thirdly, Abram was also declaring his faith and reliance on God. He was recognising that all he owned came from God. All he owned belonged to God.

In the valley of the Kings. Two kings wait to meet us. They make very different offers, and promise very different things. We have to choose which of them we will make an alliance with.

Bible Studies

The Melchizedek Work Sheet

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Melchizedek is one of scriptures enigmatic characters.

What does this passage tell us about Melchizedek?

What did he do?

What did Abram do?

Read Hebrews 7v1-9

What does Melchizedek mean?

מלך-צדק Jeremiah 23v6, 33v16

What does King of Salem mean?

מלך שלם Isaiah 9v6, Judges 6:24

Some people associate Salam with Jerusalem, this is possible. But Mt Mariah where Abraham would offer Isaac, is also claimed as the temple mount, in Jerusalem. We do not know exactly when Jerusalem was founded. We do know that the ancient city was built on the ridge going down from the temple mount, (Mt Mariah). But the Isaac account suggest the place is isolated. We can have one or the other, but not both. If Melchizedek was literal king of Jerusalem, then he must have been known to Abram. Jerusalem and Hebron are relatively close.

According to Hebrews who does Melchizedek represent? 6v20

What significance is there in Melchizedek being both a priest and a king?

In the Old Testament the role of king and priest were strongly separated. 2 Chr 26:19. There is no other account of a king being a priest.

Who in the New Testament was both Priest and King?

As a priest what does Christ do?

Hebrews 7v25

Hebrew 2v17

Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Psalm 85:10

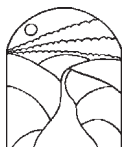
Men like Abraham acted as priests for their families. But Melchizedek is the first priest mentioned in the Bible. He is the type of the true priesthood. What is more because he stands outside of Abram's house hold, he has a universal priesthood. he is a priest for all, both Jew and Gentile.

What is the significance of the Bread and Wine Melchizedek brought?

It would be easy to get carried away and find communion in this. I do not think there is a direct connection, but there is an indirect one.

Bread and wine were part of the process of making a covenant. When Abram allied himself with Aner, Eshcol and Mamre, he would have eaten a covenant meal with them, part of this meal would be bread and wine. This meal would be repeated as a reminder of the covenant. The bread and wine Melchizedek bought should probably be seen in this light. It is because of this idea that bread and wine became part of the Passover meal and the Sabbath meal. It is also why Jesus gave bread and wine to his disciples at the last supper, saying "This cup is the new covenant in my blood," Luke 22v20

What do the bread and wine we take at communion mean?



What new meaning did Jesus give them?

What significance does Hebrews find in Melchizedek blessing Abram?

What significance does Hebrews find in Abram tithing to Melchizedek?

Hebrews says that the greater blesses the lesser, ie that Melchizedek, or what he represents, is greater even than Abraham. Regarding tithing, if the people of Israel paid tithes to the priests who descended from Abraham, via Levi, But Abram tithed to Melchizedek then the priesthood Melchizedek represents must be greater than the priesthood that came from Abraham. It's as though the priests who received the tithe, themselves paid a tithe through Abram.

Who could be greater than Abraham?

What significance does Hebrews find in Melchizedek's lack of ancestry?

It seems to imply something supernatural about Melchizedek, but this is not the authors main aim. It is a rather complicated argument. It goes like this.

Priesthood was always on the bases of ancestry. The priests could only minister because they were descended from Levi & Aaron. Jesus came from Judah and as Hebrews points out in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. 7:14 therefore Jesus could not be our high priest. Hebrews 3v1

But Melchizedek's priesthood was not based on ancestry, so it gives us a precedent.

What was Melchizedeks priesthood based on? 7v20-21

Now Hebrews points out that God promised another priest like Melchizedek would come. The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." Psalm 110:4

At first sight all this does is confirm that Jesus can be a priest, but this is only scratching the surface, because Jesus still can't be a priest under the law of Moses. What the author of Hebrews is saying is that a new priesthood means a new law and a new law requires a new priesthood. 7v12. This was understood within the Judaism of Jesus day.

The very fact that a new, superior priesthood was prophesied means;

The Levitical priesthood was not sufficient and would at some point be superseded

The law of Moses was not sufficient and would at some point be superseded.

Hebrew says this is exactly what has happened in Jesus. He has fulfilled, (completed) the Law of Moses. He is our new High Priest and our new way of coming to God, our new law, the establishment of a new and better covenant. 7v22

Abraham, the father of faith, in a wonderful anachronism, even endorsed this arrangement. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." John 8:56

Without beginning of days or end of life. Hebrews 7:3

You are a priest forever Psalm 110v4

What significance does Hebrew find Melchizedek's failure to die?

Melchizedek's priesthood is a permanent priesthood of one priest. Again this makes it superior to the OT priesthood of whom there were many. 7v23.

Who could fill such a priesthood?

Jesus fills this role on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. Hebrews 7:16

The whole of verse 3 seems to imply there was something mysterious about Melchizedek. Was he, like the Angel of the Lord, a pre-incarnation appearance of Christ Jesus? Or was he just a priest, who like Abram held on to the worship of God.

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. Hebrews 10:19-23

Bible Studies

Abram - Justified

Read Genesis 15v1-6

On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram... Genesis 15:18 We have already seen that periodically God made promises to Abram. So here again God makes promises to Abram. This time He does more, He makes a covenant. The start of this passage seems abrupt.

Is there any reason these words might have been specially appropriate to Abram?

It might just be dawning on Abram that by attacking Kedorloamer, he could have made a dangerous enemy. What if he returned? For that matter was it wise to turn down all those riches?

"Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." Genesis 15:1

How should we respond in times of threat or fear?

How did God speak to Abram?

Was this the only way he spoke to him?

What was Abram's response?

Why was this crucial to Abram?

Do you think God knows our needs and desires?

It was twenty five years between God's first promise to Abram that he would be a great nation and the birth of his son Isaac. **Why so long?**

What does this teach us about God, and the promises He makes us?

Who was going to inherit Abram's estate?



The Hammurabi Code

Adoption was very common, especially where the father (or mother) was childless or had seen all his children grow up and marry away. The child was then adopted to care for the parents' old age. This was done by contract, which usually specified what the parent had to leave and what maintenance was expected. The real children, if any, were usually consenting parties to an arrangement which cut off their expectations. They even, in some cases, found the estate for the adopted child who was to relieve them of a care. If the adopted child failed to carry out the filial duty the contract was annulled in the law courts. Slaves were often adopted and if they proved unfilial were reduced to slavery again. Charles F. Horne: The Code of Hammurabi: Introduction

Hammurabi Code 191. *If a man, who had adopted a son and reared him, founded a household, and had children, wish to put this adopted son out, then this son shall not simply go his way. His adoptive father shall give him of his wealth one-third of a child's portion, and then he may go. He shall not give him of the field, garden, and house.*

The Hammurabi code comes from Mesopotamia, the area where Abram started his journey. It dates from about 1780BC, about the time of Abraham. It is interesting because some of Abram's actions, like adopting a slave as an heir, marrying his sister, giving gifts to his sons before sending them away, etc, all reflect the code. For years liberal scholars have claimed that Genesis was not written until 1000 years after the events. (c700-500BC). Therefore, they confidently assured us, most of it's content was imaginary. The discovery of the Hammurabi code (1901) and the Nuzi tablets have conclusively proved that the Genesis account is fully consistent the social conditions of the time. Whoever wrote Genesis knew exactly what he was writing about.

What was God's response to Abram?

The next verse is one of the most important in scripture.

Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. Genesis 15:6

What did Abram believe?

It wasn't so much the promise that captured Abram's belief, as God himself.

How do you think he believed?

This verse is the corner stone of Paul's theology.

Read Romans 4v16-25 (slowly)

This passage is complex and easy to gloss over. So lets take it bit by bit.

The problem Paul is grappling with here is; **How are we saved?**

The people around Paul had several answers.

By obeying the law of Moses.

By being circumcised (part of the Covenant)

By doing good works.

Paul dismisses these suggestions, and in various places explains why they are not possible. In Romans 4, he takes Abram as an example. To be 'righteous before God' is to be saved. This is also what Paul means when he says, 'Abram was justified'.

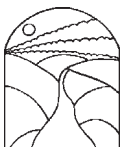
Paul says, "lets look how Abram got saved".

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Was he saved by keeping the Law?

Galatians 3v16-17

Was Abram saved by being circumcised?

Romans 4v9-10

Was Abram saved by doing good deed?

Romans 4v4-6

Paul's point is that Abram did not earn righteousness, God gave it to him. So Abram was made righteous, before he was circumcised, 430 years before the law came into being, and not because he was a good man.

How was Abram made righteous?

It was only and simply because he believed God.

Now the reason that Paul took Abram as a example is that Abram is just like us. Up until God made a covenant with him, he was a gentile, just like us. So what works for Abram, works for Gentile as well as Jews. Romans 4v11-12. So now we get to the important part; The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Romans 4:23-25

How do we get saved?

What do we have to believe?

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If you read the verse carefully, it is not what we have to believe, but who we have to believe. Who believe in him who raised...

Is being saved really this simple? Isn't there something else we have to do?

That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:9. cf Acts 2:21 Acts 2:38, Acts 16:31 Ephesians 2:8,



Faith is an act of righteousness.

Faith unites us to Christ's righteousness.

Faith leads to righteousness.

That I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. Philippians 3:9

What kind of faith did Abram have?

Romans 4v18-21

What Abram's faith positive thinking?

Was Abram's faith daunted by the impossible?

How do you think Abram faith was strengthened (v20)?

The phrase 'gave Glory to God', has a forensic meaning. Joshua 7:19. It meant to come under oath. In this context, to make a statement or declaration of belief.

Abram's faith was a choice not an emotion or state of mind.

How do we do this?

As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were. Romans 4:17

How did God give life to the dead in Abrams life?

How did God call things that are not as though they were?

Abram faced the fact that he was as good as dead. But God gave him life in the form of a baby. All through this study we have used the name Abram, but in this passage Paul calls him Abraham. **What does Abraham mean?** Genesis 17v5 Abram means exalted father. Abraham means father of many peoples.

I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. Isaiah 46v10

God still calls things that are not as though they are. He does so when He calls us holy, righteous, worthy, victorious. For Abram, part of believing was accepting the new name. *Think how they must have laughed behind his back, when Sarah called barren Abram, father of many nations.* We too have to accept that we are what God calls us. Even when we don't always see it.

More than this, when God looks at us, He does not see what we are, but what we will be. A great example of this is Gideon hiding in a wine press for fear of the Midianites. "The LORD is with you mighty warrior" Judges 6v13

What does the Lord call you?

Bible Studies

Hagar & Sarai

Read Genesis 16v1-5

When you are waiting for God to keep his promises, you do not need to be checking the calendar.

What did Sarai suggest?

Why do you think she made this suggestion?

What was this an act of faith?

Within the culture of Abram's time, this was a perfectly acceptable practice. Jacob also built a family through his servant girl's, at his wives behest.

According to the Code of Hammurabi, a wife could give a maidservant to a husband to bear children, such children would be reckoned to belong to the wife. The maidservant did not become a wife, but her status was raised. If she tried to assume the position of a wife, or was 'insolent', she could again be returned to the status of a slave. She could not be sold. (Codes 144-146)

Just because this was culturally acceptable, does this make it right?

Just because something today is culturally acceptable is it right?

It wasn't that Sarai stopped believing that God would give Abram a son. Her actions were aimed at achieving that very purpose. But she did get impatient waiting for God to fulfil His word. She doubted herself. However God would achieve His ends, it could not possibly be through her.

What does this tell us about her faith in God?

What might have caused her to see things this way?

How long had it been since they had received the promise?

Do you think Sarai felt pressured?

Sarai had give God 10 years to fulfil His word, surely this was long enough! The stigma of barrenness had got to Sarai. She blamed herself, for their failure to have children. She was desperate. She had given in to self doubt. In a sense, it was not her faith in God that was defective, as much as her trust in God.

Her attitude was, 'I don't doubt God can and will do it, but I do doubt it will be through me.' This is a common problem with Christians today.

Have you ever felt like this?

Why do you think we do so often doubt ourselves?

Is desperation a good basis for action?

Is impatience a good basis for actions?

Can you think of any noble reasons Sarai may have made this offer?

Yes, she could have seen it as a self sacrifice, giving up her prerogative for the sake of her husband.

Did this make it right?

Do right motives sanctify a wrong action?

Why do you think Abram went along with the plan?

Do temptations always come with a whiff of sulphur?

How do you think Hagar felt about the plan?

Well she stood to gain by it, but I doubt anyone asked her. Abram certainly neglected to ask God His opinion.



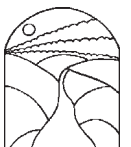
The plan worked perfectly and failed dismally.

What went wrong?

What effect did it have for Hagar, Abram and Sarai?

It was easy to make the suggestion, but hard to live with the consequences.

Who did Sarai blame? Why?



The account of Ishmael, has come to stand for human attempts to bring about God's plans. Trying to force something God has promised, into being, outside God's will. We will talk more about this when we get to Chapter 21.

Sometimes it is a fine line between grasping the opportunities God gives and taking our own initiative.

How are you going to know the difference?

The answers are found above, are you acting out of desperation or impatience? Have you asked God. What does wise counsel think?

What is the danger in trying to work these things out for ourselves?

Ishmael, would actually come to stand in the way of what God was doing.

Does our wisdom ever bring about God's plans?

Why not? Isaiah 55v8; Romans 11v33-36.

Verse 4-6 show a fault in each person. What are they?

Derek Kinder described them like this.

Hagar	False Pride.
Sarai	False Blame.
Abraham	False Neutrality.

Was Sarai justified in mistreating her maidservant?

Abram and Sarai used Hagar, they forgot that she was a person with feelings and aspirations of her own.

Read Genesis 16v7-15

God does not show favouritism Acts 10:34

For a slave to run away was a serious thing. God sees her distress and meets her need. God cares for the oppressed and downtrodden.

God's intervention is a judgement of Abram failure to intervene.

God knew who she was. God knew exactly where to find her. But He still asked her "where have you come from and where are you going?"

Why?

These are good questions. When we run from our problems, we would do well to ask ourselves the same questions.

What two things did God tell Hagar to do?

How do you think she felt about this?

Return and submit. Clearly this was not something Hagar wanted to hear. But it was what she needed to do. Going back was not going to be easy, the situation, partly of her own making, would be almost impossible.

Does God have the right to tell us to stay in a situation we find intolerable?

Why?

Sometimes it is because He is working on a plan that we know nothing of, we just have to trust and obey. We spend much time praying that God will change the awkward people around us. It never dawns on us that maybe we are the ones God wants to change. In fact they were put there, so that we would change. To learn self control, learn obedience, learn to love, learn perseverance. *We shirk the discipline; we evade the yoke; we make our own way out of the difficulty. We shall never get right thus.* F.B.Meyer

Is our comfort always the controlling factor?

Ishmael laumcy, means God hears.

What promises did God give Hagar concerning Ishmael?

If Ishmael was not God's will, why did He bless him?

How do you think things were for Hagar over the next 13 years?

What enabled her to endure?

Life must have been difficult at best. I doubt Sarai was pleasant towards her. It was the promise, that made the difference. God cared about her and her child, some day he would be a great nation.

Hagar called God, yar la, *El Ro-I*, the God who sees.

What do you think she meant by that? What did God see?

She called the place where she was yar yjl rab, the well of the living one who sees me.

Bible Studies

Abraham & the Covenant

God made a covenant with Abraham. The details of this covenant are found in Chapters 15 & 17, These two chapters occur a decade apart in Abram's life, but they speak about the same thing so we are considering them together.

“Do not be afraid,
Abram. I am your shield,
your very great reward.” Genesis 15:1

We have already studied the first part of Genesis 15 God promises Abram a son and heir and that the land he is living in will be his forever. Abram asks how he can be sure of this.

Read Genesis 15v9-21

On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram Genesis 15:18
The concept of Covenant was very important in the ancient para-biblical culture and it is vital to an understanding of the Bible. The Bible is a book of covenant.

What is the major division in the Bible?

Testament is just another word for covenant. The content of the Bible and the message of salvation are presented in covenant form.

The Bible contains many covenants, some between individuals; 1 Samuel 18:3, some between kings and his people; 2 Chronicles 23v3, or frequently a conquered people. These covenants are not just found in the Bible they were part of the fabric of society at the time.

Who was Abram already in covenant with? Gen 14v13

What was the effect of the covenant?

The NIV uses the word *Allied with* but the Hebrew says *tyrb ylub Baaley Brit*. Lit. owners of a covenant. *Brit* is the Hebrew word for covenant. Abram's allies did not have a choice whether they went with him, they were in covenant.

The Covenants that interest us the most, are the ones between God and men, of these there are many; eg.

With Phinehas, making his descendants the priestly line Numbers 25v13,

With David about his descendants 2 Chronicles 13v5

There are four important Covenant in the Bible; Who were they made with?

Genesis 9v11		
Genesis 15v18		
Exodus 34v27		
Matthew 26v28		

What is a covenant?

A covenant is an agreement, treaty or contract between two people. Our society understands such contracts when they apply to physical or financial things. But Biblical covenants had more to do with loyalty, love and friendship than finance. Covenant is a giving of oneself to another. The closest we come to this in today's society is Marriage, (which the Bible sees as a covenant Malachi 2v14).

Of course not all covenants were this inclusive, some related to specific things for fixed periods, But the major Biblical Covenants are all embracing and eternal.

Why is this important to us?

When we committed our lives to Christ we entered a covenant. We, whether we know it or not, whether we like it or not, are in covenant relationship with God. This puts obligations on us that we should be aware of.



Read Genesis 17v1-14
Do the Covenant Worksheet

What was the sign of the covenant?

Circumcision was the sign of obedience to the covenant. It represented an outward physical sign and reminder of membership to the covenant.

What does Paul say it symbolises? Colossians 2v11-13

Is the outward act sufficient by itself?

The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live. Deuteronomy 30:6

Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer. Deuteronomy 10:16

What do you think circumcision of the heart means?

Putting away the old nature with its sin & sinful desires, a change in our attitude and heart. A devotion and dedication to God.

How quickly did Abraham circumcise his household? 17v23

What do you think this implies?

What was the Basic Content of the Covenant?

Genesis 15v4;17v4

Genesis 15v18; 17v8

Genesis 17v7

Who was the Covenant made with?

How long for?

The only condition that is put on this covenant is the sign, circumcision, this the Jews continue to practice as of great importance. Abraham is also told

“I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. Genesis 17:1

But this is not strictly a condition. I think God intended to keep this covenant, even up until today, He knew whatever conditions He put on it would not be kept so He didn't make any.

Is this covenant still in effect? Galatians 3v17

The presence of the Jews today in their land is a direct result of God's faithfulness to this Covenant.

The covenant with Abraham is a covenant of Promise. The covenant made at Sinai was a covenant of obligation (law).

What kind of Covenant is ours?

Ours too is a covenant of Promise, Hebrew 8v12. And like the covenant with Abraham it is of grace.

Does the command given to Abram to be blameless apply to us?

What does God mean when he says to walk before Him?

It is easy to look at our salvation and relationship with God in a whole variety of ways. But covenant is basic.

If we are in Covenant with God through Jesus Christ how should we see our faith?

What are the privileges of our covenant?

What are its obligations?

What promises does it contain?

What rights does this covenant give God in our lives?

What would you say is the basic purpose of the New Covenant?

Bible Studies

Covenant Worksheet

How is a covenant made?

Psalm 50v5

Covenant was always made by sacrifice one of the important phrases in scripture is "the blood of the covenant". The Sacrifice represented the death of both parties to pre covenant existence and the start of their covenant relationship.

Did Abram make a sacrifice?

How did this happen in the New Covenant?

Because Jesus was both man and God, he represented both fully, His death on the cross was the ultimate substitutional sacrifice. Paul reminds us that Christ's death means our death.

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. Romans 6:8

What practice do we have that symbolises this?

1 Samuel 18v4

When Jonathan and David made a covenant, Jonathan gave David his robe and weapons, (David probably did the same). The robe signified his wealth and the sword his promise of protection. Effectively what he was saying was, "David if you are ever in trouble you can count on all my wealth to back you up and I will protect you with my life if necessary."

How did God make this same promise to Abram? Gen 15v1

How does this apply to the New Covenant?

Jeremiah 34v18

When the sacrifice had been made it was cut in two and laid out on the ground, the two parties would then walk a figure of 8 between the pieces, they would meet in the middle and the terms of the covenant would be spelled out.

How did this happen in Genesis 15

Why do you think Abram was put to sleep?

This was not a human covenant, Abram was not fit to walk with God in this way. Moreover it symbolised God's sovereignty and grace. God was doing it all, there was nothing that Abram could add. The Hebrew idiom you cut a covenant.

2 Kings 23v2

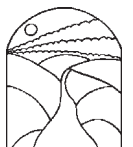
The terms of the Covenant were read out. cf Exodus 24v7. There is a definite pattern to written covenant, it is clearly perceivable in the Deuteronomy.

The parties and a brief history	The Lord our God said to us at Horeb...
Basics of the Covenant Deut 4-6	Hear O Israel the Lord your God... Thou shalt...
Terms and conditions	If cases come before your courts...
Curses & blessings	If you obey the Lord... you will be blessed
Renewal of the Covenant	These are the terms of the covenant...
Witness	This day I call on heaven and earth as witness...

What were the word's of the covenant in Abram's case?

What do you think the blazing torch and smoking furnace represent?

The simple answer is God, beyond that it get speculative. Some have suggested they represent the knowable and unknowable God. Never fully known, never completely hidden The fire represents God's unapproachable holiness, and cleansing power. The Smoke, "darkness and light; a heart of fire and a wrapping of darkness"



MacLaren. It is interesting that when God manifest himself over the tabernacle in the wilderness it was with the same two evidences.

