

Introducing Bible Basics

CHRISTADELPHIAN ADVANCEMENT TRUST,

49 THE WOODFIELDS

SOUTH CROYDON

SURREY CR2 0HJ

UNITED KINGDOM

Reg. Charity 1080393

Introducing Bible Basics

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

There are 8 studies in this introductory course. After this, there are more detailed lessons in the *Bible Basics* course; this is a 380 page book. Let us know when you finish *Introducing Bible Basics* and we'll be happy to send you a copy. All of these things are completely free of charge.

We do truly care for you, and want to help you towards a place in God's eternal kingdom here on the earth, when Jesus returns. We therefore pray for you, and look forward to receiving your answers to the lessons or your comments on them. You can study these lessons online with a personal tutor if you wish- see <http://carelinks.net/doc/bbintro>

Your Attitude

God is, and He earnestly seeks relationship with you. He has revealed Himself supremely through His word, the Bible. The Bible is what it claims to be; what is written on the tin is what is inside when you open it- the words of God Himself. Like me, you probably get irritated when you're talking to someone, sharing yourself, your principles, your history, what you stand for and what you don't... and they're not really paying attention. Looking out of the window, playing with their phone. If we want relationship with God, we must listen to His words. Carefully, and with respect. The Bible records an incident when the Lord Jesus visited a home where two sisters lived. Martha was obsessed with entertaining and her various secular duties- to the point that she ignored the visitor. Her sister Mary sat at Jesus' feet and heard His words. Martha asked for the Lord's opinion on this- and He judged that Mary had chosen by far the better option (read it for yourself in Luke 10:38-42). So begin to consider the Bible's message with this same attitude- a desire to hear God speaking to you. And begin by praying that God will help you to hear Him, to understand Him correctly. At first blush, the Bible can appear a maze too hard to get through. Too many difficult verses and new concepts. But if God is indeed God, and the Bible His word to men, and we mere mortals... then what else can we expect? It will at times appear beyond us. But God is love. He wants us for Himself, for ever. So by the same token, it also follows that His word is not going to be beyond our understanding when it comes to the basic truths He wishes to communicate. The purpose of the *Bible Basics* material is to systematically go through the Bible, and in plain language distill out the basic Bible teachings. And then, you should be in a position to accept the good news, the Gospel, of God's love, of His Son and of His Kingdom. And you do this by being baptized into Jesus; this is the way we say 'yes' to Him and His dear Son.

How to do the course

If you don't have your own Bible, please contact us and we will try to supply you with one. There are questions at the end of each study in *Introducing Bible Basics*, and you are welcome to return them to us- either in a letter sent to us at 49 Woodfields, South Croydon, Surrey CR2 0HJ UNITED KINGDOM or to our local representatives worldwide; or by email to info@carelinks.net . But we are all wired differently. Perhaps answering questions isn't your way of learning, as it isn't really mine. So in that case, just read through the material and be in touch. Send us an email saying what you think, questioning *us*. And we'd be so happy to help you to be baptized just simply into Jesus, wherever you are in the world. Between us, our group speak several languages. So feel free to communicate in your most comfortable language. And once you've gone through this material in *Introducing Bible Basics*, there's the 380 page book *Bible Basics*, available in around 70 languages, and with various audio, video and other media material expanding upon it. Let us know if you'd like a free copy.

As the author of the *Bible Basics* material I'd also like to invite you to contact me directly, if you come to a point where you're feeling 'But Duncan, what about...?'. My wife and I, and even our children, are very open to contact, and you can reach us personally at dh@heaster.org or by postal mail c/o the publishers. Till then, or until the glorious day of Christ's return- God bless you. May you too come to learn the truth of what I was taught in childhood:

*Jesus loves me, this I know
For the Bible tells me so.*

Duncan Heaster

dh@heaster.org

Carelinks, PO Box 3034, South Croydon, Surrey CR2 0ZA ENGLAND

PO Box 152, Menai NSW 2234 AUSTRALIA

www.carelinks.net

www.biblebasicsonline.com

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Study 1: God

1.1 The Existence of God

But there is a vast difference between having a vague notion that there is a higher power, and actually being certain of what He is offering in return for faithful service to Him. Heb. 11:6 makes this point, we

“must believe that (God) is

AND

and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him”.

Much of the Bible is an account of the history of God’s people Israel; time and again the point is made that their acceptance of God’s existence was not matched by their faith in His promises. They were told by their great leader Moses:

“Therefore know...and consider it in your heart, that the LORD Himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. You shall *therefore* keep His statutes and His commandments” (Dt. 4:39,40).

Thus the same point is made - an awareness within us that there is a God does not mean that we are automatically acceptable to God. If we seriously agree that we really do have a creator, we should *love Him* and “keep *therefore* his...commandments”. It is the purpose of this series of studies to explain what these commandments are and how to keep them. As we search the Scriptures to do this, we will find that our faith in God’s existence is strengthened.

“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

1.2 The Personality of God

It is a majestic, glorious theme of the Bible that God is revealed as a real being. It is also a fundamental tenet of Christianity that Jesus is the Son of God. If God is not a real being, then it is impossible for Him to have a Son who was the "image of His person" (Heb. 1:3). The Greek word actually means His "substance" (RV). Further, it becomes difficult to develop a personal, living relationship with 'God', if 'God' is just a concept in our mind. It is tragic that the majority of religions have this unreal, intangible conception of God.

As God is so infinitely greater than we are, it is understandable that many people's faith has balked at the clear promises that ultimately we will see Him. It is impossible for sinful man to see God (Ex. 33:20 RSV) - although this implies that were it not for our sinfulness, God is indeed a being who can 'be seen'.

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Mt. 5:8).

"His (God's) servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name (God's name - Rev. 3:12) shall be on their foreheads" (Rev. 22:3,4).

Such a wonderful hope, if we truly believe it, will have a profound practical effect upon our lives:

"Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

"God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). Thus man is made in the image and likeness of God, as manifested through the angels. James 3:9 speaks of "...men, which are made in the similitude of God." Our creation in the image of God surely means that we can infer something about the real object of which we are but an image. Thus God, whom we reflect, is not something nebulous of which we cannot conceive. Ezekiel saw God enthroned above the cherubim, with the silhouette of "the likeness of a man" (Ez. 1:26; 10:20); it is God Himself who is located above the cherubim (2 Kings 19:15 RV). All this has a practical import; because we are in the image of God, because it is imprinted on every part of our bodies, we must give that body to God, just as men were to give the penny which had Caesar's image on it to Caesar (Lk. 20:25). "He (God) knows our frame" (Ps. 103:14); He wishes us to conceive of Him as a personal being, a Father to whom we can relate. Descriptions of God's dwelling place clearly indicate that He has a personal location: "God is in heaven" (Ecc. 5:2); "For He looked down from the height of His sanctuary; From heaven the LORD viewed the earth" (Ps. 102:19); "Hear in heaven your dwelling place" (1 Kings 8:39). Yet more specifically than this, we read that God has a "throne" (2 Chron. 9:8; Ps. 11:4; Is. 6:1; 66:1). Such language is hard to apply to an undefined essence which exists somewhere in heavenly realms.