Genesis 26v31

Obvious once the terms of the covenant had been spelt out, both parties promised to keep the covenant. This was a serious matter covenants were not to be entered into lightly. Breaking a covenant was a very serious offence, covenant was for life, with all your life. Most of the promises God makes to Abram have the form of an oath, "this man will not be...", "know for certain that..."

Does Abram reciprocate?

When it says that *Abram believed God*, the word believed (אָמַן) Ma-Ah-Mean has strong covenant overtones. It means to commit to not just to acknowledge something as true. Our belief in Jesus has to be this same kind of commitment.

Exodus 24v9-11

Genesis 26v28-31 also mentions this meal. Half of the animal that had been cut in two was offered as a sacrifice, the other half was eaten as a covenant meal. Such a meal was often repeated as a reminder of the Covenant. Such a meal included Bread and Wine.

When did Abram eat bread and wine?

What is our covenant meal?

Do you think it is significant that the sacrifice was eaten? John 6v53-56

Ezekiel 17v18

This is not found in the Covenant with Abram (**why?**) Both parties making the covenant would cut their right wrist and raise his hand while the agreement was being spoken. (Genesis14v22). Then they bring their arms together, letting the blood flow between them. Often something would be rubbed into the wound so that it would leave a scar, as evidence of the treaty. It is generally held that this is the origin of shaking hands. It is also not without significance that when Jesus died on the Cross the nails went exactly where the wrist would have been cut.

Genesis 17v5

When individuals made covenant they often included the other parties name after their own. Abram and Sarai both have their name changed as part of the covenant.

What did the old and new names mean?

This is was a great way to seal the promise God had given Abraham, but there is more to it than that. The changes were achieved by adding the letter H (**h**) to both names. So **\rba** becomes **\hrba** and **yc** becomes **hrc**. H is the basic part of the Name Jehovah and is used as an abbreviation for it. God put his own name into Abraham's name. From this time on God becomes known as the 'God of Abraham'.

Has something similar happened to us?

Genesis 9v12

Most Covenants had a sign, in Noah's covenant it was something God did. In the three other major covenants it is something we do.

What are the signs of the Covenant?

Abraham Genesis 17v11

Sinai Exodus 31v16-17

New Colossians 2v11-12

Based on this do you think water baptism is important?

Bible Studies

Three Visitors



Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. Hebrews 13:2

Read Genesis 18v1-15

How were the visitors described?

What did Abraham do?

Later in the passage it becomes very clear that these are no normal visitors. Two of them are called Angels (19v1) and the other is clearly God. In the first verse it says The LORD appeared to Abraham. (LORD= Yahweh)

When do you think that Abram realised who they were?

It is possible he knew immediately, this was not the first time he had met God. He is certainly very keen to show them hospitality. This however was the custom, not to do so would have been considered impolite. The visitor calls Sarah by name, moreover he calls her Sarah not Sari. The visitor promises that she will have a son. If there had been any doubt, it is now gone, clearly this is God.

Is hospitality important? Romans 12v13; 1 Peter 4v9

What do you think the Church has to gain from practising hospitality?

What do we have to loss by not practising hospitality?

Who should we show hospitality to?

What special reminder did the Lord give us? Luke 14v13-14

Where does God live? Isaiah 57v15

Have you ever entertained the Lord?

Hebrews 13v2, tells us that sometime people get to entertain angels without knowing they are doing so. But Matthew 25v35-40 gives us a much more exciting prospect.

What is it? (Read Matthew 25v35-40)

You can provide a meal, or clothes, or care for God today.

People often wonder what angels look like, the scriptures give a number of descriptions, frequently they could not be distinguished from ordinary men, at other times their presence produced terror, suggesting something a little more impressive.

Is it possible that angels still appear this way?

The encounter with God was a little more unusual.

Can you think of any other times that God appeared to men this way?

This is called a Theophany, a physical visit from God.

What reasons did God have for appearing to Abraham at this time?

The first reason was to tell Abraham that the time of waiting was over. In one years time he would have his long awaited son and heir.

Who would be the child's mother?

Why did God gave Abraham this news in this way?

Much of this passage revolves around Sarah. The incident with Hagar proved that Sarah had long since given up hope that she would have a child. God acted to reestablish her faith before fulfilling the promise.

Why is faith so important? Can't God just act sovereignly?

Why did Sarah laugh?

Did you notice the discrepancy between Sarah's thoughts and God's statement?

Why do you think Sarah denied laughing?

Is it a good idea to lie to God?

Not only is it a bad idea it is also impossible, God knows our thoughts.

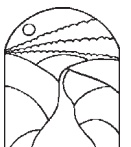
I think it was vital that God reawakened Sarah's faith, before he fulfilled the promise through her. I don't think it could have happened without this reawakening.

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**When might your faith need to be strengthened?
How might God do this?**



Read Genesis 18v16-33

Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets Amos 3:7, Cf Psalm 25:14, John 15v15

The Angels go down to Sodom, and Abraham is left walking with God.

According to the above passage, what did God chose Abraham to do?

How does this apply to us?

Does v20 suggest that God was not sure what was happening in Sodom?

What does it mean?

God clearly had other reasons for doing things this way, including teaching Abraham and rescuing Lot. God is demonstrating His justice and patience in judgement. He clearly takes the destruction of Sodom as a serious matter and is meticulous in establishing their guilt.

What do you make of this interaction between God and Abraham?

The traditional view of these events is of a God who is going to destroy Sodom irrespective of the righteous within her, and a noble, courageous Abraham, (with a much higher degree of mercy and justice than God), who heroically pleads for Sodom. I am not so sure.

What was Abraham's concern about God? v23-25

Abraham was frightened that God was about to do something unjust.

Did he need to be worried?

What do you think might have been behind his concern?

What did Abraham Call God? v25b

Does God ever act unjustly?

Abraham clearly thinks he is doing a noble thing, the future of the righteous in Sodom are in his hands. He also seems to realise that he is treading on dangerous ground. I think he seriously overstepped the mark.

Abraham suggests the number of righteous for which God should spare the city.

What were they?

How does God reply each time?

Why did Abraham stop at ten?

What would God have done if there were only 10 righteous in the city?

How many righteous were there?

What did God do?

Did Abraham's pleading change God's actions?



There are Two important lessons we can learn from this passage.

Read 2 Peter 2v4-10

What two things does God know how to do in judgement?

God knows how to differentiate between the wicked and the righteous, he will not condemn the righteous with the wicked, nor in the end will he spare the wicked for the sake of the righteous, Ezekiel 14v20.

Can you think of an example of God sparing the righteous in Judgement?

The end times will be marked by great tribulation and distress.

Can we trust God to see us through?

Come Judgement Day can we trust God?



For me this passage came as a revelation, like everyone else I had seen Abraham intercession for Sodom as heroic. I too had some difficult issues where I felt I had to challenge God concerning His justice. "What about children that die before they are old enough to understand, or the handicapped who will never understand. Will you condemn them to everlasting punishment? Or what about people who have never heard the name of Jesus, what will you do with them?"

I understood this passage and felt suitably rebuked. Abraham was well meaning in his actions, but he was a fool to doubt God.

Does God ever do anything shoddy or questionable?

The Judge of all the earth will always do what is right.

Who am I to think that my justice is superior to God's, or to think of myself as more merciful. I would not even know what Justice or Mercy were if God had not taught them to me.

I still don't know the answers to all these questions, but I know I can trust God.

Bible Studies

Sodom and Gomorrah

If he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men... If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment. 2 Peter 2:6-9

The account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, is given to us as an example and a warning of God's judgement. Jude v7



Read Genesis 19v1-5

Where did the angels plan to spend the night?

Why was Lot so persistent when offering them hospitality?

Did Lot know who they were?

Was this a kind of test for Lot?

Did he pass?

That Lot made bread without yeast shows he understood a need for urgency.

Why did the Angels go to Sodom?

There were five cities of the plain, Sodom was the leading city. The angels were there to investigate the sins of Sodom, and come the morning to call down God's judgement upon it. Although Lot did not know it, they were also there to rescue him. It is ironic that Lot keeps trying to rescue those who were sent to rescue him.

What was the principle sin of Sodom?

Do you think this was their only sin?

There have been many attempts in some parts of the Church to reinterpret this passage away from the homosexuality so obviously inherent to it. (for example that Sodom's sin was xenophobia). In fairness we have to say that this was a rampant homosexuality, including rape. Doubtless this was symptomatic of a general break down of morality in Sodom.

What does God think of Homosexuality?

Leviticus 18v22, 20v13

Romans 1v24-26

1 Corinthians 6v9-10

Based on our knowledge of Jesus character, Mark 2v15-17 etc. (cf Matthew 5v46)

What would Jesus attitude be toward homosexuals?

Is sexual orientation a private matter of no interest to God? Rev 21v8

It is being suggested that homosexuality is genetic, and not a matter of choice. So far the evidence is inconclusive.

Even if this were found to be true, would it be an excuse?

Equally, environment is a big factor for those committing serious crime. But they still have choice. Genetic predisposition or not we still have choice.

Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." Genesis 4:7



Read Genesis 19v6-16

What was the attitude of the men of Sodom toward Lot?

This was obviously not the first time Lot and the Sodomites had clashed. They accused him of moralising to them. This same accusation is often levelled against Christians.

Do we have the right to impose our morals on others?

Are our morals more valid than other peoples?

I don't think we can impose our morals on other. We do have a duty to speak out for what is right. We have to be sure our morality is biblical and not just our own ideas. This is an area where we have to be very careful, not only must our morals be biblical but the way stand up for them must also be biblical. We have to show love not hate.

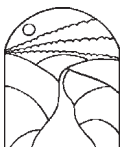
Can you think of some right and wrong ways to stand for what we believe?

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What do you think about Lots offer to substitute his daughters?

Something similar happened in Judges 19, suggesting that this was considered a lesser evil. However there is no biblical justification for this action. All we can say, in Lot's defence is that he clearly felt he was doing the right thing.

Why did the angels strike the men blind, when later they would be destroyed?

This was a last chance for them to repent. God uses a lesser judgement intending to avoid a greater one. On other occasions in Scripture this technique bought repentance. 2 Kings 6 & Acts 9v8.

What does this tell us about God's Judgement?

Can you think of any other time that God gave Sodom a chance?

For that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard 2 Peter 2:8

Lot had obviously tried to influence Sodom for good.

Why do you think he was so ineffective?

It is a telling indictment on Lot that after all these years in Sodom when it came to the crunch not even his daughters fiancés believed him.

Lot had been rescued before, why do you think he returned?

Why do you think he was reluctant to leave now?

Perhaps part of the problem was, that while Lot disapproved of Sodom's sin, he obviously enjoyed the city life, maybe this inconstancy made his witness ineffective. Possibly the problem was that Lot spent all his time disapproving instead of showing them something better?

Was Lot's living among sinners enough to see them repent?

What are the limitations of lifestyle evangelism?



Read Genesis 19v17-26

Why did Lot think he could not make the mountains?

Would you say Lot co-operated in being rescued?

Do you think this was a physical reality, a lack of faith or an act of compromise?

His actions are a bit like us and sin, we are notoriously hard to rescue!

It seems incredible that even after the rescue Lot does not trust God to finish the task. God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire & brimstone. This was either a supernatural act or God sent an earthquake which ignited the underground bitumen reserves with its associated gases, for which the area was famous. There is a traditional site for Sodom but it is almost certain that the ruins lay beneath the southern part of the Dead Sea, which in Biblical times was not yet flooded.

Think about how the angels acted in rescuing Lot, are there any lessons for us?

What happened to Lot's wife?

Had they been warned? V17b

"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." Luke 9:62

What did Jesus mean when He spoke about looking back?

In what way did Lot's wife look back?

I do not believe that this was simple curiosity or fear, when she looked back it was with her heart not her eyes. This jeopardised her escape and she perished.

Is there a lesson for us here? Luke 17v32, Hebrews 10v39



Why did God need to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah?

God needs to deal with sin, he cannot just let it go, this account shows that God will deal with sin. It is also clear that this destruction was intended as an example to us and a type of the end time judgement that will come upon the earth. Luke 17v29-30. Scripture uses Sodom as an example of the totality of God's Judgement. Zephaniah 2v9, Romans 9v29. We would like to distance ourselves from Sodom but Scripture will not let us. Matthew 11v23, Ezekiel 16v55. They consistently use them as a warning for all of us.

How can we avoid such judgement?

Read Genesis 19v27-29

Bible Studies

Isaac & Ishmael



Read Genesis 21v1-7

What does Isaac mean?

How long had Abraham and Sarah waited for the fulfilment of the promise?

Isaac, qjxy (Yitz-hach) means 'he will laugh'.

The scripture emphasises that Isaac was born exactly when and as promised. One year from the last promise and 25 years since entering the land. God had made no mistakes. The long wait was His plan.

Why is it so hard to wait for God?

Why does God so often make us wait?

Why did Sarah laugh? Genesis 18v12

Why did Abraham laugh Genesis 17v17

Why did Sarah laugh? Genesis 21v6

How do you think Sarah must have felt?

Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." Psalm 126:2

Isaac was the son of the promise, and it was through him that the promises to Abraham would be fulfilled, culminating in Jesus Christ. His name is still appropriate because the promised blessing 12v3b, salvation in Christ brings Joy.

Why was it important that Isaac be circumcised?



Read Genesis 21v8-13

It is generally thought that Isaac was about three when he was weaned that makes Ishmael 16 or 17.

What was Ishmael's attitude towards Isaac?

Why do you think this was, what was behind it?

The word that is used of Ishmael's mocking is qjxm,(matz-heck). It comes from the same root as Isaac's name and it mean to ridicule or make a joke of. It was a laugh of contempt. Ishmael, had the right of the firstborn despite all this fuss over Isaac.

But his behaviour indicated he saw Isaac as a threat.

Hagar had shown the same kind of attitude when she first knew she was pregnant.

Do you think there is a connection?

There is a real danger that we pass our bad attitudes and behaviours on to our children.

What does Sarah want done with Hagar and Ishmael?

Do you think this is fair?

What was Abraham's attitude to Ishmael? 21v11 & 17v18

Abraham has made several mistakes because he has failed to seek God, but this time he does seek the Lord. When Hagar had run away before, God told her to return and submit, but this time God tells Abraham to listen to his wife and send Hagar away.

What reason does God give for sending Ishmael away?

God tells Abraham that it is through Isaac that his offspring will be reckoned v12b. Offspring, (lit. seed) is singular.

What significance does Paul find in this? Galatians 3v16

What promise does he make to reassure Abraham?

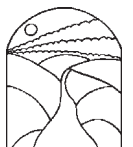
Does God's will remain the same forever?

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***Is it significant that the passage reminds us that Hagar was Egyptian?
What would have happened if Ishmael had stayed?***

There is more to this story than meets the eye. Paul uses it to illustrate the relationship between the law and grace. Between salvation through human effort and salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.



Read Galatians 4v21-31

There were people in Galatia who were teaching that to be saved you had to keep all the law, as well as believing in Jesus. Believe in Jesus, was good, but not enough. Paul is very strongly against this teaching, no one in all the 1000 years of the Law (apart from Jesus) had ever kept it, so to rely on keeping the law effectively meant that no one could be saved! The Law could only show us our faults, it could never make us righteous. Paul explains this graphically in ***Galatians 3v1-14***. If you want to understand the argument better read this passage.

Who does Ishmael represent?

Who does Isaac represent?

Can they co-exist? v30

What was the difference in their birth?

What did Ishmael's birth represent?

What does Paul mean when he says Ishmael still persecuted Isaac?

Paul obviously means the way, those who want to keep the law were troubling the Galatians and persecuting him. People who want to rely on their own efforts for salvation and people who have no grasp of spiritual things are always going to be opposed to those who trust in Jesus. Much of the persecution and ridicule Christians endure, comes from this source.

In what way are we like Isaac?

Are we born accordance with the promise of human effort? Romans 9v8

Is our rebirth supernatural or natural? John 3v8

Why is human effort in salvation never enough?

What fruit do Isaac and Ishmael produce?

Abraham's life exemplifies the only two possible attitudes towards God; faith and unbelief, Cole. Both bear fruit; Faith leads to freedom, unbelief to bondage.

Hagar and Sarah represent two covenants, the old and the new, law and grace.

What do you think Sarah's barrenness describes in this allegory?

This is the amazing growth that comes from the Gospel, gentile who were once sinners and far from God are now turning to him and producing fruit.

There is only one way to God's grace.

What do you think is the message for us from this allegory? Galatians 5v1

This passage does not mean that God has given up on the Jews who he now sees as 'ishmaelite' far from it! Romans 11v29. It does mean that Jew and Gentile alike can only be saved through faith in Jesus.



Read Genesis 21v14-21

God even cares and provides for those in bondage, those under the law.

Why did God care for Ishmael and bless him? Genesis 21v13

The last time this happened Hagar received the revelation that God sees.

What revelation does she receive this time?

What do you think the miraculous appearance of the well means?

The well appears to have been there all the time, Hagar just couldn't see it.

How do you think this fits the allegory as we have understood it?

~~They went to him, they warned him the danger, they rescued all that they could, they persisted when he was reluctant.~~

Bible Studies

The Greatest Test



Read Genesis 22v1-2

This passage tells us that God tested Abraham.

What is the difference between testing and tempting?

Testing is to bring out the good in us, tempting is to bring out the evil, God does not tempt anyone, He does not want them to sin. James 1v13

What did God tell Abraham to do?

Does God want human sacrifices? Jeremiah 19v5, Deuteronomy 12v31, Micah 6v7

Did Abraham know this?

Did you notice the repetition? *Take your son, your only son, whom you love.*

What is the point of this repetition?

Abraham is caught in both moral and spiritual dilemmas. **What are they?**

What did Abraham stand to lose?

While God had probably never told Abraham He did not want human sacrifices, they were not part of the Abraham's practice, and they did not fit in with what he knew about God, but God had said to do it. Surely this would destroy the promises that were to be fulfilled in Isaac. He loved his son but he wanted to obey God. I doubt he slept much that night.

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Hebrews 11:17-18

This was a conflict of faith and love.



Read Genesis 22v3-8

What is the significance of the phrase 'early next morning'?

Why do you think Abraham chose to obey God?

How do you think he felt about it?

What kind of an atmosphere do you think there was on the journey?

According to Jewish tradition, Isaac was 33 years old, a number not without significance. He was certainly old enough to carry a large quantity of wood and to figure out what was happening. This account is not only about Abraham's faith, but also Isaac's faith, in God and in his father.

Traditionally the site of the altar was Mount Moriah, where the temple would stand, however Scripture does not specifically say this, only that it was a mountain in the area of Mt. Moriah. Others have suggested it was Calvary, certainly God had a specific hill in mind.

What did Isaac ask Abraham?

What do you think was going through Isaac's mind?



Read Genesis 22v9-14

Why did Isaac submit to being sacrificed?

We know the end of the story and so we envisage Abraham holding his hand, waiting for the angel voice. But he was not doing so. He fully intended to obey God, even if it cost him everything he had.

Who did Abraham tell the servants would return after worshipping? v5

What did Abraham anticipate was going to happen? Hebrew 1v19

When Abraham thought everything through this was the only solution that fitted all the facts.

What was God's reason for telling Abraham to sacrifice Isaac?

Did Abraham sacrifice Isaac?

What kind of a sacrifice did God require of Abraham?

What was Abraham's attitude to God?

It is interesting that this test comes towards the end of Abraham life.

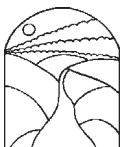
Do you think he would have done so well in his early years? Why?

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God's knows everything, He did not need to test Abraham in order to know his sincerity.

So why did he test him?

Abraham needed to know, in Job's case, Satan needed to know. More than this, such testing is about maturing in God. Sorting out where our priorities lie. It is a growing thing.

Is our obedience to God important?

In what kind of things do we need to be obedient?

So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided." Genesis 22:14

How did God provide?

A sacrifice was still needed, this time a ram became that substitute.

Does God ever test us this way?

What should our attitude be if God tells us to give something up?

It is clear that there are things that we have to give up for God, things that we may love, but we need to give them up because they are wrong, they are sin. But Isaac does not come into this category.

Does God ever tell us to give up things that are not necessarily sin? Why?

Sometimes it is because they take up too much time, time or effort that God wants directed into His service. At other times He tests us to see if it is God who comes first in our lives or something else.

Looking at a basket of fish, the fruit of Peter's old way of life, Jesus says, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" John 21:15

It is about obedience, love, faith and commitment. When God asks us "do you love me", it is a question with teeth!

"If you love me, you will obey what I command." John 14:15

Does God ever return to us the things He asks us to surrender?

What was the result of Abrahams obedience? Genesis 22:15-19



God will provide a lamb

Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son" NIV. God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering. KJV Genesis 22:8

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" John 1:29

You do not have to be a genius to realise this story has a NT parallel.

In what ways does this story parallel Jesus death on the Cross?

God did not ask of Abraham what He was unwilling to do Himself. His request of Abraham was in fact to illustrate what God Himself would do.

Why is it significant that Isaac is called Abraham's only son? John 3:16

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

In what way were Abraham's actions like God's?

How do Abraham's attitude reflect God's motives in giving us His Son?

In what ways did Isaac, display Christ's attitude?

For Abraham this was a hard fought discussion. When the Bible talks of Jesus as God's Son, there is much I do not understand. It is not as though God had a baby, such a view is inconstant with our belief in the trinity. Son, is a human way of explaining something that is beyond human comprehension, clearly it has to do with love and relationship.

As a father I would give away all I had, before I would give away one of my children, I cannot believe it was any different for Abraham, or for God.

He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Romans 8:32

God asked Abraham for his most precious possession, that is exactly what God gave for us.



What does this tell us about God's attitude towards us?

What does this tell us of the value that God puts on us?

What does this tell us about the way Abraham valued God?

How much do you love God?

Bible Studies

The Death of Sarah



Read Genesis 23

How old was Sarah when she died?

Forty years before she had described herself as old. Genesis 18v12
Sarah is the only women of whom the Bible gives the age at which she died. It is a way of stating her importance

How did Abraham behave on her death?

How should he have responded?

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. 1 Thessalonians 4:13

What does this verse mean? Why do we have hope in grief?

What of Abraham's actions showed his hope?

Two words are used of his actions, he mourned and wept. He also sat by her body. He didn't run away, cover up or deny his grief.

Was it wrong for him to weep? John 11v35

At the same time Abraham did not let grief rule his life, or blind him from God, or the future, he did not give way to depression. His action that showed he still believed the promises of God and had an eye on the future.

What was Sarah like?



Which of her actions showed doubt?

Which of her actions showed faith?

How much do you think her barrenness affected her?

Like Abraham her faith grew with the passage of time. We find her name, along side Abraham's, in Hebrews 11 as a champion of faith. It is clear that Abraham loved her deeply and that they had a strong sense partnership.

What do you think stands out the most about Sarah?

In what condition did Sarah die? Hebrews 11v13

What does this mean?



Read 1 Peter 3v3-6

Sarah's beauty is mentioned in Genesis 12v11.

What does Peter say her beauty consisted of?

Without discussing the in's and out's of submission, it is clear from this passage that submission is something that is offered voluntarily, as unto the Lord, Ephesians 5:22
It is not something that can be demanded of assumed upon. Peter sees it as the result of her respect for Abraham. The Bible instructs women to respect their husbands Eph 5v33, 1 Peter 3v7. At the same time it instructs men to love their wives. Eph 5v25, Colossians 3v19. This Respect/Love exchange is vital to a good marriage.

You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. 1 Peter 3:6

On what occasion did Sarah give way to fear and do what was wrong?

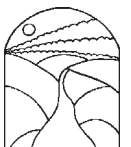
What does this verse mean to us today?

When Sarah doubted herself and told Abraham to take her maid servant, she gave way to fear. Abraham did the same thing when he told everyone that Sarah was his sister.

In what way does fear stop us from doing what is right?

Why should we not fear doing what is right?

This passage is specifically addressed to those whose husbands are not believers.





Machpelah

Abraham approaches the Hittites to buy land as a burial site. There is a cave at the end of a field belonging to Ephron, that he wants. To our mind the business negotiations seem evasive, Ephron offers to give the field, but he clearly means sell. Abraham does not argue about the price. Today this plot of land is in the centre of Hebron. It is hotly contested between Jews and Muslims. Ephron knew he was in a strong bargaining position. It has been suggested that Abraham paid an exorbitant price.

It was often difficult for an alien to buy permanent property. Perhaps the references to Abraham as a, "mighty prince," indicate an exception is being made. This could also be the reason why it is emphasised several times that the land is for a burial site, not residential or agricultural use.

This passage reflects what we know about Hittite law. Abraham wants to buy only a part of the field and Ephron's wants to sell the whole field. If Abraham bought the whole field he would incur Ephron's "feudal obligations". This would be to Ephron's advantage.

In accordance with Hittite, practice the trees were recorded. The silver is weighed out as coinage is not yet in use. The purchase is witnessed at the city gate. Sarah, Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, Leah and Jacob would all be buried here.

This land had a twofold significance for Abraham.



It was the act of a foreigner.

How does Abraham describe himself? v4

Perhaps Sarah's death reminded him all the more that this land was not his home. His eyes were elsewhere. 2 Cor 5v9 says that after death we are at home with the Lord. I think the word Home is very significant. Our joy and happiness are not bound to this life, but to the next.

Read Hebrews 11v13-16

He gave him no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. Acts 7:5 Abraham never owned the land he had been promised. Hebrews points out that Abraham was happy to be an alien, because his heart was in another place.

How does this apply to us?

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. 1 Peter 2:11

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:21

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, Phil 3:20

If we have our hearts set on a heavenly kingdom, how will we act?



It was an act of faith.

Abraham did not take Sarah back to Heron or Ur. This was the land that God had promised them and this was where they were going to stay.

Abraham was claiming the promise by his actions. He was making a statement of faith. This is the land God has promised and it will be ours.

It proved his belief in the promise. Both Jacob and Joseph insisted they be buried in the land. Gen 49v29, 50v25 It was a statement of faith. "While they themselves were silent... the sepulchre cried aloud, that death formed no obstacle to their entering on the possession of it." Calvin

If we believe something should it be seen in our actions?

For Abraham this was a symbolic act.

How might we have to give evidence of our faith in God's promises?

If it was important for Abraham to provide a physical resting place for his family, how much more important that we ensure an eternal spiritual resting place for ours?

Bible Studies

Isaac & Rebekah



Read Genesis 24v1-9

Abraham is 140 years old and Isaac is 40 years old. It is a matter of speculation whether the servant described as the one in charge of all he had, is Eliezer of Damascus. The servant who stood to inherit Abraham's wealth, if he had remained childless.

If it is, what does it tell us of his character?

What did Abraham want him to do?

What two things did Abraham instruct his servant on no account to do?

Abraham made the servant responsible for finding his son a wife, Abraham considered himself too old for this task. He was to find a wife from Abraham's old country and his relatives.



He was not to marry the a Canaanite girl.

What was wrong with marrying a Canaanite girl?

Consider; Deuteronomy 7v3-4, 2 Corinthians 6:14, 1 Corinthians 7v39

What was likely to happen if Isaac married a Canaanite girl?

How does this apply to us today?

What dangers do we face if we disregard it?

God is not a kill joy, quite the opposite. This rule is given to us because 90% of the time marriage between a believer and an unbeliever results in the believer backsliding. (If one partner gets saved after marriage, creating a mixed marriage, this danger does not seem so apply. Paul teaches on this in 2 Cor 7v12-16.) Many people consider this rule unreasonable, (if a boyfriend says "I'm breaking up with you unless you quit Church," this is quite reasonable!). The wisdom of this rule is seen in the consistent results.



He was not to return to take Isaac back to Heron or Ur.

Why did Abraham not want Isaac to return to Ur?

What reason did he give?

Abraham is concerned about the ongoing promise.

How does this apply to us?

Putting your hand under a thigh, was a way of making a solemn oath, Jacob did the same thing. Genesis 47v29.

What promise of help did Abraham give his servant?

God was not just the God of the all important Abraham, but of his servant to.

God does not show favouritism. (God is no respecter of persons: KJV) Acts 10:34

What implications does this have today?



Read Genesis 24v10-27

The servant approached Heron, Nahor's town, in the late evening. The girls are about to come out and draw water. The servant's tone suggests that he is taking this very seriously, He seems nervous.

What does he do? v12

What stands out to you in his prayer?

Who was going to choose Isaac's wife? v14

What does he ask for?

What kind of success did he want?

He asks for guidance, success and kindness to Abraham, but he also asks for a sign.

What was the sign?

Who else in Scripture asked for a sign?

When Gideon laid out his fleece, it was good, but when the Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign he replied: A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign., Matthew 16:4.

What was the difference?

When is it OK to ask for a sign and when isn't it?

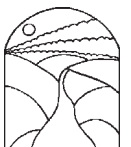
Part of it is to do with attitude and our reason for asking, part of it depends on our

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maturity in Christ, generally signs are for newer believers. We do not need a sign when we know we should do. Nor does the absence of a sign let us off the hook. For the servant this was an act of faith, (for the Pharisees it was an act of doubt). He was genuine in his motives and his need to know what to do.

When might you ask for a sign or for confirmation of God's voice?

It becomes evident, that God had already prepared the way. If we are following Him, we can also expect that God will prepare the way in front of us.

Do you ever ask God for help when you face a challenge?

How did the servant pray? v45

Do prayers have to be out loud?

Giving water to 10 camels was a major task.

What does it tell us about Rebekah's character?

What else does Scripture say about her?

Who were Nahor and Bethuel? 11v27-29, 22v20-23

Isaac & Rebekah were second cousins.

The servant gives Rebekah gifts, (were these gifts tokens representing the purpose of his Journey? Laban found significance in them. v30) He asks for board for the night and is delighted to learn that she is the relative he is looking for.

What is the first thing he does when he learns this?

We should follow his example.

It is Laban who deals with the servant, probably because of Nahor's age.

What does v31 tell us about their beliefs?

Laban offers the servant hospitality.

How does the servant reply? v33

Why was the servant so keen to tell of his purpose?

He was eager to fulfill his task but he also wanted to put his cards on the table to avoid any misunderstandings.

Genesis 24v34-48 is a retelling of the story so far.



Read Genesis 24v48-61

How did Laban respond to the servant's request? v50-51

Laban wants to delay things a few days, the servant wants to complete his task.

They ask Rebekah. ***How does she respond?***

What risks was she taking?

It is interesting how often the Bible places God's plan for salvation into the hands of a c14 year old girl's, willingness and faith. To the attributes we have already assigned Rebekah we must add courage.

Do you think Rebekah had any idea how important she was?

The gifts given to the family, v53 are the 'bride price'.

There is a remarkable similarity between the families blessing of Rebekah and God's blessing of Abraham 22v17

It was traditional to send a servant with a new bride. Deborah, Rebekah's nurse became a faithful servant in Isaac's house for two generations Genesis 35v8



Read Genesis 24v62-66

Just what was Isaac doing in the field? It seems that he was spending time alone with God.

What was Isaac's response to Rebekah?

Rebekah and Isaac made a great match. They balanced each other's temperaments.



Some people have seen an allegory in this story, Abraham represents the Father, Isaac the Son, the Servant the Holy Spirit and Rebekah the church. The Father sends the Spirit to prepare a bride for the Son



What lessons can we learn from Abraham's servant?

What lessons can we learn from Rebekah?

What do we learn about Christian marriage?

Bible Studies

The Death of Abraham



Read Genesis 25v1-11

Following Sarah's death Abraham took another wife, Keturah, v6 refers to concubines v6.

Why did Abraham not take a concubine or second wife, while Sarah was alive, what does it tell us about their relationship?

The song is right, father Abraham did have many sons, 8, that are recorded. It is probable that the *concubines* of v6, refers to Hagar and Keturah. Keturah is described as Abraham's concubine in 1 Chronicles 1v32.

What did he do with the sons of his concubines?

This was in keeping with the Hammurabi code.

Why do you think he did this?

God made Isaac the heir through the promise, But Abraham had to act accordingly, sending away his other sons did this, it also prevented family strife.

Abraham was 175 when he died, he even died according to the promise of God, compare v8 with 15v15.

The phrase "*he was gathered to his people*" is significant. Some people believe this just means he was buried with his ancestors, others take it as a reference to the afterlife.

Where were Abraham's people buried?

Where was Abraham buried?

What then does this passage mean?

Abraham's people were buried in Ur, his father in Heron, only his wife was buried in the promised land. Abraham was buried with Sarah in the cave at Machpelah, declaring his faith that this land was his. He was gathered to his people beyond the grave, This then is a spiritual thing not a physical thing.

This phrase implies renewal of relationship. Heaven is a place of fellowship, the Bible implies that Hell is a place of isolation and loneliness.

Isaac and Ishmael buried their father together. They represented two very different temperaments, two contrasting personalities. Abraham was wise to separate them. Yet here at last they are united.

The Arab nations claim descendance from Ishmael, the Jews from Isaac. There is still great animosity between them, only in Christ will there be reconciliation.



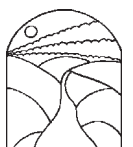
Blessings Fill in the promises made to Abraham.

Genesis 12v2-3

Genesis 13v14-17

Genesis 15v5

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Genesis 17v6-8

Genesis 22v15-18

The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made. Psalm 145:13

How were each of these promises fulfilled?

Which promises are still being fulfilled?

Which promises did Abraham see in his lifetime?

Abraham is still famous, and has many descendants, both physical and spiritual. Romans 4v16, Galatians 3v7. As for the promise that the land would be his forever, within living memory the Jews have returned to the Land God promised them. Most importantly it is through Christ and the Salvation that He offers, that all nations are blessed. Galatians 3v16 The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. Galatians 3:8-9&14

"If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did. John 8:39

What does this mean for us?

According to Matthew 1v1 whose son was Jesus?

Why do you think these two names were singled out?

Both receive the promise concerning their offspring.

What stands out to you about Abraham?

What do you think was his most important quality?

What was the high point of his faith?

What was the low point of his faith?

The greatest thing about Abraham was his faith in God.

What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Romans 4:3 But there are other characteristics we could note, his devotion to his family, his courage, his uprightness, his patience, his obedience, his love of God. But it was his faith in God that was the cornerstone of his life and for which he is still an example.

Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." John 8:56

What do you think Jesus meant when He said these words?

There is a rabbinic tradition that Abraham received a vision of the Messianic age. Just how much did Abraham understand? Enough to know that God would bring salvation through his seed? The incident on Mt. Moriah would suggest so.

The chapter goes on to record that Ishmael had 12 sons. This is presented in stark contrast to Isaac and Rebekah's initial barrenness and their 2 sons.

In the line of the promise there were three generations of barrenness.

How did each deal with the problem?

Abraham & Sarah 15v4-6

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Isaac & Rebekah 25v21

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Jacob & Rachael 30v1-2

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Why was Jacob spiritually at a loss?

At this stage, he did not know God the way he should, later he found God for himself. This is consistent with the three generations theory of Judges 2v7-10 The first generation knew God, the second knew about God and the third generation lost it.

We have now finished our study of the life of Abraham.

What is the most important thing you have learned from his example?

Bible Studies

Psalm 101

On coming to office the king had to write, for himself a copy of the law. When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees. Deuteronomy 17:18-19

Why do you think God required him to do this?

It ensured that the king knew the law, could not at any time plead ignorance of the law and that he had a copy at his disposal. It reminded the king that he was not above the law. This Psalm has been called the 'Princes Psalm' because it is a affirmation of a rulers conduct. He is affirming that he will keep and enforce the law. We are not kings, at least not in this realm, but we have areas of responsibility. If we are to find meaning in this Psalm, we will have to apply it to ourselves.

Read Psalm 101

How would you describe this Psalm, what is it intended to be?

Why do you think he wrote this Psalm?

In what way is it worship to God?

This Psalm is an oath to separate yourself from sin and to be true to God. It also teaches us two important ways to avoid falling into sin. David is surrounded by an evil world and he does not want to be swept along with it. This Psalm is a personal commitment to integrity. Psalm 119v106

Describe God's Love

Describe God's Justice

Are they contradictory or complimentary?

What would happen if there was one and not the other?

Often we struggle with combining these we see God as a God of love, and cannot understand how he can punish the wicked. Or, we see him as a God of justice and fail to appreciate his total forgiveness to all the penitent. God is both, so must we be. But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always. Hosea 12:6

Why was sing praises to God, so important for David?

The every morning remark in verse 8, suggests this was a daily kind of a Psalm. Singing praises to God here in the first verse is like starting your day by praising God.

How do you think praising God in the morning will effect you?

I will be careful to lead a blameless life—

when will you come to me?

I will walk in my house with blameless heart. V2

What does David means when he says, 'when will you come to me'?

What does this tell us about David's desires and goals?

Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; Psalm 84:10

David wants to do what is right, he desires God's intimate presence and he admits, he does not always know it. It could also be that David is looking of a specific answer to prayer, this he sees as, *God coming to him*. We must expect God's presence, we must seek God's presence's. Did you notice the same goal was found in Hosea 12v6

What do love and justice have to do with being blameless? Micah 6v8

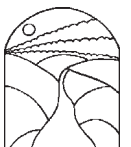
What connection is their between blamelessness and God's presence?

Deuteronomy 23v14, 18v13, Genesis 17v1, Matthew 5v48, Colossians 1v28 Psalm 18v25

How can we be blameless?

What does it mean to be 'blameless in my house'?

It means, in all his life, in his responsibilities, and his body. I think it also means literally in our house, in private, when others don't see. 1 Timothy 3v4, Joshua 24v15



What does it mean to be 'blameless in our hearts'?

David wants to live a blameless life, this deals with external sins, but he also wants a blameless heart. This internal things like, our thoughts, our desires and our conscience. We must acknowledge that it is in these places that sin starts. If we want to triumph over sin, this is the first place to fight.

I will set before my eyes no vile thing. Psalms 101:3

What does this mean? Job 31:1, Matthew 5v29 & 18v9

What sins are associated with the eyes?

Again there is an obvious meaning but also a less obvious one.

What is it? Isaiah 33v15

What danger his David guarding himself from?

Verses 4-8 Watching out for the wicked.

Who is David going to avoid?

Why? Psalm 119v115, 2 Corinthians 6v14-16

Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character" 1 Corinthians 15:33. Psalm 1v1, 26v4

How do you recognise good character? Matthew 7v16, 1 John 3v7-8.

What sins does David mention?

How would you describe these sins?

Slandering you neighbour in secret is....

Having haughty eyes and a proud heart is....

David's reaction to sin, "I will not set- I hate - Not cling to - be far from - have nothing to do with" For good or for bad, we take on the traits and values of those around us. Did you notice the contrast; the unfaithful and the faithful, the perverse in heart and the blameless.

Let those who love the LORD hate evil, Psalms 97:10

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Romans 12:9

Who is David going to role model himself on? Psalm 119v63

How is he going to do this?

Do not those who plot evil go astray? But those who plan what is good find love and faithfulness.

Proverbs 14:22

What does it mean to be faithful?

What is the implication of all this for us?

Every morning I will put to silence all the wicked in the land; I will cut off every evildoer from the city of the LORD. Psalms 101:8

For David, as king and judge, this is his goal, rid the country of evil, one day at a time. We too have a responsibility to speak out on moral issues.

Can we impose God's standard on others?

Who do you think this verse applies to us?

Can we avoid all those who David describes in this psalm?

I am not really sure we are in a position to cut off all the wicked in the land. Jeremiah 21v12. Nor can we avoid all the 'wicked'. What we have to do is disassociate ourselves from these sins. *I refuse to lie, even though everyone else does. I refuse to be faithless, even though such behaviour marks our society.* Every day we must lift up the shield of faith and separate ourselves from the sins of the world.

"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." 2 Corinthians 6:17-18

Do you think this kind of statement of commitment is useful for us today?

If you were going to write one what would you say? Today I will...

Bible Studies

Walking in the light

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. 1 John 1:7

The question this study plans to answer is, what does it mean to walk in the light?

What are the two results of walking in the light?

Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. 1 John 2:9-10

What is the evidence of living in the light?

What is the opposite of living in the light?

Walking in the light means walking in love. **Love for who?**

How does this result in fellowship?

You are either in the light or the darkness, there is no twilight.

John is taking a clear swing at the Gnostics, (an early cult that infected the church) they claimed enlightenment, (knowledge of God), but they did not show it in their actions or by their love.

Hating your brother here means failing to act out of love and self sacrifice, failure to deny oneself, to spend yourself on behalf of the needy. For John, it starts with indifference, not the hostility we usually associate with hate.

Love for others presents no stumbling stone, either for ourselves or for others, on the other hand hatred will trip us up every time.

How does Love helps us avoid sinning. Romans 13:10.

And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love. 2 John 1:6

Walking in the light means several things, some obvious some not so obvious. Primarily it means living in purity, but the verse has to mean more than, 'if anyone lives in holiness his sins are forgiven'. Holy people are not the ones for whom forgiveness is a burning issue.

Where did John get this idea from?

The words of Jesus

Read John 8v12

Walking in the light means...?

Obeying, being like, Relationship etc.

Read John 12v35

Who is the light?

Walking in the light means...?

The person who walks in the light knows where he is going.

Walking in the light requires trusting in Jesus.

Old Testament words

Read Psalm 89v15

What is the light?

What does it mean to walk in this light? & Psalm 90v8

Read Isaiah 2v5

What does it mean to walk in the light?

There are two other passages in the OT that help us.

Job gives us a graphic description of walking in the light. **Job 29v2-3**. He is surrounded by darkness, and in this darkness he must live, but God's light shines around him wherever he goes.

For Job this light meant that God was watching over him, protecting him and examining him. It also represented God's intimate friendship.

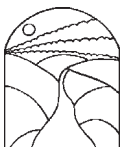
What effect did God's light have on Job?

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Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. Psalms 119:105
The Psalmist saw God's word, his commands as a light for his feet. God's light sustains him.

What path is the psalmist walking?

What did God's light enable him to do?

What is the result of having no light to walk in? John 11v10

In the dark, men break into houses, but by day they shut themselves in; they want nothing to do with the light. Job 24:16

What does light represent in scripture?

2 Corinthians 4v6

Ephesians 5v9

John 3v20-21

Ephesians 5v13

Hebrews 10v32

Isaiah 53v11

Isaiah 9v1-2

1 Thessalonians 5v5

Psalm 90v8

Psalm 139v11, Job 12:22

2 Corinthians 4v4

Psalm 56v13

Lamentations 3v2

To this list we could add openness.

Which of these do you think walking in the light refers to?

How does each of these relate to us as we walk in the light?

Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away. Genesis 5:24
Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so? Amos 3:3

So far we have concentrated on the *light* part of the phrase.

What does the walking part mean?

Clearly our walk is the way we live, how we behave in the various environments we encounter. Walking also implies relationship with God. It is an active, progressive thing, something we must consciously do.

Walking in the light is about the kind of relationship you have with God. It is also a matter of an attitude of heart. Walking in the light means living in sincerity and humility before God. Doing our very best to live the way he would have us live.

Making every effort to do his will.

Making every effort to deal with sin.

Making every effort to grow.

Making every effort to learn more of God.

Walking in the Light is the natural and intended way for a Christian to live.

If you cherish sin in your hearts are you walking in the light?