PRACTICING THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Believing in God's very existence of itself affects a man's behaviour. "The *living God*" is a phrase often used by men in prayer or desperate straits. God *is*, He is the living One, and He therefore is a rewarder of those who seek Him. All religions apart from true Christianity place a mask over God. To claim to be able to know the one true God is too much for them. So they have created false doctrines to cover Him up, to turn Him into what they would fain like or wish Him to be.

One of the most tragic misunderstandings of all time is the trinity- which claims that there are three "persons" in a Godhead. Trinitarian theologians borrowed a word- *persona* in Latin, *porsopon* in Greek- which was used for the mask which actors wore on stage. But for us, God doesn't exist in personas. He exists, as God the Father. And we practice the presence of that God. The real, true God, who isn't acting, projecting Himself through a mask, playing a role to our eyes; the God who is so crucially real and *alive*, there at the other end of our prayers, pulling at the other end of the cord... What we know of Him in His word is what and who He really is. It may not be *all* He is, but it is all the same the truth of the real and living God. And this knowledge should be the most arresting thing in the whole of our existence.

All basic Bible doctrines are meshed together, not only by logic and theory and exposition, but by the fact that one aspect of the spiritual life which they elicit leads into another. The existence of God means that there will be a judgment, and therefore our lives must reflect the fact that we believe that we live under judgment. The wicked think: "He will not require it. All [their] thoughts are, There is no God" (Ps. 10:4 RV). They admit there is a God insofar that they think God will not "require" an account of their lives; and thus effectively they act as if they are atheists. Their inward self-talk is that "There is no God" . Thus they say: "God has forgotten... He will never see."

1.3 God's Name and Character

In Hebrew and Greek a person's name often reflected their character and/or information about them. Some clear examples:

- 'Jesus' = 'Saviour' - because "He will save His people from their sins" (Mt. 1:21).
- 'Abraham' = 'Father of a great multitude' - "for I have made you a father of many nations" (Gen. 17:5)

It is therefore to be expected that God's name and titles will give us much information about Himself. When Moses wanted a deeper knowledge of God to strengthen his faith during a very traumatic period of his life, an angel proclaimed the name of the Lord. "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty" (Ex. 34:5-7). This is clear proof that the name of God entails His characteristics. His possession of them is proof that God is a personal being.

God has chosen one particular name by which He would like to be known and remembered by His people; it is a summary, an epitome, of His purpose with men. God told Israel that His name was YAHWEH, meaning "I am that I am" or, perhaps, "I will be who I will be" (Ex. 3:13-15). This name was then slightly extended. "God said moreover (i.e. in addition) unto Moses. This is what you shall say unto the children of Israel, the LORD (Yahweh) God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob...this is My name for ever, and my memorial to all generations" (Ex. 3:15). God's full name is therefore "The LORD God". One of the common Hebrew words translated 'God' is 'Elohim', meaning 'mighty ones'. God's "memorial", the name by which He wants us to remember Him, is therefore

YAHWEH ELOHIM

Implying

HE WHO WILL BE REVEALED IN A GROUP OF MIGHTY ONES

It is therefore God's purpose to reveal His character and His essential being in a large group of people. By obedience to His word we can develop some of God's characteristics in ourselves now, so that in a very limited sense God reveals Himself now in true believers in this life. But God's name is a prophecy of the time to come when the earth will be filled with people who are like Him, both in character and by nature (cf. 2 Pet. 1:4). If we wish to be associated with the purpose of God and to become like God. If we wish to die no more, living forever in complete moral perfection, then we must associate ourselves with His name. The way to do this is to be baptised into the name - i.e. Yahweh Elohim (Mt. 28:19). This also makes us the descendants of Abraham (Gal. 3:27-29) who were promised the eternal inheritance of the earth (Gen. 17:8; Rom. 4:13) - the group of 'mighty ones' ('Elohim') in whom the prophecy of God's name will be fulfilled.

The All Seeing God

That God sees and knows all things has a number of major implications for our lives in practice. Job knew this, and therefore, he commented, it was impossible that, e.g., he would lust after a woman, if he really believed (as he claimed he did) that God was omniscient. 'Why then should I think upon a young girl [as the friends implied he had done]?...does not he [God] see my ways, and count all my steps?' (Job 31:4). The Sermon on the Mount is really based around translating the knowledge that God sees and knows all things into practice. Our thoughts are equivalent to our actions; and yet often we think that the fact we are clever enough not to express them in action is somehow a lesser failure. And yet God sees our thought afar off. Realizing this will help us avoid the greatest danger in the religious life: to have an outward form of spirituality, when within we are dead. Note how the Lord Jesus begins each of His letters to the churches with the rubric: "I know..." ; His omniscience of His people ought to motivate to appropriate behaviour. Hannah had reflected upon God's omniscience; and on this basis she tells Peninah not to be proud and not to use hard words against her, exactly because of this: "Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not hardness come out of your mouth: *for* the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed" here and now, *because* He sees and knows all things (1 Sam. 2:3).

God Really Is Omnipotent

DON'T JUDGE OTHERS

The omnipotence of God not only inspires faith; it demands even more than that. Because God alone has the power to save and destroy, He alone can ultimately judge; the fact there is only one law giver means there is only one judge (James 4:12 RV). To judge, therefore, is to 'play God' in a blasphemous way, arrogating to ourselves the role of lawgiver and judge. Yet apart from God we are powerless, totally and utterly. Our powerlessness needs to be reflected upon more deeply. We simply cannot judge. The omnipotence of God alone precludes it.

NO TRUST IN WEALTH

God has 'spoken twice', an idiom for Divine emphasis upon something, that all power belongs to Him, God is omnipotent- and exactly because of this, David says, we should not set our heart upon riches if they happen to increase (Ps. 62:10,11). As the world economy develops more and more wealth, increase in riches is a temptation which faces many believers, both relatively rich and relatively poor, in most countries of the world. This most insidious temptation, David says, can be overcome by a deep sense of how important it is to believe that

all power is *of God alone*. This means that money is *not* equal to power; because all power is of God. Don't set your heart upon *money* because *power* is from God... these simple, inspired words dramatically torpedo this world's most crucial principle: that money = power. It doesn't. Quite simply, because all power is *of God*.