Will you have anything to hide if you are walking in the light?

If you sin does that mean you are not walking in the light?

The truth is we all sin, even the best of us. It is the attitude we have towards sin and what we do once we recognise that we have sinned, that show whether we are walking in the light.

If I am walking in the light what attitude will I have towards sin?

If I am walking in the light what will I do when I realise I have sinned?

The opposite attitude is found in the book of Hebrews;

Read Hebrews 10:26-27

What do you think it means by deliberate sin? Isn't all sin deliberate?

The attitude that is betrayed in this passage is one of indifference to sin. It doesn't matter, I can live with it, it's not so bad, God doesn't care.

Such an attitude cannot take repentance seriously and so finds no forgiveness.

If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; Psalm 66:18

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Psalm 51:17

How are you going to walk in the light?

Bible Studies

How to solve your problems

Well I guess that the title is a little deceiving. To try and solve our problems by ourselves is foolish. We need God's help. Jesus made the following statement.

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." John 16:33

One thing is certain we are going to face problems, everyone does.
Some of these are temptations from the Enemy, who wants us to fail & fall
Some of them are tests that God takes us through to prove our faith in Him.

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. 1 Peter 1:6-7

Either way, why do you think that God allows us to go through difficulties?

Each problem we face affords us two opportunities, to learn, grow and mature or to fail.
If we face a difficulty, and are found wanting, can they still benefit us?

Peter denied the Lord, you could say he was found wanting. But he learned from his failure and next time he was armed with experience. He never denied the Lord again. Problems come in all shapes and sizes, Some are irritants some are life threatening, some are sudden, some are drawn out, some are chronic, others are short lived. Some are internal, like illness, doubt, fear, depression. Others are external, people, jobs, cars etc.

Here are some practical suggestions.



Pray about it.

Philippians 4v6 James 5v13 John 14:13

What effect is praying going to have?

There is an obvious answer to this! But there are also some less obvious ones.

What did Philippians 4v6 say would happen when we prayed?

The next question is what do we pray?

We pray for a resolution to the problems but we also should pray for guidance and wisdom, as well as strength.

Often you will find in Scripture that when someone prayed, God did not directly solve the problem, but he did show them how. When they obeyed, the problem was solved.

Can you think of any examples?



Give the problem to God and ask Him for help.

Sometimes it is good to pray with someone.

Identify what you need and pray specifically for it.



Define the problem.

LUKE 18v40-43

This is one of several occasions when Jesus asked this question. Surely Jesus could see he was blind, surely He knew he wanted to be healed. ***So why did he ask?***

Some of our problems are obvious and easy to define, with others it is not until we sit down and think things through that we realise what is happening and we find what is at the bottom of the problem. People are usually certain what the problem is, (someone else!) often the real problem is quite different, we have to delve deeper.

How do the other people in this situation solve this problem?

If you can see things through their eyes you will know how to act to solve the problem. What other ways are there of looking at this situation?

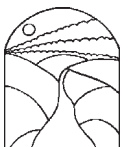
For example you are having a run in with your teens/parents, how does the situation

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look from their eyes? What makes them behave the way they do?

Am I seeing this situation clearly, realistically?

In the middle of a problem it is very hard to see it clearly, our emotions get involved and we see the worst, we give in to paranoia and deception.

Is there a spiritual side to this problem?

Spiritual things need to be solved spiritually, i.e. through prayer, spiritual warfare, fasting etc. It is vital that we ask God to show us the problem for what it is, if we want to avoid deceiving ourselves.

3

What options do I have?

It is a good idea to figure out what different options are open to us. What can we do. Mostly we only see one course of action when in fact there are several.

What do I want to do?

What will the consequences be for each action?

(For ourselves others and before God?)

Which ones will please God? Which displease him?

4

How does God see this problem?

Now we know what the problem is, we need to see it from God's perspective.

How does he see the problem?

What does He want to achieve from it?

How does God expect me to act?

What does he expect me to do?

When we are faced with difficulties we tend to become egocentric, but God often has a bigger view, he wants to impact other, he wants me to grow.

For example we work with a difficult person, we pray Lord remove them or change them. The truth is that it is us God wants to change, He is using them to knock some rough edges off our character. Or maybe God want to show them Jesus through us.

How will this effect the way we behave?

Are God's goals and our goals usually the same?

A good illustration of this would be the persecution that befell the church in Jerusalem. It would have been fine to pray, "Lord stop the persecution".

What was God's reason for allowing it? Acts 8v4

When Hagar ran from Sari her mistress God told her to go back and submit. ***Why?***

Another aspect of this is seeing the problem through the eyes of faith. 2 Kings 6v15-17. Through what God promises not through what we see.

How might we have to do this?

We need to do what is right and bring glory to God. 1 Corinthians 10v31-11v1

5

What does the Bible say?

The Bible is an incredibly diverse book, what ever problem you face someone in the Bible faced it or there is a verse that speaks to it. Reading the Bible in advance will give you the material to deal with problems and the wisdom to solve them.

6

What does wise council say?

Sometimes talking things over with someone helps to put a problem in perspective, they may have a different way of seeing the situation, they may see things you have missed or have suggestions you never thought of. Others faced this problem and found a way through. 1 Cor 10:13

Who would be a good person to talk to?

Who would be a bad person to talk to?

7

Is there an area of my life that is allowing this to happen?

Often the problems we face are connected to sin, dealing with the sin helps solve the problem. Many of our problems come because our lives are out of sync with God's will and directions. We have to examine ourselves to see if there is anything in us that is creating the problem, or making it worse.

How are you going to know if there is something you need to change?

Bible Studies

Psalm 40

Read Psalm 40

What themes are there in this Psalm?

v1-3	
v4-5	
v6-8	
v9-10	
v11-12	
v13-17	

What is this Psalm about?

What state was David in when he wrote this Psalm?

David takes about sin and the joy of forgiveness. Psalm 51 is the classic Psalm of repentance. It seems to me that this Psalm follows on from there. It is a Psalm of restoration.

What is the result of waiting patiently for the LORD?

What do you think the slimy pit David takes about is?

What is the firm rock?

Some people have interpreted, the slimy pit to mean that David was seriously ill, others think it was imminent military defeat. Others see it as depression, despondency or melancholy. Basically the slimy pit is sin and it's effects.

One thing was certain, David could not rescue himself. He knew it was only God that could help him. So he resolves to wait for the Lord.

It is a great metaphor of a life before and after salvation. Whether the slimy pit is sin or some dire trouble the important thing is that God rescued him from it and he will also rescue us. The rock obviously is Christ.

What slimy pits might you end up in?

It is reassuring to know that whatever pits we do end up in Christ can lift us out.

What two results came from his deliverance?

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This is the 'look what the Lord has done' attitude which we too should have. It is not easy to be patient in a slime pit.

How is a person blessed by trusting in God?

What wonders do you think David is talking about?

What effect is remembering God's wonders going to have on us?

It is not only things past that David thanks God for, but things to come, things God has planned for us.

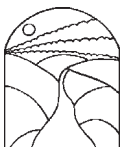
For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11

This verse continues the theme of thanking God and telling others.

You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. Psalms 51:16
But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. 1 Samuel 15:22

What is wrong with sacrifice?

But my ear you have pierced, could mean two things;



**Pierced could mean opened.**

Instead of sacrificing David is listening to God, he is being obedient. This is another way of saying that obedience is better than sacrifice, a lesson David's predecessor learned the hard way.

**Read Exodus 21v1-6**

This was the process of becoming a bondservant, someone who served a master not because of obligation, but because of choice.

Which kind of service do you think is better?

What kind of service do you think God wants?

Someone once said God will have no slaves is this true? Why?

**Read Hebrews 10v5-10**

According to Hebrews who said these words?

The Gospels do not record this saying of Jesus, these were not just Jesus words but His whole attitude as well. If you are wondering why the second line is different in Hebrews than Psalms. Hebrews is quoting the Septuagint (LXX) a Greek translation of the OT, not the Masoretic text which our Bibles follow. The meaning is the same, the LXX just changes the metaphor, it is thought that they wanted to emphasize that God's will is achieved through us.

Hebrews uses these word to contrast the continual animal sacrifice of the OT with Christ's, one sacrifice for all. What the animal sacrifices could never accomplish, Christ did.

What does a 'body you prepared' mean when applied to Jesus?

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, God prepared a body for Him, Luke 1v35 we call this the incarnation. When God the Son took on human flesh. This was Christ's acts as bondservant, the piercing of His ear.

What does 'it is written about me in the scroll' mean?

It means Jesus was the promised Messiah, the fulfilment of the OT prophecies and the fulfilment of the OT ritual of sacrifice.

What does a 'body you prepared' mean when applied to us? 1 Cor 6v20

What attitude did Christ show?

How does this apply to us?

"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. John 4:34

What kind of a Sacrifice does God want from you?

**Read Psalm 40v9-10**

Does this passage contradict Psalm 119v11?

What is David going to do? Acts 20v20&27

Did Jesus do this?

The whole tone of the Psalm changes in the last two sections. Again David talks of his sin, this is strange as the rest of the psalm celebrates forgiveness, why this sudden contrast?

In verse 12a what effect does sin have?

When David say 'my sins', he could well be referring to the sins of the nation he ruled, rather than his personal sin. If so, then this passage continues to parallel Christ's obedience, giving us a graphic picture of His suffering on the cross.

But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation always say, "The LORD be exalted!" Psalms 40:16

If this refers to Christ's work on the Cross what reason do we have to rejoice?

If this refers to the rest of the Psalm what reason do we have to rejoice?

What does this Psalm tell us about God?

Yet I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer; O my God, do not delay. Psalms 40:17

The Psalm starts with waiting and ends with seeking. **Are the two mutually exclusive?**

Bible Studies

Satan I

What do people believe about the devil today?

Most people don't believe he exists, others think; sulphur, horns and a pitchfork.

Is either view Scriptural?

Among Christians there are very opposite ideas about Satan.

Either we have an unhealthy fascination with things demonic. Or we ignore him. We either see him as all-powerful, or so weak that he is not worth worrying about.

Are any of these views scriptural?

Do you think these views depict Satan's own propaganda?

You will find reference to him frequently in the Scriptures. It is dangerous to be ignorant or to disregard something Scripture mentions so often. Nor can we choose the bits of the Bible we will believe and ignore the bits that don't appeal to us.

Ignoring Satan will not make him go away.

Being innocent will afford us no protection.

Paul says: For we are not unaware of his schemes. 2 Corinthians 2v11. Yet frequently we are unaware of his schemes and consequently we are often outwitted them.

When you look at the world around us you have to believe in the devil, otherwise you have to believe that God is either very weak, or Himself evil. There has to be an explanation of the work of evil in the world.

"As far as God goes I'm a nonbeliever.. But when it comes to the devil- well that's something else... the devil keeps advertising.. the devil does lots of commercials."

William Blatty (The Exorcist)

Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Resist him, standing firm in the faith, 1 Peter 5:8-9

What we do believe.

Jesus said "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Luke 10v18

Basically we believe that Satan was one of the angelic host, an archangel, along with Gabriel and Michael, who because of rebellion against God, was thrown out of heaven. All this rebellion happened prior to the creation, but seems to be linked to it. The Bible only gives us very veiled references to this event.



Read Isaiah 14v12-15

The Latin for 'Morning Star', is where the name 'Lucifer' comes from, it means *shining one*. Did you notice the 5 'I wills'? Each of them refers to a different area of deity, Satan wanting to be like God.

When Satan tempted Eve what did he promise? Genesis 3v5

According to 1 Timothy 3v6, what was Satan's problem?



Read Ezekiel 28v12-19

The king of Tyre is here presented as a cipher for Satan.

How does this passage describe Lucifer in his pre fallen state?

Why was he cast down?

Did not fall alone

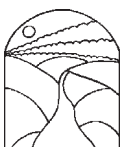
Revelation 12v7-8&4

2 Peter 2v4

Jude 6

Some people think the reference in Revelation 12 to a third of the stars falling to earth, means a third of the angelic host fell with Satan. In other places angels are alluded to as stars. Job 38v7.

Satan is a fallen angel - fallen on account of pride.



The battle

God & Satan are not equal forces nor do they need each other.

Satan, an angel is powerful God is all powerful

Satan, one place at a time God is everywhere

Satan - great knowledge & wisdom God is all knowing and His wisdom is total.

If you want to find an equal, look at another Archangel, Gabriel or Michael

If Satan can only be in one place at a time, what are our chances of meeting him?

Consequently when we say talk about Satan what we really mean is Satan's forces, of which there are plenty.

In what way do we give the Devil undue credit?

Christians often end up blaming Satan for things he never did.

It is quite obvious that there is a battle going on between God and Satan. Even a quick read of Revelation reveals that the book is as much about the final defeat of Satan as it is our salvation.

Why did Jesus Come to earth? 1 John 3v8

What 'work' do you think John is talking about?

It is also clear that this battle is being fought in the hearts and minds of human beings.



So why doesn't God snap his fingers, destroy Satan and save us a heap of grief?

As I understand it, the battle between God and Satan is an ideological issue. It is not about power, God is all powerful, Satan is not. Somewhere down the line Satan has accused God of being wrong in his actions. In all likelihood, regarding the creation of man, his free will and God's desire for fellowship with him.

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, Ephesians 3:10

What is God proving through mankind?

Who is he proving it to?

In other places rulers and authorities in heavenly realms, speaks of the enemy. Eph 6v12

God is looking for a people who will love Him unconditionally. I believe the world we live in is the only kind of world in which such love and faith can be proved genuine. God is using you to condemn Satan's sin & to prove him wrong. At the same time to call a people for himself, not forced to obey, not even awed by God's majesty into obeying, but following Him by our own free will.

Names

Think about what these names tell us about this nature.

Isaiah 14v12

Morning star, Light bearer (Lt)

Zechariah 3v1

Lit *the* Satan.

Satan is a Hebrew word, it means the accuser or adversar. One who is against God and us. It is a description not a name, in Hebrew it is never *Satan*, but '*the satan*' lit '*the accuser*.'

Revelation 12v10

This is what he is doing all the time.

Matthew 4v1

The word Devil is from the Greek (diabolos {diabolical = of the devil} it means slanderer. It is the Greek equivalent of Satan.

John 12v31

2 Corinthians 4v4

What do you think these names mean? cf 1 John 5v19

Matthew 6v13

1 Peter 5v8

or the enemy, 1 Timothy 5v14

Bible Studies

Satan II



Satan is a defeated foe.

Christ Jesus... disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Colossians 2:15

that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, Philippians 2:10

And God placed all things under his feet Ephesians 1:22

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. 1 John 3:8

who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him. 1 Peter 3:22

Yet Satan is still active, the Bible tells of his final demise, but that is still in the future. "In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. Hebrews 2:8

Satan is currently defeated, but still active. Jesus has triumphed, but sentence has yet to be fully carried out. This leaves us with an enemy who will attack, but it also leaves us with more than enough resources to defeat him.



We have authority over the enemy.

I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. Luke 10:19

Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. 1 Peter 5:8-9

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. James 4:7

You do not have to fear the enemy. He doesn't have authority over you. You have authority over him.



The Work of the Enemy

John 8:44

Four times in this verse Jesus tells us that Satan is a liar. This implies something else, Satan is active in communicating.

How does Satan lie to us?

What effect are these lies going to have if we believe or even entertain them?

Can you trust anything Satan says? What can you trust?

Matthew 4v3

What does this mean the enemy is going to do?

What is his goal in doing this?

Revelation 12v9

What does this mean?

Why do you think diversion works so well?

John 10:10

What do you think he wants to steal from us?

Your Joy, your peace, your faith, your time, your assurance of salvation etc.

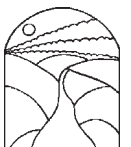
Stealing, murdering and destroying, as I understand it is a process. What Satan steals

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from you sooner or later God will give you back. While it is gone you are weak and hopefully he can kill you. God can give life to the dead and He will do so, but while you are spiritually dead (not responding to God), Satan hopes to destroy you. Put you in a place where you will not find your way back to God. The only one who can let this happen is you, God is, after all on your side. Watch what he steal from you.

Most of all Satan wants to steal people from God's Kingdom.

Most of the time Satan is not an armed robber, he is a cat burglar, you may not even realise you have been robbed until way down the track.

Revelation 12:10

What does this mean?

How is he going to accuse you?

Who is he going to accuse you to?

We call this condemnation, it is when Satan starts to point the finger at us. Most of the time it is internal. It is Satan lying to us.

How are you going to overcome this voice of condemnation?

1 Thessalonians 2:18

What is he going to try to hinder?

What kind of things is he not going to oppose?



Blinding the eyes

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 2 Corinthians 4:4

What does Satan do to the unsaved?

Why?

When you get save, you wonder why everyone else can't see the amazing truth you have found. Well this is why.

What implications does this have for us in our witnessing?

Witnessing needs to be accompanied by prayer warfare. People will not respond to our witnessing unless we pray. Like always the spiritual and the physical have to go together.

If Satan has blinded their eyes does this mean witnessing is a waste of time?



The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 2 Thessalonians 2v9

And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. 2 Corinthians 11v14

What do these verses tell us about the way Satan operates?



How do you defeat the Enemy?

I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. 1 John 2:13

At this point a lesson of spiritual warfare always seems the order of the day, but this would be to miss the obvious.

When you throw out his lies you have defeated the enemy.

When you resist temptation you have defeated the enemy.

When you love your enemy you have defeated the enemy.

When you do God's will and what is right you have defeated the enemy.

They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Revelation 12v11

The blood speaks of our redemption, the word our lifestyle and authority.

Keys in overcoming.

**Recognise his work,
Stand firm**

**Resist him
Bind & loose**

Enemy can only work in your life if you let him. You have the authority.

Look at the thing that are stopping you being effective as a Christian - that is where you will find the enemies work

Bible Studies

Sacrifice and Offerings

The book of Leviticus records five types of offerings. Each type of offering is described twice ch1-5 & 6-7. The first is a general explanation the second is directed specifically at the priests.

Each of these offerings in some way describes Jesus sacrifice on the cross. Each sacrifice was to remind the Children of Israel of some aspect of their relationship and obligation to God. The same is true for us.



The Burnt Offering

Read Leviticus chapter 1 6v8-13

What kind of animal was to be sacrificed?

Why did he lay his hands on the offering?

What was the offering for? v4

Laying hands on the offering was symbolic of transferring the persons sin to the animal. It forced the person to identify with the sacrifice. To realise that it represented him and that his sin required that animals death.

The offering itself was for atonement. It was intended to make the offerer right with God and to obtain acceptance with God. It was not for a specific sin, 'but rather for the offerers general state of sinfulness.' It was intended to remind him of his own short comings, that he was a sinner and as such separated from a holy God.

The burnt offering reminded the people that God's blessing and favour was obtained as a result of the offering, not because of good works. This offering could be anything from a young bull to a pigeon, this meant it was not the exclusive domain of the rich.

What did the offerer do himself? What did the priest do?

The offerer was deeply involved, it was a very personal thing. It must have made quite an impact on the person.

What part of the animal was sacrificed? What part was eaten?

What was done with the blood? Why?



For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. Leviticus 17v11

Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. Hebrews 9v22

The blood was the effectual part of the sacrifice. It represented the life of the animal.

What do we mean by a substitutory death?

The Bible tells us that the wages of sin are death and the soul who sins will die. Romans 6v23, Ezekiel 18v4. Just as God warned in the garden of Eden, sin brings death. Spiritual death now and eternal death later. This has a problem attached to it. If the first time you sinned you died, we would all be dead. So God accepts a substitute life on your behalf.

One of the major purposes behind the sacrificial system was to confront people with the seriousness and the effects of their sin. To remind them of the requirements of a holy God and the inevitable connection between sin and death.

Burnt offerings were not a new idea.

Read Genesis 8v20-21 (Exodus 10v25-26, 18v12, 32v6)

What similarities are there between this and the Leviticus commands?

Isaac was also offered as a burnt offering. Genesis 22v2

The burnt offering was a voluntary offering made by individuals. It was one of the most frequent offerings and could be given at any time. It was done by men only. Job offered burnt offering on behalf of his family. Job 1v5.

Burnt offerings were also made by the priests on a regular daily basis, Exodus 28v1-8. They were required for purification after, childbirth or contact with a dead body etc.

The burnt offering was the only one burnt completely, this is why it is sometimes called a whole offering. Neither the priest nor the people received anything from it. It was only to the Lord, it was *Corban*, Mark 7v11.

In what ways does the burnt offering point to Christ?

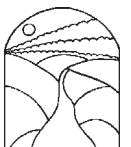
"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! John 1:29

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**Do we need to make burnt offerings today?
What do we need to do?**



Lessons from the burnt offering for us

Remember our sinfulness and need for purification. Remember that sacrifice had to be done God's way, today that is through Christ.

What other ways might we try?

The need to be right with God and accepted by him above all else. This is a basic human need. This atonement is only through the shedding of blood.

The need to identify with Christ's sacrifice. **How do we do this?**

All of the sacrifices had different requirements, one of the reasons for this was to stop them from becoming a ritual, mere form. Even in OT days the sacrifice only had merit, if it was combined with faith and obedience. Micah 6v6-8, Amos 5v23-24

How does this apply to us?



The Grain Offering

Read Leviticus Chapter 2 6v14-18, 7v9-10

What did this offering consist of? How was it prepared?

What was it offered with? What could it not be offered with?

What part of the offering The Fellowship offering

Read Leviticus Chapter 3 7v11-34, 19v5-8, 22v29-30

The Hebrew for fellowship offering is zebeck shalom, it can be translated peace offering. The word Shalom has the idea of health and wholeness included in it.

What kind of animal was offered?

What part of the animal was offered?

Compared with a burnt offering, what is the different about these animals?

Who eat the meat? Lev 7v15

Why were you prohibited from eating the meat on the third day?

The fat and blood were offered to God. The offering was eaten by the offerer (and family) as a special meal. The priests received the breast 7v31. The priest making the offering received the right thigh, 7v32-33. You could probably find some spiritual reason the meat was not to be eaten on the third day. But the obvious reason is that by the third day it will start to be a health hazard.

Both male and female animals could be offered. Fellowship offerings that were not in response to a vow or promise made to God could even include substandard animals Lev 22v23 While in the wilderness all red meat eaten by the Israelites had to be presented as a fellowship offering before the Lord. Lev 17v3-4

What does this suggest to you about the way we say grace?

We do not know how, or if this command was obeyed once the people possessed the land. And the temple was too far away for it to be practical. It was probably practised at the high places. We do know that the practice of slaughtering meat in at a temple was common in the ancient world, it is part of the background behind the *meat sacrificed to idols* problem, that Paul addresses.

What was the sacrifice for? Lev 17v12, 17v16

The offering could be an act of thanksgiving, the fulfilment of a vow or a freewill offering. In each case the rules governing the sacrifice were slightly different.

Make an altar of earth for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle. Wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you. Exodus 20:24

What meaning do you think the peace offering had for the Israelites?

This sacrifice was not predominantly about sin although blood was sprinkled and hands were laid on the animals head, associating the offerer with the animal and its death. The offering is intend to establish peace with God. To make the offerer whole before God. To gain acceptance with God. Lev 19v5

What prevents these things happening?

The offering was made at times of great sorrow; Jud 20v26 and great joy; Deut 27v7, 1 Sam 11v15. The burnt offering was essentially the negative part of dealing



with sin, the fellowship offering is the positive part, it celebrates the benefits of being right with God. This is the only offering that the offerer received back, he eat it benefited him physically. It is as if eating the meal was symbolic of

receiving the blessings of God. It points manward more than Godward. It celebrates the blessings we receive by being at peace with God. In contrast the burnt offering pointed Godward.

Bible Studies

Sacrifice and Offerings Part II



The Fellowship offering

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Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, Romans 5v1



Read Ephesians 2v12-18

How does the peace offering relate to Christ and to us?

What results did Christ's offering bring us?

Jesus death on the cross bought us peace with God, It bought us into a state of wholeness before Him. (it also brought peace between Jew and Gentile)

Why do you think Peace with God is so important?

Where does communion fit in to all this?

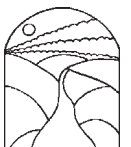
It is interesting that our peace offering is also associated with a meal, the bread and wine of communion. In the early church communion was often a part of a full meal.

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A meal itself speaks of fellowship as does the word communion. When we take communion it is symbolic of receiving the effects of Jesus Sacrifice.

It is interesting to note how frequently feasts, banquets, meals and eating together are found in the NT, often they are overlaid with great significance. Jesus eating with sinners, the marriage banquet of the lamb, the whole subject of eating with pagans.

What effect does eating together have?



The Sin Offering

Read Leviticus Chapter 4v1-12 4v13-5v13; 6v24-30

The burnt offering was also about sin, it address a general state of sinfulness. The Sin offering was to deal with a specific, unintentional sin. The chapter is divided into four, it presents slightly different regulations for the sins of different people.

Who were they?

Lev 4v3		Lev 4v13	
Lev 4v22		Lev 4v27	

What was unintentional sin?

In this context it seems to be where you become aware you have sinned after the event.

What is wilful sin?

Can you sin without realising it?

If you do not know you have sinned, does that make it OK?

There was no specific sacrifice for intentional sin. Hebrews 10v26. Deliberate sin are defiant sins, acts of rebellion, they imply a refusal to repent.

	Priest	People	leader	individual
Animal	bull	bull	male Goat	female goat/sheep
Blood	horns of incense altar		horns of the burnt altar	
	the rest was pour out at the base of the altar			
Body	burned outside the camp		eaten by the priest.	

Why was the body of the offering disposed of?

God wanted to make the point that it was the blood that was the all important part.

The blood had to be applied to be effective. **How is the blood applied to our sin?**

Read Leviticus 6v24-30

How is the body of the offering described?

What effect does it have on those who come into contact with it?

What is sin?

⁴When anyone sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord's commands—Leviticus 4v2

This is an interesting question and one that can be answered very differently by different groups of people. The biblical definition of sin is anything that is contrary to the righteousness of God and the will of God. Things we do, as well as things we fail to do.

What other answers might people outside the church give?



Sin brings defilement, death and separation from God.

Sin requires action to rectify it, it cannot just be left or ignored.

Sin is costly. The price paid to atone for sin was high.

Sin has to be atoned for by blood.

Part of the reason that sacrifices were prescribed to the Israelites, was to continually bring them face to face with the seriousness and consequences of their sins.

Jesus is our sin offering.

For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, Romans 8:3

What significance does Hebrews find the place of Jesus Death? Heb 13v11-13

According to the scriptures Jesus died for the sins of the whole world 1 John 2v2.

But He also died for the specific sins we commit. It is good to ask Jesus to forgive the hundred sins we commit every day, but when we become aware of specific sin we must specifically repent of them. We cannot afford to get complacent or apathetic about sin. Forgiveness is free, but obtaining it was very expensive.

Bible Studies

Sacrifice and Offerings

Part III



The Guilt Offering

Read Leviticus 5v14-6v7; 7v1-6

The sin offering and the guilt offering were very closely related, it is not always easy to distinguish between them.

What offering was to be made?

The offering was not only a ram from the flock but also restitution, 120% of the damage done.

Do we still need to make restitution? Luke 19v8

The regulation for a guilt offering were similar to a burnt offering the fat and the blood were offered to God. It was often accompanied by a grain offering.

Who ate the guilt offering? Lev 7v5

What is Guilt?

Guilt is an emotional feeling when we have done wrong.

Guilt is a legal status, having been convicted of a crime.

Is Guilt good or bad?

That depends, it can be both. Pain is a warning system against damaging the body. It is not pleasant and if unattended can be destructive. Guilt fulfils the same function for the soul. It tells us when something is wrong.

If we have sinned, should our sinning be accompanied by guilty feelings?

If we ask forgiveness, should we still feel guilty?

Do people always feel guilty when they sin?

Is it possible to feel guilty without having sinned?

Guilt is a natural consequence of sin. To that extent it is healthy and is intended to lead us to repentance. But the Enemy likes to use guilt as a tool of condemnation against us, even when we have been forgiven or have done nothing wrong. Such guilt is incredibly destructive. The question we need to ask is "why do I feel guilty?" We may need to repent of a sin or we may need to tell the enemy to get lost and live in the righteousness God has given us.

Our conscience is not infallible, it can be too strict or too lax. It needs to be trained by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.



What will the result of a too lax conscience be?

What will the result of a too strict conscience be?

Guilt often causes us to act in strange ways. I have learned that no actions (other than repentance) motivated by guilt succeeds. They never seem to produce the desired effect, they only compound the problem.

What was the object of the Guilt offering?

To remit guilt, so that we would no longer be guilty before God and so we no longer need to feel guilty. The Guilt offering reminds us that we need to learn how to deal with guilt

How do you deal with Guilt?

What were guilt offering brought for?

Leviticus 5v15

Leviticus 5v17

Leviticus 6v2

The offerings were for legal and moral debts.

The Lords holy things are; his Name, the Sabbath, the offerings, or things consecrated to God. Guilt offering had to be presented if a Nazarite vow was broken. Numbers 6v12

What things are Holy to the Lord for us?

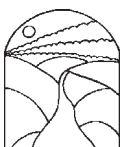
To the above list we could add, our bodies 1 Cor 6v19-20, Communion etc.

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An example of an unknown sin would be King Abimelech taking Sarah into his harem, without knowing she was already married. Or the priests who married foreigners in the time of Ezra. Ezra 10:19. (they also violated something holy to God, the priesthood.)

The offering were also for wrongs against others, extortion, theft, negligence or false witness. Sexual sins were also included, Lev 19v21.

This reminds us that God is extremely concerned about how we treat each other. The same offering was required for a sin against God, as a for sin against your neighbour. Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Matthew 22v37-39

The most interesting application of a guilt offering was in purification for leprosy. Lev 14 (x8).

What is Leprosy a symbol of?

How does this apply to us?

Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. Isaiah 53:10

Jesus death was not just a sin offering it was also a guilt offering.



You murder someone, are convicted for it and sent to prison. After 20 years you are released, you have paid for the consequences of your crime.

Are you still guilty?

Obviously yes, you cannot undo what you did, your criminal record remains, you will always be known as a murder.

But with Jesus death things are different, He didn't only fulfil the sentence for your crimes, He also remitted your guilt. This is why we say that when God forgives you, it is just as if you had never done the sin. Your guilt is taken away.

This is way forgiveness brings incredible freedom.

Why do you think Satan is so keen to load us up with guilt?

What are you going to do when Satan reminds you of guilt?

Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more." And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin. Hebrews 10v17-18

Sacrifices



Read Mark 12v41-44

Did this women make a sacrifice?

Why did Jesus commend her?

What would most peoples attitude towards her be?



Read Matthew 26v6-10

Did this women make a sacrifice?

What was peoples attitude towards her?

Why did Jesus commend her?

For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have. 2 Cor 8:12

What might you need to sacrifice to the Lord?

Would you accept a second rate car to give the rest to missions?

Would you turn down a better paid job which would leave you with no time to serve God?

The Bible is full of sacrifice.

What effect is sacrificing going to have on our faith?

I think it is time to reassess our faith. For so many of us it is based on receiving from the Lord and knows nothing about giving. The history to the Church is one of sacrifice. People who gave their time, their money, their lives to serve God. Little has been achieved in the Kingdom of God without sacrifice

This sacrifice is not for our sins, or to gain acceptance with God, but out of Love.

Why is sacrifice so important to God?

OT Sacrifice was a form of worship, is sacrifice still a form of worship?

OT Sacrifices had to be without blemish, how does this apply to us?

It is unfailingly true that God reward and blesses the fruit of sacrifice.

Bible Studies

Judas and Jesus

Of all the studies I have written, this one poses more questions than it answers. Judas has become a watch word for evil, the ultimate traitor, shunned and eternally cursed. Villain or tragic disciple? The character of Judas and the part that he played are by no means that simple.



Read Luke 6v13-16

How is Judas described in this passage?

Do you think the word became is significant?

When Jesus sent out the 12 to preach the Gospel, Judas was among them. He healed the sick and raised the dead along with the rest of them. The Gospels remind us, along with most of the references to Judas, that He was the one who betrayed the Lord. But this of course was unknown to the disciples. On the outside he looked like everyone else.

The name Judas, is the Greek version of Judah it means praise. It was very common, two disciples were called Judas and so was one of Jesus brothers, Mat 13v55.

Iscariot probably means *man from Kerioth*. Kerioth was a village in southern Judea. If this is so he was the only one of Jesus disciples who was not from Galilee. An outsider from the start. Most of the priests lived in villages of Judea, some people have suggested that Judas was a priest. This case is strengthened by Matthew 27v5, which records that Judas threw the money into the temple. The word used here (naos=sanctuary, holy place) implies the area of the temple that only the priests had access to.

What was Judas specific job in the band of disciples? John 13v29



Read John 12v3-7

What was Judas doing with the money?

What does this passage tell us about Judas?

What does it tell us about his attitude towards Jesus?

Knowing Judas was a traitor, we tend to read into this more than is due. Had it been Peter that betrayed the Lord, what would we make of his numerous indiscretions? Again we must remember that John did not know Judas was a thief at the time, it came out later.



Read Mark 14v4-11

According to Marks account, Judas was not alone in his criticism of Mary, or the rebuke it received from Jesus. According to Matthew it was a general attitude among the disciples. Mat 26v8-9

It is recorded immediately after this incident that Judas went to the high priest. The question is why?

Did Judas feel disenfranchised by Jesus?

Did he finally realise that he and Jesus were after different goals?

Did he take Jesus comments about death as a green light?

What other reason could Judas have had?

When searching for reasons why Judas did what he did, greed, bitterness and disillusionment are all there, but none of them are sufficient motives.

At the last supper when Jesus declares "one of you will betray me" no one suspected Judas. Even when he left the table they thought he was going to give money to the poor or buy something. John alone was privy to this information. (Reading the account, Peter stands out as the likely character, John 13v38).



Read John 13v22-27

Receiving the bread in this way was an honour, it was also a mark of friendship.

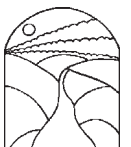
Why did no one guess it was Judas?

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The only conclusion is, that Judas was just like the rest of them.

Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.
Psalms 41:9 & John 13v18

How does Jesus describe Judas?

Even in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus again calls Judas his friend.

Jesus replied, "Friend, do what you came for. Matthew 26:50

This is not *philos* the usual word for friend but, *hetairoi* which means comrade, companion or partner.



What did Jesus say would have to happen? Matthew 26v24

If it were better that he had not been born, why was he?

(in the Greek it is unclear whether the *he*, is Judas or Jesus). But of course, without God's forgiveness, this statement is true of all of us.

What would have happened if Judas had not betrayed Christ?

Questions like this are hypothetical. It had to happen. Jesus had to die and he had to be betrayed.

Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" Jesus answered, "Yes, it is you." Matthew 26:25

Why did Judas ask?

We conclude that Judas alone heard the reply.

When faced with the possibility of betrayal, the disciples asked the question "is it I?". When we read the serious warnings of the NT, we should ask the same question.

Jesus did know who would betray him.

Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. John 6v64

Notice that while the betrayer is singular, those who do not believe are plural.

Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.) John 6:70-71

Did Jesus encourage Judas in his actions? John 13v27

If Jesus knew Judas would betray him, then why did he choose him?

Jesus also knew he was a thief. He even knew, when he washed Judas' feet, that he had plotted with the priests to hand Jesus over. Knowing what we are like, why did Jesus choose us?

How could Jesus demonstrate his love to someone He knew would betray him?



Why did he not expose him?

Why did he not protect himself for Judas' plans?

Why did he not help Judas to overcome, the way he did Peter? Luke 22v32

Hopefully answers to these questions will become clear in the course of these studies. The third question gives us a place to start from. Jesus did not protect himself because His very mission was to die on the cross.



The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born." Matthew 26:24

While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. John 17:12
May their (his) place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in their tents. Psalms 69:25
May his days be few; may another take his place of leadership. Psalms 109:8 cf Acts 1v20

The role Judas played was predicted in Scripture. It had to happen. We will see why later.

How could Judas have stayed so long with Jesus and yet stay so uninfluenced by his teaching?

Walking around with Jesus, is not the same as following him. The heart is deceptive above all things and through a host of reasons people fall. Is Judas so very different from some of the famous names of our time who have sinned and fallen? The danger is there for all of us. We must guard our hearts. Judas' failure, was a failure of faith. Studying these scriptures you are left to realise it could so easily have been Peter, or you and I.

Bible Studies

Judas and the Priests

“We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!” Matthew 20:18-19



Read

Matthew 26v3-5

Mark 14v1-2

Matthew 26v14-16

Mark 14v10-11

Luke 22v1-6

According to Mark the priests offered Judas money.

What does Luke say prompted Judas actions? Luke 22v3

Why did the priests need Judas help?



Some have suggested it was because they did not know Jesus well enough to ensure arresting the right person. This is very unlikely, it had never been a problem for them before! Another question reveals the answer.

What were the dangers of arresting Jesus?

The passages above specify that the priests were afraid to arrest Jesus, for fear of the crowd rioting. Someone who knew Jesus actions intimately and could provide an opportunity to arrest Jesus quietly, would have been of great benefit to them. John 18v2 eludes to this inside information.



**What time did the priest say would be unwise to arrest Jesus?
When did they arrest Jesus?**

This conflict is one of the fundamental factors between the lines of the gospel accounts. Jesus was arrested at the worst possible time. Long before the priests had their preparation in place. This explains the frenzied activity, the trial by night, the early morning Sanhedrin and the problems with Pilot. The reason was that Judas came to them the night of the Last Supper, and told them that *Jesus was morose, he was talking about dying. If they moved now, he would not resist, nor would the other disciples. This was the time to act there, might not be another opportunity.*



This explains the second reason the priests needed Judas. The Priests had tried to arrest Jesus before and failed. John 7v32, 8v58, 10v39, Luke 4v30. They could not afford to fail again, if they did, it would backfire on them seriously with the crowds. Jesus had even raised the dead, they could not deny His miracles and there was a real fear that He would prove unarrestable. And where would that leave them?



Thirdly, the entire Jewish justice system was witness orientated, Witness brought the charges, arrested the person, questioned them and if guilty of death were the first to throw a stone. Two witness were needed, but maybe Judas was intended for this role. If so he only fulfilled the first part of it.



Read Matthew 26v47-50; Mark 14v43-46 Luke 22v47-48, John 18v1-4
Why a kiss?

It is what didn't happen next that is interesting. Judas played no subsequent part in the trial of Jesus. How glad the Priests would have been to have one of Jesus own disciples act as a witness against him.

Why did the priests not use him as a witness?

Was he unreliable, unable, unwilling?

In the end what was Judas actually responsible for?

If he had not done his part, how would it have changed things?



Read Matthew 27v1-5

It is the morning after Jesus arrest.

What is his legal status?

Jesus has been found guilty by the highest Jewish court, they now need the Roman authority to endorse this verdict and carry it out.

v3 When Judas... saw that Jesus was condemned

What else did he think was going to happen?

What was Judas' attitude?

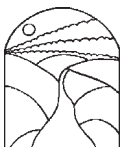
What do you think was going through his head?

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Did Judas acknowledge his sin? v4

Is remorse the same as repentance?

Did Judas repent?

We do not know whether Judas was truly repentant, we cannot know. Throwing the money into the temple was a dramatic act and the best indication of the depth of Judas' feelings. There is a worse condition than Judas', to sin and be so hard in your heart as to feel nothing. We have a fairly clear idea of the cause and effect that Judas had in mind. Is the evidence open to other interpretation?

Is it possible that Judas thought Jesus would be acquitted?

Is it possible that Judas thought he was carrying out Jesus' wishes?

It has been suggested that Judas' plan was to force Jesus' hand, to make him act radically, to make him conform to Judas' plans for him, plans of power and fame. To be the kingly Messiah that the people wanted.

Do you think this is possible?

Why did he hang himself?

People usually kill themselves because they can see no future. It seems that the depth of Judas' guilt was more than he could bear. He could see no way out and no way back. Even if he asked for forgiveness, it is clear he did not appropriate it. (that does not mean it was not given, or could not have been given.)



Some other theories He thought his death would somehow help acquit Jesus. Many in the 2nd and 3rd century taught Judas hung himself to get to Hades ahead of Jesus and meet Him there because he knew He (Jesus) had entered His Kingdom through death. (Origin, Theophanes, Theophylact, etc.)

What happened next

Read Matthew 27v6-10 and Acts 1v18-19

What happened to the money?

Who bought the field?

This is often pointed to as one of the most glaring contradictions within the Gospels. (Acts is a continuation of Luke).

How long did Judas have to buy the field?

At most one week, one of the busiest weeks of the year. Was this enough time to buy a field? This is assuming that they paid in advance! Something that is not likely. It is highly questionable whether Judas had time to buy the field.

How does Acts describe the money used?

This could be the money Judas embezzled, the field an early acquisition. If so there is no problem, two lots of money, two fields with very different descriptions. As for the method of Judas' death, it is possible that Judas fell from the rope.

Why did Jesus need Judas?

That sounds like a strange question. What I really mean is, why did it have to happen this way? Jesus consistently said He would be betrayed, the Scriptures also predicted it. Why could Jesus not just be arrested?



Judas and his betrayal stand for something. Who killed Jesus, was it Judas, the Priests, every Jew that ever lived, or the Italians who did the deed? *Who are we to blame for Jesus' death?*

Who did Jesus say was responsible for his death? John 10v18; 19v11-12;

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 1 Corinthians 15v3

The only Christ killer I can point the finger at, is me. I am the Judas, it was my sin that betrayed the Lord. When we look at Judas, we are supposed to realise that it was our actions that caused Jesus to die. We are not supposed to pass the blame.



The examining priest.

It is well understood that Jesus fulfilled the Passover festival, with its deliverance for the land of sin. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. 1 Cor 5:7 The animal lived with the family for four days, Exodus 12v6. The lamb or goat had to be without spot or blemish. It was the priests' job to examine the animal and declare it clean. For Jesus this refers to purity from sin, the only human never to sin.

Who declared Jesus clean?

The Priests were accusing him of blasphemy. Pilate did, but he was a gentile and not a priest, he didn't count.

"I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood." "What is that to us?" they replied.

"That's your responsibility." Matthew 27:4

Judas had been with Jesus from the beginning and he declared him clean. So Judas in fact fulfilled an important role.

Bible Studies

Judas and Satan



Thirty pieces of silver.

The Gospel writers find this very significant

Read Exodus 12v32 the price of a slave;

Read Zechariah 11v11-12

Read Jeremiah 32v7-9

Matthew puts together two historically unconnected passages. (the NT does this in other places as well). Jeremiah refers frequently to the potters field 18v2; 19v2. Judas in returning the money to the temple did what Zechariah did, the priests in buying the potters field did what Jeremiah did. It is also possible that Matthew is quoting Jer 19v4vb. Talking about the same field he says, they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent. For me Jeremiah 19v1-13 fits better. There are certainly parallels between both passages, but it is not easy to understand the exact fulfilment.

Silver in scripture often speaks of atonement. Lives were redeemed with silver.

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

As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. "What you are about to do, do quickly,"

Jesus told him, John 13:27



Despite whatever motive we may have found in Judas for betraying the Lord, he was incapable of acting alone. Satan entered him. Nor was it just a demon that oppressed him, but Satan himself.

Was Judas capable of resisting Satan?

If Satan was involved does this mean Judas was not responsible for his actions?