Responding To The One God

A DEMAND FOR OUR ALL

That God is one (Dt. 6:4) is not just a numerical description. If there is only one God, He therefore demands our *all*. Because He is the One God, He demands all our worship; and because He is One, He therefore treats all His people the same, regardless, e.g., of their nationality (Rom. 3:30). All true worshippers of the one God, whether Jew or Gentile, are united in that the one God offers salvation to them on the same basis. The fact there is only one Lord Jesus implies the same for Him (Rom. 10:12). Paul saw these implications in the doctrine of the unity of God. But that doctrine needs reflecting on before we come to grasp these conclusions. Christ taught that the command that God was one and therefore we must love God *included* the second command: to love our neighbour as ourselves. The first and second commands were in fact one command; they were inseparably part of the first commandment (Mk. 12:29-31). This is why the 'two' commandments, to love God and neighbour, are spoken of in the singular in Lk. 10:27,28: "*this* do..." . If God is one, then our brother bears the one Name of God, and so to love God is to love our brother (cp. 1 Jn. 4:21). And because there is only one God, this demands *all* our spiritual energy. There is only one, the one God, who seeks glory for men and judges them (Jn. 8:50)- therefore the unity of God should mean we do not seek glory of men, neither do we judge our brother. That God is one is a command, an imperative to action (Mk. 12:28,29).

NO IDOLATRY

There is a religious impulse within all men, a desire to serve someone or something. Generally, men and women sink this in the worship of the many idols of this materialistic age. But for us, there is to be one God, one channel alone for our devotion; for God is one. When Israel rejected the fountain of Yahweh, they hewed out many other fountains, in the form of idols (Jer. 2:13). The urge to worship is there within all men and women. We are asked to concentrate and consecrate that passion solely for the one God- not to share it between the many things that demand it. Our worlds, our lives and hearts, are full of potential idols. And what, in the most fundamental essence, is wrong with idolatry? It seems to me that idolatry *trivializes* this wonderful God of whom we have spoken. It makes the Almighty God into a piece of wood or stone, or into a smart career or new house.

1.4 The Angels

All that we have considered so far in this study is brought together by a consideration of the angels:

- real, personal beings
- carrying God's name
- beings in whom God's Spirit works to execute His will

- in accordance with His character and purpose
- and thereby manifesting Him.

We mentioned in Study 1.3 that one of the most common of the Hebrew words translated ‘God’ is ‘Elohim’, which strictly means ‘mighty ones’. The word can frequently be shown to refer to the angels who, as God’s ‘mighty ones’, carry this name and can effectively be called ‘God’ because they represent God. The record of the creation of the world in Gen. 1 tells us that God spoke certain commands concerning creation, “and it was done”. It was the angels who carried out these commands. “Angels, that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word” (Ps. 103:20). It is therefore reasonable to assume that when we read of ‘God’ creating the world, this work was actually performed by the angels. Job 38:4-7 hints this way too.

In the Bible there are two ‘natures’; by the very meaning of the word it is not possible to have both these natures simultaneously.

GOD’S NATURE (‘DIVINE NATURE’)

- He cannot sin (perfect) (Rom. 9:14; 6:23 cf. Ps. 90:2; Mt. 5:48; James 1:13)
- He cannot die, i.e. immortal (1 Tim. 6:16)
- He is full of power and energy (Is. 40:28)

This is the nature of God and the angels, and which was given to Jesus after his resurrection (Acts 13:34; Rev. 1:18; Heb. 1:3). This is the nature which we are promised (Lk. 20:35,36; 2 Pet. 1:4; Is. 40:28 cf. v 31).

HUMAN NATURE

- We are tempted to sin (James 1:13-15) by a corrupt natural mind (Jer. 17:9; Mk. 7:21-23)
- We are doomed to death, i.e. mortal (Rom. 5:12,17; 1 Cor. 15:22)
- We are of very limited strength, both physically (Is. 40:30) and mentally (Jer.10:23)

This is the nature which all men, good and bad, now possess. The end of that nature is death (Rom. 6:23). It was the nature which Jesus had during his mortal life (Heb. 2:14-18; Rom. 8:3; Jn. 2:25; Mk. 10:18).

ANGELS DO NOT SIN

The angels who are of God’s nature must therefore be sinless and unable to die - seeing that sin brings death (Rom. 6:23). Often when angels appeared on earth they looked like ordinary men. As angels share God’s nature they cannot die. Seeing that sin brings death, it follows therefore that they cannot sin. The original Greek and Hebrew words translated ‘angel’ mean ‘messenger’; the angels are the messengers or servants of God, obedient to Him, therefore it is impossible to think of them as being sinful. Thus the Greek word ‘aggelos’ which is translated ‘angels’ is also translated ‘messengers’ when speaking of human beings - e.g. John the Baptist (Mt. 11:10) and his messengers (Lk. 7:24); the messengers of Jesus (Lk. 9:52) and the men who spied out Jericho (James 2:25). It is, of course, possible that ‘angels’ in the sense of *human*

messengers can sin. The following passages clearly show that all the angels (not just some of them!) are by nature obedient to God, and therefore cannot sin:

“The Lord has prepared His throne in the heavens; and his kingdom rules over all (i.e. there can be no rebellion against God in heaven). Praise the Lord, you His angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word. Praise the Lord, *all* you His hosts; you ministers of His, that do His pleasure” (Ps. 103:19-21).

“Praise him, *all* His angels... His hosts” (Ps. 148:2)

“The angels...are they not *all* ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them (the believers) who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Heb. 1:13,14).

The repetition of the word “*all*” shows that the angels are not divided into two groups, one good and the other sinful. The importance of clearly understanding the nature of the angels is that the reward of the faithful is to share their nature: “They which shall be accounted worthy...neither marry...neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels” (Lk. 20:35,36). This is a vital point to grasp. Angels cannot die: “Death... does not lay hold of angels” (Heb. 2:16). If angels could sin, then those who are found worthy of reward at Christ’s return will also still be able to sin. And seeing that sin brings death (Rom. 6:23), they will therefore not have eternal life; if we have a possibility of sinning, we have the capability of dying. Thus to say angels can sin makes God’s promise of eternal life meaningless, seeing that our reward is to share the nature of the angels. The reference to “*the* angels” (Lk. 20:35,36) shows that there is no categorisation of angels as good or sinful; there is only one category of angels. Dan. 12:3 says that the faithful will shine as the stars; and stars are associated with the Angels (Job 38:7). We will be made like Angels; and yet we will be given immortal, sinless nature. Therefore, Angels can’t sin. Our hope is to enter into the wonderful freedom of nature which the “Sons of God”, i.e. the Angels, now share (Rom. 8:19).