One could say he was unable to resist him, because he had left himself open to attack. It was Judas sins and wrong attitude toward Jesus, that gave Satan a foot hold. It was Satan that tempted Adam and Eve, and yet God still held them responsible.



What did Satan hope to achieve?

We are in the ironic position of it being the will of our heavenly Father that Jesus should die on the Cross and that of our infernal opponent. This has been the topic of much debate. It is clear that Satan wanted Jesus to go to the Cross, but he did not want the result that it brought. Maybe Satan thought Jesus would fail this great test. Certainly he thought he was winning, that Jesus death was playing into his plans. The resurrection must have come as a nasty surprise. Satan had totally misunderstood what God was doing.

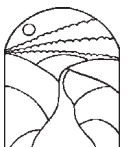
One of the big problems behind the story of Judas is the argument over predestination and eternal security. Is that Judas had no choice as to his actions, therefore he cannot be held responsible for them. And, that once a person has truly committed themselves to Christ, it is impossible for them to fall. These are two bigger subjects do discuss in full now, but we do have to have a quick look.



Was Judas a true follower of Christ?

What is the evidence both ways?

We cannot judge, he gave every indication that he was, Jesus called him an apostle. No one guessed he was the traitor. The only things that stand against him are John's revelation that he was a thief and his act of betrayal.





Read Romans 9v14-23

But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and though I multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, Exodus 7:3, 4v21, 14v4, 14v7

This passage describes how God hardened Pharaoh’s heart, in order to use Pharaoh’s rebellion for God’s purposes. Paul is adamant that God has the right to do this. *What similarities are there between Pharaoh and Judas?*

We have seen that Judas actions were pre-ordained, Jesus knew from the beginning who would betray Him, and He described his actions as necessary. Romans 9 never fitted a man so well as it fits Judas

What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory—Romans 9:22-23 *How does this apply to Judas and to us?*

*Was it possible for Judas to avoid his fate?
Did God make Judas betray Jesus?*

We are left with two choices, either Judas was a special case, in which event there is very little we can say, as we do not understand the dispensation under which he lived.



The other option is that he lived by the same set of rules as the rest of us. He could have resisted Satan, but he was already too weak from backsliding. If he repented then he was forgiven, If he didn’t he wasn’t. He was the same as us.

Both Judas and Pharaoh had sufficiently twisted hearts to open themselves up to be objects of wrath.

We cannot say that God made Judas betray Jesus, were this true the Bible would hardly say that Satan entered him.

Were Judas’ sins beyond forgiveness?

And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, ...

Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven... Mathew 12:3132

Jesus is contrasting these sins with the sin against the Holy Spirit, of which Judas is not accused. It seems clear to me that Judas would have been forgiven. The big question is did he come to the place of asking forgiveness?

If Judas teaches us anything, it is that we must guard our hearts and not allow them to stray from a simple love and trust for our Lord.

So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! 1 Cor 10:12

***How has your view of Judas changed over these studies?
How do you see him now?***



We have villainised Judas to disassociate ourselves from him, for fear that what was in him, may be is us. Instead we would do well to examine our own hearts and deal with any greed, pride or bitterness we find.

They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, “Surely not I, Lord?” Matthew 26:22

*O Judas don’t you come to close for I fear that I might see
That traitors look upon you face might look too much like me,
For just like you I sold the Lord and often for much less
And like a filthy traitor I betrayed him with a kiss.
Michael card.*

Bible Studies

Psalm 46 - Be Still

Read Psalm 46

This is truly a beautiful psalm.

When you finished reading it what did it make you feel?

For me it is a psalm of reassurance, peace and encouragement. It helps me to put my troubles into perspective and to trust God.

The psalm is divided into three by three declarations

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. V1

The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah v7

The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah v11

It is also divided into three by the word Selah, (which means consider). Selah comes at the end of each of three pictures. Sometimes we get caught up in the precise meanings of Hebrew or Greek words and in doing so miss the big picture.

What do each of these pictures describe?

What do you think each means?

1

Psalm 46v2-3

2

Psalm 46v4-6

3

Psalm 46v8-9

There are two ways in which this psalm can be understood;

The Psalmist is talking about his world, the problems he faced and therefore, the problems that we also face in this world. The first picture, the **earthquake** is one of life falling to pieces, of turmoil and confusion. Terra firma, all we have ever relied on, crumbling to the sea. Living on a landslide, The **city of God** is the security and stability that Jesus brings to a person when they trust him. Despite the destruction that is all around. v6. The last picture, is of bring **peace to the storm**. God sorting things out and returning order to our confused world. In the midst of this He stands exalted and glorified.

The second way of looking at this is eschatologically, the psalm that talks about the end times. The earthquake is the events before the return of Christ, the city, the kingdom of God, the new Jerusalem, Rev 21. The last picture is God's final triumph in the world. Rev 11v15. *Both of these explanation are correct.*

The word 'fall' (Hebrew *mot*) also occurs three times;

What falls?

v2

What doesn't fall?

v5

What falls?

v6

Why doesn't the city of God fall? v5

Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. Romans 14:4

To him who is able to keep you from falling Jude 1:24

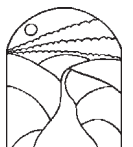
What does this psalm say is the basic reason for our confidence? vs1,5,7&11

?

What does it mean for God to be our refuge?

What does it mean for God to be our strength?

What does it mean for God to be our ever present help?



“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.” Psalm 46:10

This verse is presented as a conclusion to the psalm and a command to us. (Notice the change of tense {He>I}, the rest of the psalm is about God but in this verse God speaks).

The phrase *be still* requires that we have been involved in some kind of activity, which we are now to stop.

What are we to be still from?

Works as a means to salvation. Hebrew 4 reminds us that we cannot enter into God’s rest by our own good works.

How else could you put this phrase?

Being still, means stepping back, and allowing God to move
The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.” Exodus 14:14



Read Zechariah 2:13

What meaning does be still have in this verse?

Reverence and awe, humility in the presence of God, repentance before him, even being ashamed of our rebelliousness, are all found here. And yet Zechariah also conveys a sense of the privilege of being involved with God.

What does Be still mean in these verse?

Why were they to be still?

Nehemiah 8:11

Psalm 37:7

(NB: none of the above 4
verse us the same Hebrew
for be still as Psalm 46)

This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: “In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it. You said, ‘No, we will flee on horses.’ Therefore you will flee! Isaiah 30v15-16



It has been pointed out that until you are still, you will not know God. This is true in salvation. It is not until we stop relying on our effort and call on the name of Jesus, that we can be saved. The Cross is the ultimate place of stillness. It is somewhere where you have to stop, a ‘drive-by’ will not do it. It is also true in the Christian life. Our activity, both good and bad, and the pressures of life can rob us of intimacy with God.



Read Luke 10v38-42

Being still in God’s presence is a vital to our spiritual health.

Please write Luke 10v41-42 in large red letters across your soul!

There is something deeply illogical about this verse. Being still, is not a good method of learning. If your entire revision for an exam consists in being still, you will fail. Yet there is a knowledge of God, which cannot be obtained any other way.

We learn by studying the Bible and we learn by serving God. But there is a depth to be acquired by being still in God’s presence.

This kind of knowledge leads strongly to relationship with God.

Do you think being still is the solution to everything?

There is a time and a need for action, but invariably there is a need to be still first. It is one of the things, that is going to help stop us from doing the wrong thing.



Hurry hurry is the password, I got to get my daily bread.

We’re too busy talking, to hear what God has said.

Moving in your mind so quickly, confusion seems to reign.

Don’t you think we ought to stop, an hear what God is saying? Len Magee

Bible Studies

Ananias & Sapphira

There are times when church can be quite exciting. There are also aspects of New Testament Christianity that no one seems to pray for in today's church.



Read Acts 4v32-37

It is important to understand the background of this incident.

For various social and religious reasons Jerusalem had far more than its fair share of poor. They were partially provided for from temple funds, believers in Jesus would have been excluded from this provision. The church took it upon themselves to provide for the poor among them.

Is this still important today?

It is hard for us to understand what a major issue this was for the Church. Distribution of food to the poor was the first major internal problem that the Jerusalem church faced and it nearly caused a split. Acts 6v1-7

What does this passage tell us about the attitudes, priorities and practices of the church?

Who provided for the poor? - What kind of people?

Why do you think people sold their fields or houses?

Is there any indication that this giving was anything but voluntary?

The money was laid at the Apostles feet. v37 Those who gave, gave out of their surplus.

What does this imply?

It implies that the money was given to God and that it was an act of worship.

But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving. 2 Corinthians 8v7



Read Acts 5v1-11

Was it wrong to keep some of the money from the sale?

If you answered 'yes' you have missed the point of the passage.

According to Peter, who did the land belong to? v4

According to Peter, who did the money belong to once the land was sold? v4

So what did Ananias and Sapphira do wrong?

They did several things wrong but basically it was deceit. They lied. They pretended to give all the money when in fact they kept some. If they had said, "here is half the money", they would have done nothing wrong.

Were their actions premeditated? v7b

Why do you think they pretended it was the whole amount of money?

Were they trying to please God or man?

This was a kind of hypocrisy. They wanted praise from man. They treated the church with contempt. They were phonies

Are money and faith always hostile to each other?

Who did they lie to?

What does this mean?

What does Peter attribute this deception to?

Does this mean it was not Ananias fault?

What does it mean? 1 Peter 5v8



Ananias failed to recognise two spiritual forces at work in the church.

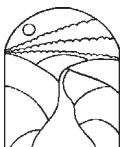
Failed to recognise the Holy Spirit.

Failed to recognise the enemy.

How is the enemy at work within the church?

In what way did he fail to recognise the work of the Holy Spirit?

In what way did he fail to recognise the work of the enemy?



Ananias and Sapphira must have had some strange ideas about church and some strange ideas about God. They were only concerned with external things and how people saw them. Not with what God saw. It reminds us of the danger of putting up a front when the reality is missing. Where were their devotion and commitment to God? They had gone hollow. I wonder how long it had been like this?



Do you think Ananias was like people today who go to church for the sake of appearances?

Many go through patches when we do the externals of the faith but our love for the Lord has waned.

What are the dangers of such times?

What should we do when they happen?

What dangers are there for the Church when people within it start to see it as a secular institution?

Would you say Ananias and Sapphira were lax in their attitude towards God?

What was their attitude towards God?

1 Samuel 16v7, John 7v24 Matthew 6v3

How did Peter know Ananias was lying?

As I understand it, Peter exercised the spiritual gift of the word of knowledge.

Who struck Ananias down, Peter or God?

Do you think Peter knew what was going to happen?

This was clearly God's action. He is judge of the earth and he has the right to judge and punish us. In the end we will all be judged for our action. The Bible speaks of Temporal judgement (judgement now, 2 Peter 2v9) and Eternal judgement, (after death, 2 Cor 5v10, Heb 9v27)

There is nothing unusual about the speed of the burial, It is consistent with contemporary Jewish practice and a hot climate. Even today in Jerusalem, because it is a holy city corpses may not be kept in the city over night, they must be buried or removed.

Why did Peter question Sapphira as he did?

We are all individually responsible for our actions. Sapphira would not be judged for Ananias' sin, only for her own. He gave her a chance to repent.

If she had come clean, would she have been struck down?

No, she would not have.

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Hebrews 4:12 O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. Psalm 139:1-2

What does it mean to test the Spirit mean? Deut 6:16, Psa 78v18,56, Acts 15v10 I think it includes deliberately doing something against God's will.

Can you think of anyone else in the Bible who was judged in a similar way?

There are many; Achan, Judges 7; Uzzah 2 Sam 6 and Uzziah 2 Chr 26v19 stand out.

Many people commit sins that are far worse and get away with them.

Why did God judge Ananias and Sapphira so harshly?

Clearly God was making an example of them.

He was protecting the churches unity, holiness and purpose.

He was protecting the integrity and spirituality of the church.

For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 1 Peter 4:17

The sins of some men are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them. 1 Timothy 5:24



What message did God want to get across?

What does this tell us about the way we should give?

What does this passage tell us about the nature of God?

What would happen if this occurred in our church on Sunday?

What was the effect of this miracle on the church and the community? v11-14

Bible Studies

Great Promises

What is promised?

What does the promise mean?

When might I need a promise like this?

Is there a condition?



No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. 1 Corinthians 10:13 James 4:7



If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9



For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17



But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8 John 14:26 Luke 11:13



God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” Hebrews 13:5, Isaiah 43:2



Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it.” Isaiah 30:21



but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. Isaiah 40:31



So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Isaiah 41:10



The LORD will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven. Deuteronomy 28:7, Deuteronomy 20:4



The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. Deuteronomy 33:27



The LORD will keep you free from every disease. He will not inflict on you the horrible diseases you knew in Egypt, but he will inflict them on all who hate you. Deuteronomy 7:15



But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed Isaiah 53:5



Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Galatians 6:9 Matthew 16:27



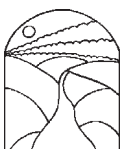
.If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. James 1:5

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Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. James 4:8



The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10



I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of my hand. John 10:28



being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:6



I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Philippians 4:13



And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19



Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me. John 12:26



Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. John 13:17



Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. John 14:27



He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Romans 8:32



neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:39



But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Luke 12:31



Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Mark 11:24 Mark 9:23



“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Matthew 11:28-29



Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed. Proverbs 16:3
Psalm 1:3



Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. Psalm 119:105



The LORD will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; Psalm 121:7
Psalm 23:4 Psalm 34:7



Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. Psalm 126:5



Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart. Psalm 37:4



Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall. Psalm 55:22

Bible Studies

Intimacy with God

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Read Job 29v1-4

Job had many troubles, the lose of his children, his health and his worldly possessions. Yet of all these one of the thing that troubled him the most, and which he finds most inexplicable, was the loss of his relationship with God.

How does Job describe his relationship with God? v4

There was a time when God was his intimate friend, now, through no fault of his own, this relationship is gone. The heavens are brass. He describes his relationship with God in v3. When his lamp shone upon my head and by his light I walked through darkness! Job 29v3

What was the light? What was the darkness?

For me, this presents a graphic picture of Job (and us), living in a world of darkness, sin, oppression and ignorance, and yet God's light shining on him. Everywhere he walks he walks in light.

For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light. Psalm 36v9

Intimacy with God was that light. But now the light has gone out and he is left in the darkness.



Intimacy with God needs to be the aim of our lives.

Humans are social creatures. Relationships are important. There are all kinds of relationships, good and bad. There are also all kinds of relationships with God.

What relationship with God is described in Ephesians 2v3?

Is this a good or bad relationship?

On the positive side, God describes His relationship with us in many ways, not all of them include intimacy.

What degree of intimacy do these relationships include?

Master - servant	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Friend	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Father - Child	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Husband - wife	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>

One of the reoccurring themes in the psalms is the search for intimacy with God.

When will you come to me? Psalm 101:2

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. Psalm 42:1

Other psalms celebrate this intimacy.



Read Psalm 84

Which verses in this psalm talk about searching for intimacy?

Which verses talk about finding it?

The psalmist tells us that the sparrow has found a place near the altar. In doing so, he is telling us that **there is a place of intimacy for us in God**. Just as the sparrow found a place so must we. The psalmist called this a pilgrimage, he had to keep searching, and so do we.

As humans we crave intimacy. It is one of the forces that drives our societies promiscuity and destructive relationships. Intimacy is something we are bad at. It requires a reciprocal giving which is very risky.

God put the desire for intimacy in us.



God wants intimacy with us

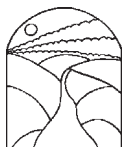
God walked with Adam in the cool of the day. He created us to be objects of His intimacy. He did not create us to be His servants, (He made Angels for that.) He created us for relationship with Him. God wants an intimate relationship with us. But it must be on His terms.



Read Hebrews 4v1-11

Do you think this rest speaks of intimacy?

How do we enter this rest?



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Rest comes in surrendering to God, in acknowledging that we can never be good enough and relying on Jesus. It comes in forgiveness of sins, in trusting God. It is by faith. Rest is a relationship with God, a state of intimacy. It is facilitated by forgiveness of sin and is by grace. It cannot be earned.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.... Matthew 11:28
Can you hear Christ calling you to intimacy?

The story so far.



There is a place of intimacy with God – which we can find.
We have a need for that intimacy – it is satisfying.
God created us to be objects of His intimacy – He desires intimacy with us.



How am I going to find intimacy with God?

At this point it would be easy to come up with a list of do's and don'ts. But if the above is true, and intimacy with God is our natural condition, then we need to identify the things that block that intimacy. That stand in the way of what should be natural for us.

What things stand in the way of intimacy with God?

As has already been mentioned there are many kinds of relationships and not all of them include intimacy.

Would you expect to find intimacy in an employer, employee, relationship?

Would you expect to find intimacy in a teacher, student, relationship?

What kind of relationships do you find intimacy in?

Here is the big question, what do these relationships have in common?

So we are sitting here on the counselors couch, trying to figure out way we don't have an intimate relationship with God.

The first question has to be, what kind of a relationship do you have with God? A relationship with God can be based on many things; fear, guilt, duty, awe, etc. These are not going to generate intimacy.

What should our relationship with God be based on?

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.
Deuteronomy 6:5 & Matthew 22:37

To love, we can add things like; grace, faith and trust.

Intimacy come as a natural product of a good relationship with God.

Some people exercise a kind of *Christian Agnosticism*, they believe in God and go to church, but they do not believe that God cares for them. God is always aloof from them, He does not concern himself with their daily life.

Is this what God is like?

Is this kind of a view of God going to bring about intimacy with him?

What would need to change to enable the person to know God intimately?

A few pointers



One of the cornerstones of intimacy with God is worship.



You cannot develop intimacy with God during the ads on TV.
Intimacy requires time. Be still and know that I am God Psalm 46:10



To the list presented earlier (love, trust, commitment) add communication



Intimacy requires a giving of yourself. Intimacy with a human relationship require reciprocal giving. We have to let down our walls and barriers and let people get close to us, we have to open ourselves up. This involves the risk of being hurt. For intimacy with God we must surrender our fears, doubts and pride and allow God to come close.

In the cross of Jesus, God made the first move, He took the risk. Now it is your turn.
Come near to God and he will come near to you. James 4:8

Bible Studies

Calming the Sea



Read Matthew 8v23-27

This incident is also recorded in Luke 8v22-25 and Mark 4v35-41. It is important to remember that this is not a parable, but an actual event that Matthew records.

Several of the disciples were experienced fishermen.

Galilee is a lake about 21km by 11km. Galilee is usually a placid lake, even in the late afternoon when the wind changes bringing with it choppy waves. At times it does get sufficiently rough to cause trouble. The boats used for fishing in Jesus day were quite low to the water and could have been swamped in such conditions.

Why do you think they were afraid?

Do you think experienced fisherman would be given to panic?

Matthew records that the storm was sudden and furious. Some people have taught that this storm was sent by the enemy, to destroy Jesus. They find significance in the fact that Jesus rebuked the storm, a word generally reserved for combating Satan.

Who's idea was it to cross the lake? 8v21, Mark 4v35, Luke 8v22

Jesus was asleep in the boat. **How did the disciple interpret Jesus sleep?**

Is there any other way to interpret it?



What accusation did the disciples make against Jesus? Mark 4v38

Do you think they blamed him for getting them in this mess?

Did Jesus care?

Jesus was not asleep because he did not care.

Did Jesus think they were going to drown?

Why did He rebuke their lack of faith?

Does this mean they really had no faith?

Faith drives out fear and fear drives out faith. D.A. Carson

Do you think this statement is true?

Is this what happened to the disciples?

What did Jesus do to the storm?

Why were the disciples amazed?

O LORD God Almighty, who is like you? You are mighty, O LORD, and your faithfulness surrounds you. You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them. Psalm 89v8-9
He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. Psalm 107v29

What do you think Matthew intended us to understand from this account?

Remember it is not a parable. He wanted us to understand just how powerful Jesus is.

The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!" Matthew 8v27

They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" Mark 4v41:.

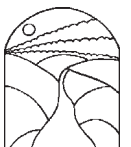
In fear and amazement they asked one another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him." Luke 8v25



Would you like to answer the disciples question, what kind of a man is this? Colossians 1v15-20

Why is it important for us to grasp this point?

The Gospels want us to understand that Jesus was not just an ordinary man, he was, (and is) the Son of God, God incarnate. Without this fact, the whole system of salvation, presented to us in the Bible, falls apart.





Our Storms

What do you think the storm represents?

What do you think the boat represents?

Some people say the boat is the church, I prefer to look at it as each of our lives. The storm represents the troubles, difficulties and crisis we face. Some of the sufficient to swamp our lives.

Can you think of any examples?

Two Lessons



Jesus can speak to the winds and the waves in our lives and make them still. Just like Jesus was in the boat with the disciples, He is in your life.

What did they expect Jesus to do when he woke up?

Clearly they knew that waking Jesus up was what they needed to do. But they were fishermen and Jesus was a carpenter, so I can't imagine it was help with the boat they wanted. Consciously or subconsciously, they were looking for a miracle.



The problem was solved when Jesus took charge

The problem was solved when the fishermen knew there was nothing left they could do. Their experience and seamanship was not enough.

How does this apply to us?

We too need to call for help. We too need to realize that our own skills are not sufficient. The disciples were frustrated because Jesus was asleep. "How can you be sleeping when we are in such dire straits?"

Have you ever felt, in the midst of one of your storms that Jesus was asleep?

Why do you think this is?

Is He asleep? Psalm 121v4

According to this passage, what should we do when face with a storm?



There is another thing we need to learn from this.

Were the disciples in real danger?

Clearly they thought they were.

Did Jesus share their opinion?

What was Jesus reaction to being woken up?

He seemed unimpressed. Jesus didn't share their sense of imminent disaster or their panic.