God Manifestation

The name of God can be carried by anyone through whom He chooses to ‘manifest’ or reveal Himself. So men and angels as well as Jesus can carry God’s name. This is a vital principle which opens up so much of the Bible to us. A son especially may carry the name of his father; he has certain similarities with his father, he may have the same first name - but he is not one and the same person as the father. In the same way a representative of a company may speak on behalf of the company; he may telephone someone on business and say, ‘Hello, this is Unilever here’; he is not Mr. Unilever, but he carries their name because he is working on their behalf. And so it was with Jesus.

ANGELS CARRYING GOD’S NAME

We are told in Ex. 23:20,21 that God told the people of Israel that an angel would go ahead of them; “My name is in Him”, they were told. The personal name of God is ‘Yahweh’. So the angel carried the name of Yahweh, and could thus be called ‘Yahweh’, or ‘The LORD’, in small capitals, as the word ‘Yahweh’ is translated in the N.I.V. and A.V. We are told in Ex. 33:20 that no man can see the face of God and live; but in Ex. 33:11 we read that “The LORD

(Yahweh) spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaketh to his friend” - i.e. directly. It could not have been the LORD, Yahweh, Himself in person, who spoke to Moses face to face, because no man can see God Himself. It was the angel who carried God’s name who did so; and so we read of the LORD speaking face to face with Moses when it was actually an angel who did so (Acts 7:30-33).

MEN WITH GOD’S NAME

One of the passages which is most helpful in demonstrating all this is John 10:34-36. Here the Jews made the mistake which many do today. They thought that Jesus was saying he was God Himself. Jesus corrected them by saying, “Is it not written in your law, I said, You are gods? If He called them ‘gods’...why do you say of (me)...’You blaspheme!’ because I said, I am the Son of God?”. Jesus is really saying ‘In the Old Testament men are called ‘gods’; I am saying I am the *Son* of God; so why are you getting so upset?’ Jesus is actually quoting from Ps. 82, where the judges of Israel were called ‘gods’.

The priests were God’s representatives, and for a man to ‘appear before the Lord’ effectively referred to his appearance before the priest. When we read of “men going up to God at Bethel”, the ‘house of God’ (1 Sam. 10:3), we aren’t to think that God Himself lived in a house in Bethel. The reference is to the priests, his representative, being there.

JESUS AND THE NAME OF GOD

It is not surprising that Jesus, as the Son of God and His supreme manifestation to men, should also carry God’s name. He could say “I am come in my Father’s name” (Jn. 5:43). Because of his obedience, Jesus ascended to heaven and God “gave him a name which is above every name” - the name of Yahweh, of God Himself (Phil. 2:9). So this is why we read Jesus saying in Rev. 3:12: “I will write upon him (the believer) the name of my God...and I will write upon him my new name”. At the judgment Jesus will give us God’s name; we then will fully carry the name of God. He calls this name, “My new name”. Remember, Jesus gave the book of Revelation some years after his ascension into heaven and after he had been given God’s name, as explained in Phil. 2:9. So he can call God’s name “My new name”; the name he had recently been given. We can now properly understand Is. 9:6, where concerning Jesus we are told, “His *name* (note that) shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father...”. This is a prophecy that Jesus would carry *all* the name of God - that he would be the total manifestation or revelation of God to us. It was in this sense that he was called ‘Emmanuel’, meaning, ‘God is with us’, although He personally was not God. Thus the prophecy of Joel 2 that men would call on the name of Yahweh was fulfilled by people being baptised into the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:21 cf. 38). This also explains why the command to baptize into the name of the Father was fulfilled, as detailed in the Acts record, by baptism into the name of Jesus.

STUDY 1: Questions

1. What will most help develop our faith in God?

- Going to church
- Prayerful Bible study
- Talking to Christians
- Looking at nature.

2. Which of the following is the most correct definition of God?

- Just an idea in our mind
- A piece of Spirit in the atmosphere
- There is no God
- A real, material person

3. Is God

- A unity
- A trinity
- Many gods in one
- Impossible to define in any way?

4. What does God's Name 'Yahweh Elohim' mean?

- He who will be
- He who will be revealed in a group of mighty ones
- A great one
- Strength

5. What does the word 'Angel' mean?

- Man-like
- Wing covered
- Messenger

6. Can Angels sin?

- Yes
- No

7. What most convinces you that there is a God?

Study 2: God's Spirit

2.1 God's Spirit

It isn't easy to define exactly what the word "spirit" means. If you went to a wedding, for example, you might comment, "There was a really good spirit there!" By this you mean that the atmosphere was good, somehow everything about the wedding was good; everyone was smartly dressed, the food was nice, people spoke kindly to each other, the bride looked beautiful, etc. All those various things made up the "spirit" of the wedding. Likewise the spirit of God somehow summarises everything about Him. The Hebrew word translated "spirit" in the Old Testament strictly means "breath" or "power"; thus God's spirit is His "breathing", the very essence of God, reflecting His mind. The good news is that God is willing to share His Spirit with us!

It is a common Bible teaching that how a man thinks is expressed in his actions (Prov. 23:7; Mt. 12:34); a little reflection upon our own actions will confirm this. We think of something and then we do it. Our 'spirit' or mind may reflect upon the fact that we are hungry and desire food. We see a banana going spare in the kitchen; that desire of the 'spirit' is then translated into action - we reach out for the banana, peel it and eat. This simple example shows why the Hebrew word for 'spirit' means both the breath or mind, and also power. Our spirit, the essential us, refers to our thoughts and therefore also to the actions which we take to express those thoughts or disposition within us. On a far more glorious scale, God's spirit is the same; it is the power by which He displays His essential being, His disposition and purpose. God thinks and therefore does things. "As I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand" (Is. 14:24).

THE POWER OF GOD

Many passages clearly identify God's spirit with His power. In order to create the earth, "the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light" (Gen. 1:2,3).

God's spirit was the power by which all things, e.g. light, were made. "By His spirit He has created the heavens; His hand has formed the crooked serpent" (Job 26:13). A comparison of Mt. 12:28 and Lk. 11:20 shows that "the finger of God" and "the spirit of God" are parallel - God in action is His spirit. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth" (Ps. 33:6). God's spirit is therefore described as follows.

- His breath
- His word
- His finger
- His hand

It is therefore His power by which He achieves all things. For example, believers are born again by God's will (Jn. 1:13), which is by His spirit (Jn. 3:3-5). His will is put into operation by the spirit. Speaking of the entire natural creation, we read: "You send forth your spirit, they are created: and (thereby) you renew the face of the earth" (Ps. 104:30). This spirit/power is also the

sustainer of all things, as well as the means of their creation. It is easy to think that this tragic life stumbles on without this active input of God's spirit. Job, a man who became weary of this life, was reminded of this by another prophet: "If he (God) gather unto himself his spirit and his breath; all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust" (Job 34:14,15). When pulling out of a similar trough of depression, David asked God to continue to uphold him with this spirit, i.e. to preserve his life (Ps. 51:12).

God's spirit is the means by which He is present everywhere, although He personally is located in heaven.

"You know my sitting down and standing up, you understand my thought far off... Where shall I go from your spirit? or where shall I flee from your presence? If I dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there... your right hand (i.e. through the spirit) shall hold me" (Ps. 139:2,7,9,10).

THE HOLY SPIRIT

The phrase "Holy Spirit" is to be found almost exclusively in the New Testament. In the A.V. the name "Holy Ghost" is often used, but it should always be translated as "Holy Spirit", as modern versions make clear. This is equivalent to the Old Testament phrases "the spirit of God" or "the spirit of the Lord". Notice, too, how the Holy Spirit is paralleled with the power of God in the following passages.

- "The Holy Spirit shall come upon you (Mary), and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you" (Lk. 1:35)
- "The power of the Holy Spirit...mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the spirit of God" (Rom. 15:13,19)
- "Our gospel (preaching) came...in power, and in the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 1:5).
- The promise of the Holy Spirit to the disciples was spoken of as their being "endued with power from on high" (Lk. 24:49).
- Jesus himself had been "anointed...with the Holy Spirit and with power" (Acts 10:38).
- The "promise of the *Holy Spirit*" (Acts 1:5) is defined as "*power* from on high" in Lk. 24:49. Hence the disciples received *power* after the *Holy Spirit* came upon them (Acts 1:8).

2.2 Inspiration

We mentioned in the previous section how God's spirit was seen at work in the creation: "By his spirit he has created the heavens" (Job 26:13) - the spirit of God moving upon the face of the waters to bring about the present creation (Gen. 1:2). Yet we also read that "by the word of the Lord" the world was made (Ps. 33:6), as shown by the Genesis narrative recording that "God said" things were to be created, and it happened. God's spirit, therefore, is very much reflected in His word. Likewise our words express our inner thoughts and desires - the real 'us' - very accurately. Jesus wisely pointed out: "Out of the abundance of the heart (the mind) the mouth speaks" (Mt. 12:34). So if we would control our words, we must firstly work on our thoughts.

God's Word, then, is a reflection of His spirit, or thoughts. It is such a blessing that in the Bible we have God's words written down so that we might understand God's spirit or mind. David spoke of how God's word and "own heart" are parallel (2 Sam. 7:21); God's mind/spirit is expressed in His Word. God achieved this miracle of expressing His spirit in written words by the process of *INSPIRATION*. This term is based around the word "spirit".

IN-SPIRIT-ATION

"Spirit" means "breath" or breathing, "Inspiration" means "in-breathing". This means that the words which men wrote while under "inspiration" from God were the words of God's spirit. Paul encouraged Timothy not to let his familiarity with the Bible lead him to forget the wonder of the fact that it is the words of God's spirit, and therefore provides all that we need in order to have a true knowledge of God.

"From a child you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is useful for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:15-17).

This unwillingness to accept the huge spiritual power which is in God's word has led many to question whether all the Scriptures are fully inspired by God. They have suggested that much of what we read in the Bible was just the personal opinions of the writers. But Peter effectively disposes of such woolly reasoning:

"We have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it...above all, you must understand (this is vital!) that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:19-21 N.I.V.).

We must "above all" believe that the Bible is inspired. The doctrine of inspiration is so often emphasised in the Bible text (e.g. Mt. 15:4; Mk. 12:36; Acts 1:16; 28:25; Heb. 3:7; 9:8; 10:15).

THE WRITERS OF THE BIBLE

A solid belief in the total inspiration of the Scriptures is therefore vital. The men who wrote the Bible were irresistibly carried along by the spirit which inspired them, so that their words were not their own. The Word of God being the truth (Jn. 17:17) and providing rebuke and correction (2 Tim. 3:16,17), it is not surprising that with many people it is unpopular - for truth hurts. The prophet Jeremiah suffered much opposition for speaking forth the words God inspired him with, and so he determined not to record or publicise the words which he was given. But because the writing of God's Word is a result of God's will rather than human desire, he was "carried along by the Holy Spirit" so that he had no choice in the matter. "I am in derision daily, every one mocks me...Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with holding it back" (Jer. 20:7,9). Peter describes this idea of the Bible writers being 'carried along' with the same Greek word used in Acts 27:17,27 about a ship being 'driven' by the wind, out of control. Mic. 2:7 comments that truly inspired prophets can't be stopped from speaking forth

God's word, because God's Spirit controlling them can't be constrained. Those men were truly 'carried along'.

Likewise when Balaam was determined to curse Israel, the spirit of God made him speak out a blessing on them instead (Num. 24:1-13 cf. Dt. 23:5). He could not 'escape from' God's word (Num. 22:12 Heb.). Jude says that he intended to write a letter about a totally different theme to the one he ended up writing about, because "I was constrained to write..." (Jude 3 RV)- by the Holy Spirit inspiring him.

A surprising number of the men whom God inspired to speak His word went through periods of reluctance to do so. The list is impressive.

- Moses (Ex. 4:10)
- Jeremiah (Jer. 1:6)
- Ezekiel (Ez. 3:14)
- Jonah (Jonah 1:2,3)
- Paul (Acts 18:9)
- Timothy (1 Tim. 4:6-14)
- Balaam (Num. 22-24)

This all confirms what we learnt in 2 Pet. 1:19-21 - that God's Word is not the personal opinion of men, but the result of men being inspired to write down what was revealed to them. The prophet Amos reflected: "The Lord God has spoken, who can but prophesy?" (Am. 3:8).