If Jesus was in the boat was it ever going sink?

We need to realize that Jesus in us, makes all the difference, our lives are secure, not because of the stability of the boat, or the skill of the sailor, but because of the presence of Jesus. Jesus is always with us in the storm.

Does this mean we are never going to get wet?

To extend the metaphor, Paul says; three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 2 Corinthians 11:25 But Christ was in the boat and God saw Paul through, safe onto dry land.

According to this explanation, what should we do when face with a storm?

Sometimes Jesus will miraculously calm the storm, other times He will bring us through the storm, but whatever happens, He is in control.



What fault did Jesus find with the disciples?

"You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Matthew 8:26

"Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" Mark 4:40

"Where is your faith?" Luke 8:25

What do we learn from this?

How should we react in times of fear?

Sometimes you can hear Jesus speaking through the wind and the crash of the waves, and into our storm, "why are you afraid?"

Bible Studies

The Flagellation



Read Matthew 27v26-31

The Gospels mention this with such brevity that it is easy to miss its significance. Some versions say that Jesus was flogged, others that he was scourged or whipped.

Jesus was beaten (illegally) after his trial before the Sanhedrin, But this was the first physical punishment Christ received, it occurred half way through his trial before Pilate.

Read John 19v1-5



Flagellation.

The prisoner was stripped naked and tied to a post, his back exposed. His arms were secured above his head, his knees were 20cm off the ground and his legs trailed behind him, this way the prisoner could not brace himself against the whip.

The whip, called a flagrum or flagellum had several tails, (4 or 5), they were made of leather and had pieces of bone, glass or metal, threaded through the ends. A wooden handle was attached. The length of the whip was only about a metre. Because of the attachments, the effect of the whip went beyond damaging the surface of the skin, each successive blow took the injuries deeper, ripping away the flesh, even to the point of exposing bone. The sides of the body were also exposed and the face could also suffer damage, it was quite possible to lose an eye during flagellation.

Flogging was usually inflicted by two soldiers, (lictors), one either side of the prisoner, taking alternative blows. The object of the scourging was to bring the victim to a point just short of death. As you can imagine the blood loss would be substantial. Many people did not survive flagellation. The severity of the flogging depended on the disposition of the lictors. As a prelude to crucifixion, a merciful scourging was a severe scourging! This is because the severity of the scourging had an inverse relationship to the amount of time you could expect to survive on the cross.

Sometimes flagellation was practised while the condemned man was carrying his cross to the place of execution.

The Gospels do not say how seriously Jesus was scourged. Some people have taught that the scourging was restricted to 39 lashes, in accordance with Jewish Law and practice, Deuteronomy 25v3, (40 was reduced to 39 by the Rabbis in case the administrator accidentally lost count.) This was a Jewish law which the Romans had no reason to keep. It is safe to assume that the scourging was very severe. Jesus lifestyle would suggest that He was very fit man, but He struggled to carry His cross and expired quickly. This tells us that He must have been seriously injured by the flogging.

The Greek used in 1 Peter 2v24 also suggest the severity of the beating.

We do not know whether this severe beating was an attempt by the soldiers to be lenient.

Scourging could be associated with crucifixion, but as with so many of the elements in Jesus passion, it was relatively uncommon, the majority of people were not scourged before crucifixion. Most Roman historians do not associate flagellation with crucifixion, however we do know that such a link did exist. Some people see this flagellation as an attempt by Pilate to give Jesus a lesser punishment than crucifixion, which the priests rejected. It is possible to see this in the account given by John. It is hard to believe that many people would recover from a serious scourging to live a long and happy life. Jesus scourging was probably a standard precursor in a severe crucifixion regime.

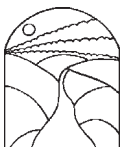
Peter found great significance in this scourging.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed 1 Peter 2:24

What did Jesus stripes attain for us? cf Matthew 8:17

Read Isaiah 53v4-6 (NIV wounds = stripes)

Is Isaiah talking about spiritual or physical healing?



I think Isaiah is talking primarily about healing from sin. Peter seems to be talking about physical healing, I think both are true.



Beating and Humiliation

Next it is recorded that Jesus was mocked. This is something that many find strange. Pilate showed himself favourably inclined to Jesus. The soldiers certainly had no reason to hate Jesus, why then did they mock Him? Some have suggested that these were local troops belonging to Herod, this is unlikely. It must be understood that ritual humiliation was an integral part of the crucifixion process. This mocking often began during the scourging and continued through the crucifixion.

What effect do you think this kind of humiliation would have on the prisoner?

All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. Psalm 22:7

For zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me. Psalm 69:9



How did the soldiers mock Jesus?

There are several plants native to Israel with long thorns. The crown was then beaten on to his head. Mark 15v19. The skull bleeds profusely. This crown of thorns is not unique to Jesus death, it was a known form of torture. (Clement of Alexandria)

Jesus was shown to the crowd mockingly dressed as a king. He is intended to be seen as an object of contempt, but also of pity.

Just as there were many who were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness— Isaiah 52:14

What effect would the removal of the robe from His back would have had?

The wounds on His back would have been reopened many times during the crucifixion process, carrying his cross and moving against the upright while on the cross. Jesus must have lost enormous amounts of blood.

All of this was in accordance with prophecy.



Read Isaiah 50v5-7

What things were prophesied?

According to Isaiah what was Jesus attitude during his sufferings?

Whether intended or not, there is some powerful symbolism here.



What did thorns represent? Genesis 3v18, Hebrews 6v8

Thorns were the effect of the fall. Jesus is the one who came to restore Adam's failure. The second Adam. He bore the effects of the fall as a crown.



What colour was the robe?

What did this represent? Isaiah 1v18

Again the idea is that Jesus wore a robe of sin, he took our sins upon himself, so that we might wear a robe of righteousness.

Do you find anything ironic in Jesus' portrayal as a king?

This parody is still found in peoples response to Jesus today.



Why do you think it was necessary for Jesus to bear shame as well as death?

You could say that what Jesus suffered, is what he removed from us. He took our shame by bearing our shame etc.

What else did Jesus take from us by bearing for us?

Sickness, guilt, death, separation from God, sin, insults, helplessness, hopelessness, rejection. etc.

What physical condition would Jesus have been in prior to crucifixion?

It has been said that Jesus sufferings were Physical, emotional and spiritual

What elements were emotional and spiritual?

Bible Studies

The Crucifixion



Read Matthew 27v32-54

It is thought that crucifixion was first used by the Persians around 500BC. It was outlawed by the Roman emperor Constantine in the fourth century. During the 800 years that crucifixion was used many thousands, probably hundreds of thousand of people were executed this way.

Mass crucifixions were not uncommon, in 71BC after the Spartacus revolt, 6000 men were crucified at one time. There are many references to crucifixion in ancient writings. Crucifixion was a dreaded form of execution. It was both cruel and humiliating.

It was mostly reserved for men and almost exclusively reserved for the lower classes.

As a means of execution, crucifixion was not very efficient, it's aim was to serve as a deterrent. Quintilian (35-95AD) wrote "*whenever we crucify the guilty, the most, crowded roads are chosen, where most people can see and be moved by this fear. For penalties relate not so much to retribution as to their exemplary effect.*"



Why was crucifixion not an efficient form of execution?

What did the Romans hope to achieve in crucifixion?

What does Matthew 27v39 imply about the place of Crucifixion?

The methods of crucifixion used were diverse. There were four basic types of cross, a simple pole (I), an **X**, a **T** (tau cross) shape and the cross shape (**t** Latin cross) that we are all familiar with. There are at least 10 different Latin words to describe different designs. Different crosses were favoured in different areas, in Britain the **X** was commonly used. The **I** shape was probably the original form, because of its simplicity, seems to have been used for mass execution. The convict's hands would have been tied to the top of the pole, his feet unsupported, this would lead to death by asphyxiation within one hour. The **T** shape seems to have been the most common. The *Latin* or *lower tau* cross (**t**) was favoured in Israel at this time. Within each style of cross there was a wide variation of techniques used. A skilled Roman soldier could control the length of time it took to die and the severity of the suffering. For example a half seat fixed to the cross at the height to the buttocks could prolong the suffering dramatically. The technique varied according to the outcome desired by the Roman authorities.

Do we know for sure what kind of Cross Jesus died on?

We do not know for sure, but there is no reason to doubt that the standard shape we are familiar with was not the kind used. Even if it was the more common **T** shape, the addition of the inscription, often elevated above the cross beam, still gives us the shape we are used to.

Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus John 19v16 Once handed over, the same group of four soldiers, would be responsible for the prisoner and would stay with him until he was dead. They were very professional in their knowledge and experience of crucifixions.

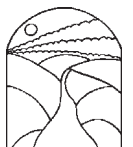
Usually ropes were used to secure the person to the cross, sometimes a combination of ropes and nails. The use of nails seems to be associated with individual crucifixions and where there was a desire for specific cruelty. Josephus writing about the fall of Jerusalem in 70AD says; "*the soldiers out of rage and hatred amused themselves by nailing their prisoners in different postures.*"

The nails themselves were highly prized, and worn by Jews and Gentiles, as healing amulets Despite the strong literary evidence for crucifixion, only one example of the remains of a crucified man have been found. There are two reasons for this; Crucified men were often not permitted to be buried, their bodies were thrown onto the rubbish dumps or left on the crosses. Secondly, if ropes were used, crucifixion left no evidence on the skeleton. Crucifixion was usually 'bloodless', Christ death, for various reasons was an exception. His Death must have been a very bloody sight.

What wounds would the blood have come from?



The discovery was made in 1968 north of Jerusalem. The mans name was, according to an inscription, was Jehohanan. He was executed in the first century, close to the time of Christ. Although the skeleton was in a bad state of decay, it appears that his arms were draped over the top of the cross beam and secured with ropes. An 11.5x1 cm iron nail, square in shape with a round head was still fixed in one of his ankles. Both feet were nailed individually, (11.5cm is not long enough to go through both feet.) The nail went through the side of the ankle suggesting that the feet were nailed to the sides of the uprights. Splinters of olive wood indicate a wooden plaque between the foot and the nail head, to prevent the foot from pulling off the nail.



"Each criminal condemned to death bears his cross on his back" Plutarch (46-120AD)
This was not the whole cross, which would have been far too heavy to carry for any distance. It was the cross beam (*patibulum*) which was carried, this was 1.8m long and weighed between 35 and 50 KG. The uprights (*strides*) were usually permanent fixtures.

Why did Jesus struggle to carry the patibulum?



The cause of death for those crucified, is usually assumed to be from asphyxiation, however this was not always the case. The key factor was the angle of the arms. If the hands were fixed to the cross close together, or in the case of the **I**, directly over the head, this fixed the diaphragm in the inhale position and death would be by asphyxiation. The person had to pull himself up to exhale. Once they lost the strength in their arms to do this, they would die. Fixing the feet to the cross, made it easier to push the body up to exhale. This is why the Gospels record that the Roman soldiers broke the legs of the two criminals crucified with Christ. If you were lucky, the soldier severed the arteries and you bleed to death quickly.

Can you imagine what it would be like to support your body with broken legs?

If however, the arms were spread wide, as is usually portrayed in Christian art. Death was not by asphyxiation, but as a result of Hypovolaemic shock. This is a condition where low blood pressure reduces the flow of blood causing cell and organ damage. The blood and water that flowed from Jesus side are consistent with the effects of hypovolaemic shock. In reality death was probably a combination of these and other causes, like dehydration and exposure.

Either cause of death would come slowly, it could take a few hours or last several days. This depended on the method used and the strength of the condemned man.

Three of Josephus' friends were accidentally crucified by the Romans after the fall of Jerusalem, they were taken down from the crosses, one out of the three survived. (Life of Josephus 75.420-421)

Is it possible that Jesus was not dead when taken down from the cross?

Traditionally Christ is portrayed with nails through the palms of his hands.

Why is this not possible?

Clearly the nail would have ripped through the skin. Nails are not mentioned in any of the gospel accounts of Jesus' death. We only know nails were used from a comment of John, Peter (Acts 2v23) and later of Paul (Colossians 2v14).

So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." John 20:25

The Greek used here can mean hand, wrist or forearm. The Bible does not say the nail went through the palm. In reality it would have gone through the wrist between the carpals and the radius, this missed the Radial and Ulnar Arteries preventing the condemned man from bleeding to death. It did sever the Median Nerve inflicting excruciating pain and paralysing the hand into a claw. Each time a crucified man pulled himself up to breathe the pain would be intense. The victim would also have suffered severe muscle cramps. The feet could be nailed in a variety of ways sometimes together sometimes separately, on the front or the sides of the cross.

What would happen to the laceration on Jesus' back as He pushed up to breathe?

The details of Jesus' crucifixion are very much in keeping with what we know about crucifixion. Such things as dividing the clothes among the soldiers, offering the condemned man gall (wine and myrrh) as a mild anaesthetic, and the need to ask Pilate (the Judge) for Jesus' body, are all consistent with Roman Law. However from the above you will realise Jesus' crucifixion was by no means typical, it represents the an extreme and severe form of the practice.

Why do you think Jesus refused the gall?

Why do you think Jesus said 'I thirst' John 19v28

The Gospels make reference to a sign fixed above Jesus' head. It said *Jesus of Nazareth king of the Jews*. This was common practice, it was called a *titulus* and recorded the condemned man's crime. (Remember crucifixion was intended for its shock value and as a deterrent).



Why do you think the chief priests objected?

Why do you think Pilate wrote this?

Was it true?

It is clear from the account that the priests manipulated Pilate into acting against his will. This was Pilate's revenge, a way of humiliating the priests. At the same time it stands out as one of the greatest declarations of truth of all time.

Jesus' time on the cross was quite brief, six hours, Mark 15v25&34.

Why do you think the other condemned men lived longer?

To ensure Jesus was dead, the centurion thrust a spear up under His rib cage, piercing the cavity around the heart. This released, what John calls, blood and water. The water, which would have come first, was Pericardial fluid or separated blood. Which implies not only that Jesus was certainly dead, but that He died of heart failure associated with Hypovolaemia.

Is it significant that Jesus died of heart failure?

Bible Studies

The Tower of Babel



Read Genesis 11v1-9

Cush was the father of Nimrod, who grew to be a mighty warrior on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; that is why it is said, "Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the LORD." The first centres of his kingdom were Babylon, Erech, Akkad and Calneh, in Shinar. From that land he went to Assyria, where he built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah and Resen, which is between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city. Genesis 10:8-12

This is an event that took place about 100 years after the flood. The name of the area where the city was build was Shinar, This plain is where Babylon was located. (Some of the modern language translations, drop Shinar and call it Babylonian.) Archaeology has shown that this area was one of the first centres of civilisation. Here in the plain between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers the Sumerian culture flourished. It is also significant that the best know of the extra biblical accounts of the flood, the Gilgamesh chronicles, come from this area. The Sumerians are credited with inventing writing.

What did the people do when they reached Shinar? x3

Is it significant that they used bricks and mortar, rather than cut stone?

Some people think that bricks and mortar represents human effort, and Stone, Divine methods. Bricks are certainly inferior and less long-lasting, but in a plain they were readily available, stone wasn't.

Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth." Genesis 11v4



Why did they want to build a city and tower?

Who's glory was the tower for?

How high was the tower intended to be?

The kind of tower they built was probably a ziggurat, a kind of a step pyramid used as a temple or place of worship. The ruins of several giant ziggurats still exist in modern day Iraq/Iran.



In the ancient world people believed in a three tier universe. The earth was like a flat disk, above it was an arch in which the gods lived, below it was another arch which was the underworld. (this was a pagan idea, it is not taught in the Bible). If they built a tower high enough they could physically reach heaven.

How likely were they to succeed?

Do you think this was their intention?

If it was, then it was architecturally ill-conceived, the mountains that surrounded the plain were higher than they could ever hope to build and yet they still did not reach the heavens.

Assuming they did believe they could physically reach heaven.

Did God fear they could succeed?

We cannot build a tower that reaches the upper atmosphere, they certainly couldn't. We also know the heaven is not physically located above the earth, it's an entirely different plane of existence. So if God knew this project was doomed to failure, why did He intervene? There must be more to it than just building a tower.

What was wrong with what they were doing?



There goal was to avoid being scattered. This was in direct rebellion to God's command to cover the earth Geneses 9v7, KJV

Secondly it was to make a name for themselves, instead of God. It was a refusal to worship and honour God.

Reaching heaven meant reaching God. They were going to do this through human means. They were trying to exalt themselves over and against God. to be independent of God and self sufficient. To make their own religion and reject God. Such a process is described in **Romans 1v18-23**. Consequently some people identify the tower of Babel as the birth of paganism and idolatry.

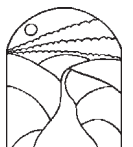
In Hebrew, Babel means *confusion*, but in the Sumerian and Greek versions of the name it means *gateway of heaven*. This name may speak of the tower or God's visit.

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Just as there are accounts of a great flood in the myths of many of the worlds ancient cultures, so to there are accounts of a time when men lived in one village and spoke one language. Some of them include the story of an unfinished tower destroyed by the gods.

It has been speculated that, with the memory of the flood still recent, they want to build something that could, protect them from another flood. Side-stepping God's judgement, giving them the freedom to behave as they wished without fear.

Would the tower have survived?

The Tower of Babel today



**What was the attitude of the people who build the tower?
Where is this kind of attitude seen in society today.**

Arrogance and a wilful denial of God seemed to mark their behaviour. One of the basic philosophies of today's society is *secular humanism*, while it contains much good, it glorifies man, makes him self-sufficient, and master of his own destiny, it has no place for God. It is the religion of our western world. It is a modern tower of Babel.

What attitude should we have toward God?

How does today's society try to reach God, or to be more precise, side step God?
Babylon, in Scripture, came to represent all that is evil, a culture opposed to God. Rev 17v5, 18v21.

Can man reach God through human effort?

Babylon stands for all manmade religion, attempts to reach God by our own goodness, good works or wisdom. All attempts to do so are futile. In the faith of the Bible, God reached out to man. What man could not do God did by sending his Son to earth to die on the Cross. God took the initiative. We call this grace.



The tower of Babel also finds it's way into Church life. Whenever we concentrate of building an empire, an edifice or a monument to our own achievement, then we are building Babel. When the structure becomes more important than the goal. When our image is more important than God's work. Whenever we loose sight of God's will. When ever people cease to be important. When ever God's glory takes second place, we are building Babel. Anything we build for our own glory or out of pride is Babel.

He said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" Daniel 4:30

Who's glory was Babel built for?

In what ways does the Church try to build a tower of Babel?

What is the danger when this happens?

Is this just a danger for big organisations or for churches and individuals

Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labour in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. Psalm 127:1

The problem is that often we deceive ourselves into believing that what we are doing is for God when really it is for us.

How can we guard ourselves against this danger?

The Outcome

Man tried to go up, but God ended up coming down.

What was God's conclusion about mans efforts? Genesis 11v6

What does this tell us about the power of unity, both for good and evil?

How is this kind of unity achieved?

Do you think there is a parallel in the incredible advances of our day?



What did God do prevent them continuing? x2

In the end God got His way, by disrupting their language.

Why did God choose this way to act?

There is a contrast here with the day of Pentecost. On both occasions God gave new languages and scattered the people, at Babel it bought disunity, at Pentecost it bought unity and the glory of God

What were the effects of God's judgement?

There is a parallel to this found in Acts, where God commanded the church to take the Gospel to all nations, but Jerusalem was just too comfortable, God had to send a persecution to scatter them.

Do you think this is why God has allowed so many denominations?

Bible Studies

Idolatry

Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. 1 John 5:21

Throughout the Old Testament God continually battled with the people's persistent idolatry. The Prophets consistently preached against it, but Jesus did not have to. By His day Judaism, thanks to it's time in exile, was largely free from idols.



Read Jeremiah 10v1-10 Isaiah 40v18-25

In this passage what is an idol?

What contrast is made here between God and the idols?

If an idol is only wood, stone or metal what is the harm in it?

Do these idols still exist?

In a sense, the passage deliberately misses the point. Even the pagans did not believe that the wood itself was powerful, the idol became a vehicle for the god whom it represented and who indwelt it.

What makes a carving an idol, rather than a statue?

I would say the act of worship or devotion, (by someone not necessarily just you) and declaring it as such. In 1 Corinthians 8v4, Paul says We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one.

What does he mean by nothing at all?

What is behind an idol? 1 Corinthians 10v19-20, Deuteronomy 32v16-17, Psalm 106v35-37

What danger could there be for the believer in such idols?

What kind of things should we avoid?

The first commandments prohibit the making of idols, not only of foreign gods, but also of idols intended to represent Jehovah. *Deuteronomy 4v15-19*. It is likely that the golden calves made by Israel, first at Sinai and then at Dan and Bethel, were intended as images to represent the true God.

Why did God refuse to be worshiped this way?

There are many answers to this question. Firstly I think God want to avoid being seen as one of many competing gods. I think He also wanted be free from the our preconceived ideas about who He is and what He is like. You can't contain God and you must let God speak for Himself, this He has done in Scripture.

This is what the LORD says: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" Isaiah 66:1-2



Spiritual Idols

Believers in the first century world were confronted with physical idols as are believers today in many parts of the world. Obviously the perils of us falling for physical idol worship, although existent, are slim. This kind of idolatry is not hard to identify or avoid. John has a different kind of idol in mind.

When John says 'Keep yourselves from Idols' what kind of idols does he mean?



Read Ezekiel 14v1-6

What kind of idols are these? What does this mean?

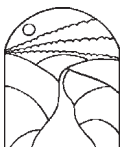
What is this kind of an idol?

These were not physical idols, representing false gods. This was something internal, something in the heart or mind. The simplest definition of this kind of idol is: *anything that takes a place in our lives that is intended for God.*

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature:....greed, which is idolatry. Colossians 3v5, Ephesians 5v5

Why does Paul say greed is idolatry?