The inspired writer of Psalm 45 says that his tongue is like the pen of a writer (Ps. 45:1). The writer is God. God was using the inspired person's words as His pen, with which to communicate to men. Ezra likewise saw himself as a "scribe of the law of the God of heaven" (Ezra 7:21). The God who is in Heaven wrote through a scribe here on earth. That's the idea of inspiration.

2.3 Gifts of the Holy Spirit

At various times in His dealings with men, God conferred the use of His power (“Holy Spirit”) on men. However, this was never in the form of a “blank cheque”, as it were, enabling them to do what they wished; always the use of this Holy Spirit was for a specific purpose. When it was accomplished, the gift of the Holy Spirit was withdrawn. God has always given His spirit to achieve specific, defined objectives. Because of this, those who truly possessed the gifts of the spirit knew exactly what they were to use them for, and therefore did not achieve only partial success in their use of them. This contrasts with the many failures and partial cures experienced by those who claim to have spirit gifts of healing today.

The following examples all indicate specific reasons and objectives being behind the granting of spirit gifts.

- Early in Israel’s history, they were commanded to make an elaborate tent (“tabernacle”) in which the altar and other holy items could be kept; detailed instructions were given concerning how to make all the items which would be necessary for the worship of God. To accomplish this, God gave His spirit to certain men. They were, “filled with the spirit of wisdom, *that they may make Aaron’s garments...*” etc. (Ex. 28:3).
- One of these men, Bezaleel, was “filled with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, *to...work in gold and...in cutting of stones...in all manner of workmanship*” (Ex. 31: 3-5).
- Num. 11:14-17 records how some of the spirit/power delegated to Moses was taken from him and given to the elders of Israel, for the purpose of enabling them to correctly judge the people’s grievances so that there was less pressure on Moses. Just before Moses’ death, the spirit gift was transferred from him to Joshua so that he, too, could properly lead God’s people (Dt. 34:9).
- Samson, was given the spirit in order to kill a lion (Jud. 14:5,6); to kill 30 men (Jud. 14:19) and to break apart cords with which he had been tied up (Jud. 15: 14). Such “Holy Spirit” was therefore not possessed by Samson continually - it came upon him to achieve specific things and was then withdrawn.

Having the Holy Spirit gifts was no guarantee of salvation. It is grace that saves, not Spirit gifts (Eph. 2:8). Men like Saul, Balaam (Num. 23:5,16), Judas (Mt. 10:1) and those of Mt. 7:21-23 all had the gifts; and yet they will not be saved. It’s a scary thought- that God can use us to do His will, even empower us to do His work; and yet this of itself is irrelevant to our personal salvation.

REASONS FOR THE GIFTS IN THE FIRST CENTURY

The gifts of the Holy Spirit were made available for the guidance of the early believers through inspired messages, until the New Testament record of these messages and the teaching of Jesus was written and circulated.

- “When he (Jesus) ascended up on high (to heaven), he...gave (spirit) gifts unto men...for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the (preaching) ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ”, i.e. the believers (Eph. 4:8,12).
- So Paul wrote to the believers at Rome, “I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end you may be established” (Rom. 1:11).
- Concerning the use of the gifts to confirm the preaching of the Gospel, we read: “Our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance” through the miracles wrought (1 Thess. 1:5 cf. 1 Cor. 1:5,6). Paul could speak of “those things which Christ has worked by me, to make the Gentiles obedient by word and (miraculous) deed, through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the spirit of God” (Rom. 15:18,19).
- A Gospel preaching campaign in Cyprus was backed up by miracles, so that “the deputy (governor), when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine” (Acts 13:12).

Thus the miracles led him to really respect the doctrines being taught. At Iconium also, “the Lord... gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done” (Acts 14:3).

All this is summarised by the comment on the apostles’ obedience to the command to preach: “They went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following” (Mk. 16:20).

SPECIFIC THINGS AT SPECIFIC TIMES

These gifts of the spirit were therefore given in order to perform specific things at specific times.

THE FIRST CENTURY SPIRIT GIFTS

- Prophecy

The Greek word for ‘prophet’ means someone who forth-tells God’s Word - i.e. any person inspired to speak God’s words, which at times included foretelling of future events (see 2 Pet. 1:19-21). Thus “prophets” - those with the gift of prophecy - came “from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be a great famine throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren” (Acts 11:27-29). This kind of highly specific prophecy, which had a clear fulfilment within a few years, is quite lacking amongst those who now claim to possess the gift of prophecy.

- Healing

A classic example is found in Peter’s healing of the lame beggar who was laid each morning at the temple gate. Acts 3:2 mentions that they laid him there daily - so he would have been a familiar sight. Having been healed by Peter’s use of the spirit gift, “he leaping up stood,

and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking and leaping... And all the people saw him walking and praising God: and they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter... all the people ran together unto them in the porch... greatly wondering” (Acts 3:7-11).

Peter then immediately launched into an open-air talk about the resurrection of Christ. Having the unquestionable, irrefutable evidence before them in the form of that healed beggar, we can be sure that they would have taken Peter’s words to be those of God. The temple gate at “the hour of prayer” (Acts 3:1) would have been thronged with people, like a shopping mall on a Saturday morning. It was in a place like this that God chose to confirm the preaching of His word by such a clear miracle. Likewise in Acts 5:12 we read that “by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people”. The usual claims made by ‘faith healers’ today seem to revolve around things which have happened in some back-street hall rather than on the streets, and in the audience of ‘believers’ hyped up into a spirit of expectancy for a ‘miracle’ to occur, rather than before the hard-hearted general public.

- Tongues

The apostles, rough fishermen that some of them were, received the great commission to go out into all the world, preaching the Gospel (Mk. 16:15,16). Perhaps their very first reaction was, “But I don’t know the languages!”. To overcome this, the gift of speaking in foreign languages (“tongues”) and being able to understand them, was granted. On the Jewish feast of Pentecost, soon after Christ’s ascension to heaven, the apostles “were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues...The crowds came together (again, a public display of the gifts!) and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue (the same Greek word translated ‘languages’) wherein we were born? Parthians and Medes...we hear them speak in our tongues...And they were all amazed” (Acts 2:4-12). It is unlikely that the double emphasis on the people’s amazement and their marvelling would have been necessary if they had heard only the mumbo-jumbo spoken by those who claim to have the gift today; that gives rise to petty sarcasm or indifference, rather than the amazement and conviction from understanding the words being spoken, which was experienced in Acts 2. Apart from the clear parallel between “tongues” and “languages” in Acts 2:4-11, “tongues” is very evidently used to mean “languages” in other parts of the New Testament (Rev. 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 17:15).

2.4 The Withdrawal of the Gifts

The miraculous gifts of God's spirit will be used again by the believers in order to change this present world into God's Kingdom, after the return of Christ. The gifts are therefore called "the powers of the world (age) to come" (Heb. 6:4,5); and Joel 2:26-29 describes a great outpouring of the spirit gifts after the repentance of Israel. The very fact that these miraculous gifts will be given to the believers on Christ's return is proof enough that they are not possessed now. "If there be prophecies, they shall fail; if there be tongues, they shall cease; if there be (the gift of) knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect [complete] is come, then that which is in part shall be done away" (1 Cor. 13:8-10). The gifts "are temporary" (G.N.B.). Eph. 4:8-14 helps us understand this further.

"When he (Jesus) ascended up on high (to heaven), he...gave (spirit) gifts unto men...for the building up of the body of Christ: until we all come in (unto) the unity of the faith (i.e. the one faith), and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man...That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and thrown about with every wind of doctrine."

The gifts of the first century were to be given until the perfect, or mature, man was reached. Note how Eph. 4:14 likens being under the ministry of the miraculous gifts, to spiritual childhood; and, in the context of prophesying, how the miraculous gifts were to be taken away. 1 Cor. 13:11 says the same. Making the claim of possessing the miraculous spirit gifts is therefore not a sign of spiritual maturity. The miraculous Spirit gifts were given until the church became "perfect" or mature. This cannot refer to the second coming of Christ because the word is repeatedly used about how the believers in the first century ought to become "mature". The 'passing away' of the gifts is related to the 'passing away' of the Jewish and Mosaic system in AD70. This was in any case moving into the second generation after Christ; and it seems that the miraculous gifts were largely obtained by the laying on of hands of the Apostles. As that generation died out, and the more mature ones like Paul stopped using the gifts widely, then the possession of the gifts would have declined in any case.

This is not to say that the Spirit of God is not active today. The form of manifestation has changed- in this dispensation we don't experience the miraculous gifts. But there are clear promises of God's action in the life and hearts of His people, and there is in this sense the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who are baptized. Even more than forgiveness, we need the strength to change, to not repeat sin. We need the power of God in our lives, a new mindset, a new psychology, a new spirit... a holy spirit. For we simply lack the steel in our own soul required to hold ourselves back from sin; instead we seek a new atmosphere to think and live in. And this is God's Spirit, which He promises to all who are in Christ.

"For this cause I bow my knees to the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, that you may be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man. That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, to the end that you would be rooted and grounded in love, that you might be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height, and to truly know and understand the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him that is able to do immeasurably above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory

in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations for ever and ever. Amen” (Eph. 3:14-21).

STUDY 2: Questions

1. What does the word 'Spirit' mean?
 - Power
 - Holy
 - Breath
 - Dust
 - To back up the verbal preaching of the Gospel
 - To develop the early church
 - To force people to be righteous
 - To save the apostles from personal difficulties.

2. What is the Holy Spirit?
 - A person
 - God's power
 - Part of a trinity.

3. How was the Bible written?
 - Men wrote down their own ideas
 - Men wrote what they thought God meant
 - Through the inspiration of men, by God's Spirit
 - Some of it was inspired, other parts were not.

4. Which of the following are reasons why the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were given?
 - From where can we learn God's truth?
 - Partly from the Bible, partly from our own thinking
 - From the Holy Spirit telling us things directly
 - From the Bible alone
 - From religious ministers / priests.

5. Name spirit gifts possessed in the first century.

6. When were they withdrawn? Can we have them now?

7. How can the Holy Spirit work in our lives today?

- 8.

Study 3: The Promises of God

3.1 The Promise in Eden

The story of humanity's fall is related in Genesis chapter 3. The serpent was cursed for misquoting God's word and tempting Eve to disobey it. The man and woman were punished for their disobedience. But a ray of hope comes into this dark picture when God says to the serpent.

"I will put enmity (hatred, opposition) between you and the woman, and between your descendant and her (special, notable) descendant; it (the woman's descendant) shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15).

This verse is highly concentrated; we need to carefully define the various things involved. We will see later that Abraham's special descendant was Jesus (Gal. 3:16), but that if we are in Jesus by baptism, then we also are the "descendant" (Gal. 3:27-29). This word "descendant" is translated "seed" in some versions, as it also refers to the idea of sperm (1 Pet. 1:23); so a true 'seed' will have the characteristics of its father.

The seed or descendant of the serpent must therefore refer to that which has the family likeness of the serpent.

- distorting God's Word
- lying
- leading others into sin.

We will see in Study 6 that there is not a literal person doing this, but that within us there is.

- "our old man" of the flesh (Rom. 6:6)
- "the natural man" (1 Cor. 2:14)
- "the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts" (Eph. 4:22)
- "the old man with his deeds" (Col. 3:9).

This "man" of sin within us is the Biblical "devil", the serpent.

The descendant of the woman was to be a specific individual - "you (the serpent) shalt bruise *his* heel" (Gen. 3:15). This person was to crush permanently the serpent, i.e. sin - "it shall bruise your head". Hitting a snake on the head is a deathblow - its brain is in its head. The only person who is a candidate for the descendant of the woman must be the Lord Jesus.

- "Jesus Christ, who has (by the cross) abolished death (and therefore the power of sin - Rom. 6:23), and has brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10).

- On the cross, it was by His being ‘bruised’ [an allusion to Gen. 3:15] that we find forgiveness (Is. 53:5 AVmg.).

Jesus was literally “made of a woman” (Gal. 4:4). He was the son of Mary, although God was his Father. Thus in this sense he was the descendant of the woman but not the descendant of a man as he had no human father. This descendant of the woman was to be temporarily wounded by sin, the serpent - “you shall bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). A snakebite on the heel is normally a temporary wound, compared to the permanence of hitting the snake on the head.

The condemnation of sin, the serpent, was through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross - notice how the verses quoted above speak of Christ’s victory over sin in the past tense. The temporary wound to the heel suffered by Jesus is therefore a reference to his death for three days. His resurrection proved that this was only a temporary wound, compared to the deathblow that he gave sin. It is interesting that non-Biblical historical records indicate that victims of crucifixion were nailed through their heel to the stake of wood. Thus Jesus was “wounded in the heel” through his death. Is. 53:4,5 describes Christ as being ‘bruised’ by God through his death on the cross. This plainly alludes to the prophecy of Gen. 3:15 that the serpent would bruise Christ. However, ultimately God worked through the evil which Christ faced, *He* is described here as doing the bruising (Is. 53:10), through controlling the forces of evil which bruised His Son. And so God also works through the evil experiences of each of His children.