Greed is idolatry because a greedy person believes the things of this life will take care of him. Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Luke 12:15





Read Matthew 6v20-21

Is Jesus suggesting that our treasure can be an idol?

Why can a desire for wealth so easily become an idol? 1Tim 6:v9-10, Heb 13v5

How are we going to recognize the idols in our lives?

Anything that takes away from our worship of God. It can be in the area of our affection, finance or time. The best technique is to ask God to show you the idols you have set up. Whether we realize it or not, we are all philosophers. We all have a view about what is important in life and how we should live. A way of making sense of the world. An idol is a product of our belief system. Within these personal philosophies you will find many of our idols.

We do not think of these things in terms of worship. Who ever admitted to worshipping a car? So for us a better question might be;



To what do you trust your future?

What do you trust to provide for your needs?

To what do you attribute your success?

What do you love more than God?

If you exercise self reliance, instead of God reliance, self has taken the place of God. You have made yourself an idol!

Are such idols just ideas in our minds or can they be physical things too?

Often the idols of our minds find a physical expression. A lust for wealth may materialize into a fine house. A god of freedom may manifest itself in a flash car.



Is materialism an idol?

Is secular humanism an idol?

What makes something an idol for you?

What kind of things could be an idol for us?

Which of these could be an idol? Car, pride, control, lust, money, TV, free time, personal rights, family, beauty, music, Pastor, celebrity.

Are they of themselves bad?

There is nothing radical about this idea it has been preached the world over. Yet many of us find it very hard to identify the things in our lives that are idols. (It's much easier to identify them in other peoples lives). *You mean the things I love and cherish so much are actually idols!*

If an idol is something that takes, time, affection or finance away from God.

How much is too much? (When does it stop being an acceptable part of our life and start being an idol?)

What things result from, or are associated with idol worship?

Ezekiel 14:3

What does this mean?

Jonah 2:8

What does this mean?

Judges 8:27

What does this mean?

Deuteronomy 4v16

What does this mean?



A Graven image

We have seen that an idol can be a physical image or something set up in our hearts. That it can also be an image of a false god or a false image of the true God. There is a danger that in our religion we create idols of God. We create a defective or limited view of who God is and what He can do. When we do this we worship an idol of our own making and not the true God. God seems to take delight in shattering these false views of who He is.

Do we worship God or our concept of God?

When the form of religion becomes more important than the God behind it, we practice idolatry. For example; when we put our faith in the act of prayer and not the God who answers prayer, we practice idolatry. Attending church never saved anyone, responding to God did. We must remember that Christianity is an act of the heart, which expressed itself in our actions. If we trust in the actions and forget the all important things like faith, love and relationship we become idol worshippers.

Bible Studies

Walking on the water



Read Matthew 14v22-36 Mark 6v45-56, John 6v16-24

Three of the gospel accounts record this incident, all three place it in the context of another great miracle. **What was it?**

Neither John nor Mark, record that Peter walked on the water.

Jesus has gone up into the hills alone to pray. He had sent His disciples on ahead of him to the other side of the lake.



What was the disciples current position and problem?

Were they in any immediate danger?

What kind of a mood do you think they were in?

It had been a long day, they were tired and probably frustrated. According to Mark they were rowing hard against the wind. (6v47).

Mark comments that Jesus was walking past them not to them, perhaps in the manner of Luke 24v28. The fourth watch of the night is between 3 and 6am.



Who did the disciples think Jesus was?

What was their state of mind as a result? Mark 6v50

Why do you think they made this assumption?

Does this mean the Bible endorses the existences of ghosts?

No, it doesn't, it only says that the disciples, in their fear, assumed it was a ghost, as it turned out they were wrong. The Bible is quite clear that after death we leave this world for the next. There is no place in Biblical theology for disembodied souls roving the earth. Orthodox Christianity, where confronted with the possibility of ghosts attributes them either to demonic activity or sees them as a form of vision.

What happened when He reached the boat? Matthew 14v32 Mark 6v51

Why do you think Jesus chose to walk across the water?

It has to be more than just the shortest route between two points. Jesus did not do miracles gratuitously. John only records seven of Jesus miracles, including this one. Each miracle he selects is intended to teach us something.

What did Jesus want the disciples, and us, to understand?

In many ways this incident is similar to the calming of the sea. *Matthew 8v23-27, Luke 8v22-25 and Mark 4v35-41.* The basic meaning is the same Jesus has mastery over nature, He is not an ordinary man, we should stand in awe of Him. Matthew puts it like this: Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." Matthew 14:33

Is it significant that the disciples worshiped Jesus? Matthew 4v10, Rev 22v8-9

What similarities are there between this story and the calming of the sea?



Mark gives us a clue about the reason Jesus walked on the water.

What is it? Mark 6v52

What does Mark mean by the loaves? Mark 6v30-44

(Now would be a good time to familiarise yourself with the story.) The question is,

What was it about the loaves they hadn't understood?

Again it is about Jesus amazing power, but I think it is more than that.

But he answered, "You give them something to eat." Mark 6:37 Matthew 14v16 Luke 9v13

Why do you think Jesus said this?

I think Jesus was trying to stretch their faith and their participation in His work. Trying to break their conservative ideas about what God can do. Shock them into broadening their spiritual horizons.

How does this apply to us today?

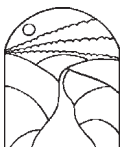
If this is so then Peter was the only disciple who grasped it.

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**When the disciples cried out in terror what did Jesus say? Matthew 14v27
Do we still fail to recognise Jesus at work and respond in fear and dismay?**



**What did Peter say? Why?
Was this a rational thing to suggest?
As a test to see if it really was Jesus, what weakness did it have?
What other risks did he face?**

This is typical Peter, rash and impulsive, but quick to learn and follow.

Sometimes it is a thin line between faith and presumption.



**What is presumption?
What is faith?
What is the difference?**

The difference is found in one simple word in v29, *come*. Presumption is assuming on God, faith is obeying Him.



**What kind of courage did it require to step out of the boat?
Why do you think he did it?
Did he walk on water?
What caused him to sink?
What did Jesus do?**

The Application

An application for us is not hard to find.



**What do you think the boat represents?
What do you think walking on water represents?**

Peter was a fisherman, the boat represented everything he knew and was comfortable with. Walking on water represented the exact opposite. It is after all impossible, it cannot be done! The boat is the natural the water the supernatural. Walking on water is living by faith.

What does living by faith mean?

As Christians we talk so much about faith and how important it is but very often we will do everything possible to avoid having to exercise it.



**Do you think this is a healthy attitude?
Why do we avoid situations that might require faith?
What does getting out of the boat mean for us?**

What sort of things are you going to need before you set out in faith?

A word from God! Courage and some faith might help.



**What do you think the waves and wind represent?
What happens when we look at them?
Where should we look?
What enabled Peter to walk on water?**

Is it promised that we will never fail?

No in fact from Peter's example quite the opposite! Peter got very wet. But there is a promise in this passage, that when we do fail, Jesus will be right there to rescue us.

What are the risks in stepping out in faith?

Why do you think fear of failure is such a problem for so many people?

There are many things that can and will fail, God will never fail.

Who suggested that Peter walk on the water, Jesus or Peter? v28

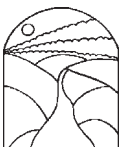
Who authorised it? v29

Often we wait for God to tell us what to do (which is right) but sometimes it needs to be us taking the initiative saying; 'Lord is this what you what from me?'

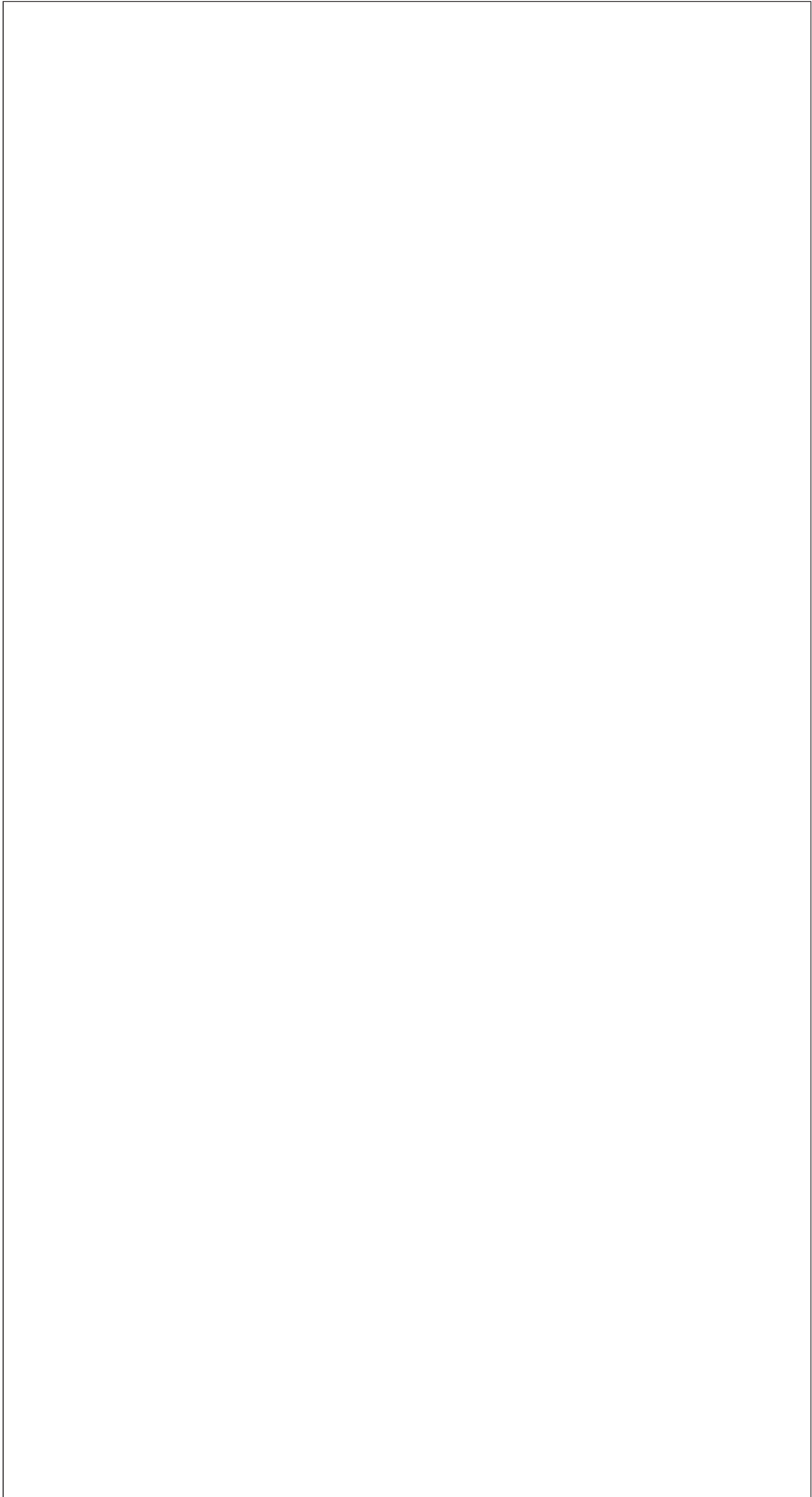
Well I guess you could say Peter made a fool of himself, again. Eleven disciples, watched, eleven disciples stayed dry, respectable and safe. One got wet, one failed, one made a fool of himself, but one for a brief moment walked on water. I know which group I would rather be in.

Bible Studies

STREAMS IN THE DESERT

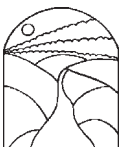


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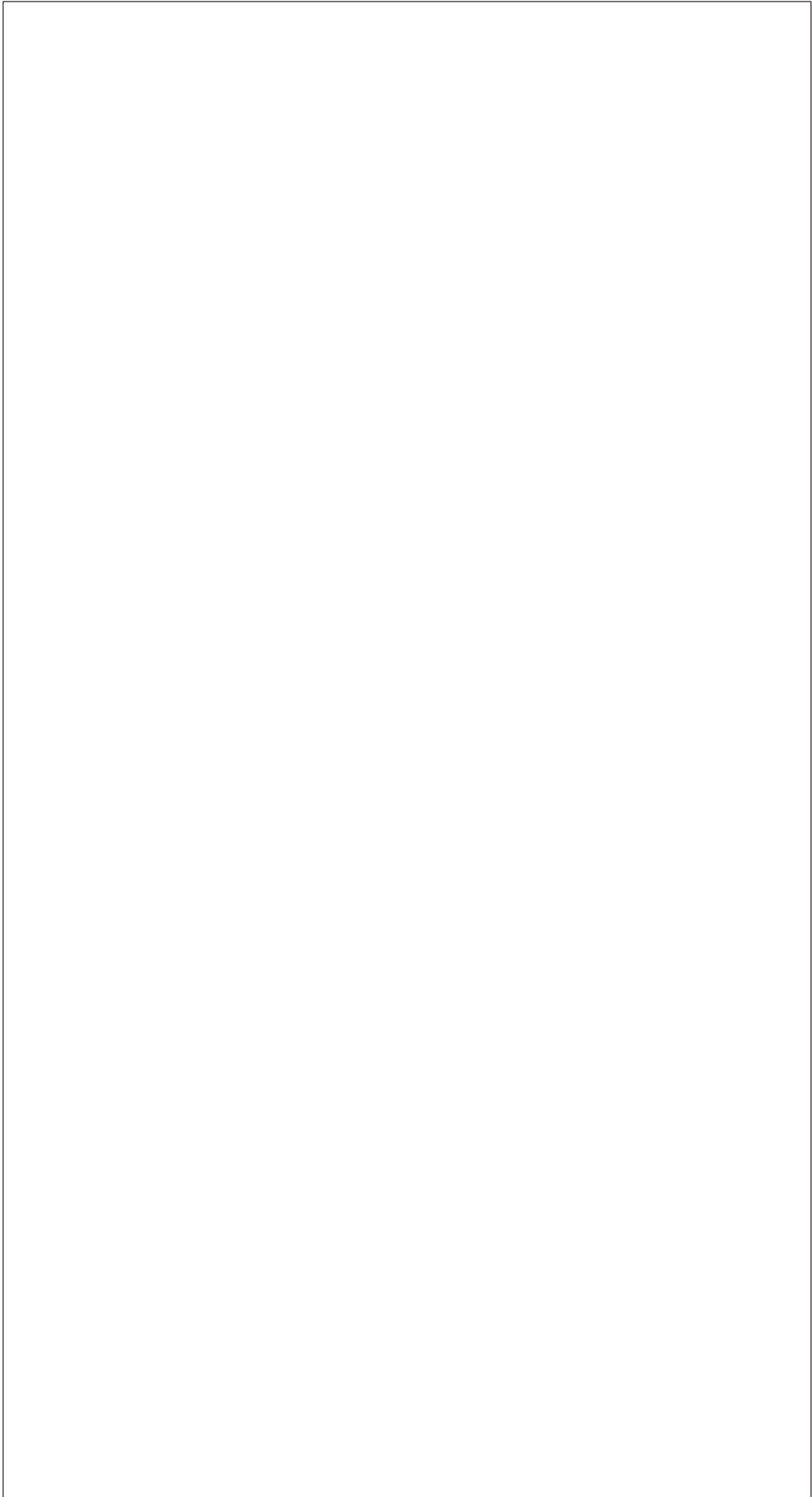


Bible Studies

STREAMS IN THE DESERT



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Bible Studies

The Census, Inn & Manger

There are many questions about the nativity account that never get asked. So much of our understanding of the subject comes from nativity plays and Christmas cards. It is good to do a reality check every now and again.

Read Luke 2v1-7

Where did Joseph normally live?



The Census

The problems start with Quirinius. Syria was the Roman administrative centre over Israel at the time. The problem is that Quirinius was governor of Syria between 6-9AD. Too late for the birth of Christ. We know he conducted a census in 6AD. Acts 5v37, *Josephus Antiquities 18v26*. We also know that in Egypt a census happened every 14 years.

Jesus was born around (or before) 4BC. So how are we to explain Quirinius being Governor of Syria at that time?

There is some evidence (an incomplete inscription) that Quirinius had a previous term of duty in Syria between 10BC and 7BC. If so the census would date from this time.

Why does Luke describe this as the first census?

Probably to differentiate it from the second, more famous one, he mentions in Acts 5v37. (Luke and Acts are two volumes of the same work). Why would he say first if there had only been one?

The second possibility also centres around the word 'first' it can mean prior or before. In which case Luke is saying the *Census before the one under Quirinius*.

Josephus does record that about this time the whole Jewish nation swore an oath of allegiance to Caesar *Antiquities 17v42*. This could well be Luke's census.

Justin, a Christian author in the middle of the second century, writing to Roman Christians, claimed that Quirinius' census could still be examined. I Apology 34

As far as we know Augustus did not give an edict proclaiming a census across the whole Roman world at one time. We do know that he was very keen on taxation and statistics. According to a Roman historian (Taticus) after Augustus' death, tax statistics from the empire were found to have been written in his own handwriting! This command was probably a general one compelling each province to return such data, rather than a command for a specific empire wide census.



The return to Bethlehem

Why did Joseph go to Bethlehem?

Joseph's clan originated in Bethlehem and it appears most of his family still lived there.

Why was it important for Joseph to return to Bethlehem?

The Messiah had to be descended from King David. Isaiah 11v1, 2 Samuel 7v12-13, "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. 6 In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness. Jeremiah 23:5-6 What is more Jesus had to be born in Bethlehem. Micah 5v2, Mathew 5v2.

Generally with a census, you want people to stay still, not move. The order to return to your ancestral home seems very strange, and unlikely to help in collecting the tax.

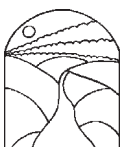
We know of an Egyptian census in 104BC where exactly this command was given. Dio Cassius, a Roman writer also describes the process of collecting taxes around the time of Christ's birth. According to his explanation people returned to property they owned so that it could be assessed and taxed. This is probably the reason for Joseph's journey,

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he owned or had inherited, property in Bethlehem, a field or even a house. It is fascinating that the location of Jesus birth, prophesied in Scripture was facilitated by the Roman Emperor.

The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem would have taken the best part of a week.



**Would you take your pregnant wife of such a journey?
How would you cope with a donkey ride in such a condition?
Why did Joseph take Mary with him?**

There must have been a compelling reason and it is unlikely that the census required her presence. Mary's position, pregnant and unmarried was precarious. By not divorcing her Joseph took responsibility for the baby and included himself in the scorn. They were probably glad to get away from Nazareth's gossip and perhaps worst.

We envisage Joseph and Mary arriving in Bethlehem the evening of Jesus birth.

Does Luke actually say this?

While they were there, is what Luke says, no time frame is given. Our traditional understanding could be right. Mary spent the first three with Elizabeth her cousin. She must have been in the last trimester of her pregnancy.

Why was it a problem finding accommodation?

Joseph must have had family in Bethlehem why not stay with them?

You would expect a pregnant women to be given generous treatment. Was it because Mary was pregnant and unmarried?



The Inn

Our understanding of the Christmas story has Joseph knocking on the door of a 'motel' and being turned away. This is quite unlikely

This kind of inn was not common in Israel. It was very un-Jewish and associated with the seedier side of life. It is highly unlikely that Bethlehem had this kind of an inn. (The story of the Good Samaritan uses a totally different word for inn). The Jews took hospitality very seriously and entertained strangers in their homes.

The word used for inn is *Katayma*, it is the same word translated *guest room* in Luke 22v11. It could be used of an inn, but it usually meant a room, in a private home, dedicated to hospitality. If the family was poor it could be a corner of a room. Depending on the context, it could mean a billet for soldiers or even a camp site.

We do not know how long they were there, or where they stayed, before the baby was born.

Several scenarios are possible; That they arrived the night of the birth to find no room. Or that they were staying in a *Katayma* but because of the crowding had to move out for the birth or wanted to move out for the birth.



In a manger

Does Luke say that Jesus was born in a stable?

Why do we assume this?

A poor families house was often divide between a higher area for the family and a lower one for the animals. It could have been a shed adjacent to the house. Or as tradition says a cave. It is even possible that it was out of doors.

Why is it significant that no room was found for Jesus birth?



What were the conditions that marked Jesus birth?

Why do you think God planned this kind of birth?

(What points do you think He wanted to make?)

Do any of the themes in Jesus birth recur in his life?

What contrasts spring to mind?

How does Jesus birth fit with His character and purpose?

What effect is this story intended to illicit in us?

What difference should it make to the way we live?

Bible Studies

Some ideas for answering the last questions

What were the conditions that marked Jesus birth?

Poverty, rejection, humility, shame, obscurity, secrecy.

Why do you think God planned this kind of birth?

(What points do you think He wanted to make?)

King David came from obscurity to be king.

That Jesus was one of us. He suffered the same indignities we suffer.

It put Jesus among the ordinary people.

It showed servanthood.

Do any of the themes in Jesus birth recur in his life?

Yes Jesus continued to live a simple life.

He associated with ordinary people.

He came to serve not to be served.

Luke 9:58 Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

He continued to be found by those who would humble themselves. And missed by those who wouldn't

What contrasts spring to mind?

Glories of heaven, usual kind of king, second coming,

The ways that He could have been born

The way the Jews expected Jesus to come.

The way we expect important people to behave

The honour we want for ourselves.

2 Cor 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

How does Jesus birth fit with His character and purpose?

It describes these things Very well. His care for ordinary people, humanity, simplicity

Can you imagine a Jesus born in regal splendour acting the way he did or humbling himself on the cross?

What effect is this story intended to illicit in us?

This is a Jesus we can relate to, know and love.

What difference should it make to the way we live?

Loose our pride or insistence on position and respect.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. Phil 2:5...

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