3.2 The Promise to Abraham

The Gospel taught by Jesus and the apostles was not fundamentally different from that understood by Abraham. God “preached before the gospel unto Abraham” (Gal. 3:8). So crucial are these promises that Peter started and ended his public proclamation of the Gospel with reference to them (Acts 3:13,25). If we can understand what was taught to Abraham, we will then have a very basic picture of the Christian Gospel. There are other indications that “the gospel” is not something which just began at the time of Jesus.

- “We declare unto you glad tidings (the Gospel), how that the promise which was made unto the (Jewish) fathers, God has fulfilled” (Acts 13:32,33).
- “The gospel of God, which he had promised afore by his prophets (e.g. Abraham, Gen. 20:7) in the holy scriptures” (Rom. 1:1,2).
- “For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead” (1 Pet. 4:6) - i.e. believers who had lived and died before the first century.
- “For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them” (Heb. 4:2) - i.e. Israel in the wilderness.

The promises to Abraham have two basic themes.
 (1) things about Abraham’s special descendant and
 (2) things about the land which was promised to Abraham.

The Land

1. “Get out of your country... unto a land that I will show you” (Gen. 12:1).

2. Abraham “went on his journeys... to Bethel (in Central Israel). And the Lord said unto Abram... Lift up now your eyes, and look from the place where you are northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which you see, to you will I give it, and to your descendant for ever... walk through the land... for I will give it unto you” (Gen. 13:3,14-17).

3. “The Lord made a covenant with Abraham, saying, Unto your descendant [singular- i.e. one special descendant] have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates” (Gen. 15:18).

4. “I will give unto you, and to your descendant [singular- i.e. one special descendant] after you, the land wherein you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession” (Gen. 17:8).

5. “The promise that he (Abraham) should be the heir of the world” (Rom. 4:13).

Scripture goes out of its way to remind us that Abraham did not receive the fulfilment of the promises in his lifetime: “By faith he sojourned (implying a temporary way of life) in the land of promise, as in a strange country, living in tents” (Heb. 11:9).

He lived as a foreigner in the land, perhaps with the same furtive sense of insecurity and mismatch which a refugee feels. He was hardly living with his descendant in his own land. Along with his descendants, Isaac and Jacob, (to whom the promises were repeated), he “died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and (they) were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Heb. 11:13). Notice the four stages.

- Knowing the promises - as we are doing through this study.
- Being “persuaded of them” - if it took a process of persuasion with Abraham, how much more so with us?
- Embracing them - by being baptised into Christ (Gal. 3:27-29).
- Confessing to the world by our way of life that this world is not our real home, but we are living in hope of that future age to come upon the earth.

Abraham becomes our great hero and example if we appreciate these things. The ultimate recognition that the fulfilment of the promises lay in the future came for the tired old man when his wife died; he actually had to buy part of the promised land in which to bury her (Acts 7:16). Truly God “gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession” (Acts 7:5). The present spiritual children / descendants of Abraham may feel the same incongruity as they buy or rent property - on an earth which has been promised to them for their personal, eternal inheritance!

But God keeps His promises. There must come a day when Abraham and all who have those promises made to them will be rewarded. Heb. 11:13,39,40 drives home the point.

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises; God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect”.

All true believers will therefore be rewarded at the same point in time, i.e. at the judgment seat at the last day (2 Tim. 4:1,8; Mt. 25:31-34; 1 Pet. 5:4). It follows that to be in existence in order to be judged, Abraham and others who knew those promises must be resurrected just before the judgment. If they have not now received the promises and will only do so after their resurrection and judgment at Christ’s return, there is no alternative but to accept that the likes of Abraham are now unconscious, awaiting the coming of Christ. Yet stained glass mosaics in churches throughout the world have been known to depict Abraham as now in heaven, experiencing the promised reward for a life of faith. Thousands of people for hundreds of years have filed past those pictures, religiously accepting such ideas. Will you have the Bible-based courage to step out of line?

The Descendant

The promise of a descendant applies primarily to Jesus and, secondarily, to those who are “in Christ” and therefore are also counted as the descendant of Abraham..

1. “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you... and in you shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:2,3).

2. “I will make your descendant as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall your descendant also be numbered... all the land which you see, to you will I give it, and to your descendant for ever” (Gen. 13:15,16).

3. “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars, if you be able to number them...So shall your descendant be... Unto your descendant have I given this land” (Gen. 15:5,18).

4. “I will give unto... your descendant[s] after you... the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God” (Gen. 17:8).

5. “I will multiply your descendant as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and your descendant shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in your descendant shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 22:17,18).

Notice that the descendant was to bring “blessings” to be available to people from all over the earth. In the Bible the idea of blessing is often connected with forgiveness of sins. After all, this is the greatest blessing a lover of God could ever want. So we read things like: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven” (Ps. 32:1); “The cup of blessing” (1 Cor. 10:16), describing the cup of wine which represents Christ’s blood, through which forgiveness is possible.

The only descendant of Abraham who has brought forgiveness of sins to the world is, of course, Jesus, and the New Testament commentary on the promises to Abraham provides solid support.

“He (God) doesn’t say, ‘And to descendants’, in the plural, but in the singular, ‘And to your descendant’, which is Christ” (Gal. 3:16).

“...the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in your descendant shall all the tribes of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus (i.e. the descendant), sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (Acts 3:25,26).

Notice here how Peter quotes and interprets Gen. 22:18.

The descendant = Jesus

The blessing = forgiveness of sins.

The promise that Jesus, the descendant, would have victory over his enemies now slots more neatly into place if this is read with reference to his victory over sin - the greatest enemy of God’s people, and therefore of Jesus, too.

Becoming Part Of The Descendant

By now it should be clear that Abraham understood the basic elements of the Christian Gospel. But these vital promises were to Abraham and his descendant, Jesus. What about anyone else? Even physical descent from Abraham would not automatically make someone part of that one specific descendant (Jn. 8:39; Rom. 9:7). Somehow we have to become intimately part of Jesus, so that the promises to the descendant are shared with us as well. This is by baptism into Jesus (Rom. 6:3-5); frequently we read of baptism *into* his name (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5). Gal. 3:27-29 could not make the point any clearer.

“As many of you (i.e. only as many!) as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek (Gentile), there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one (through being) in Christ Jesus (by baptism). And if you be Christ’s (by baptism into him), then are you Abraham’s descendants, and heirs according to the promise”.

The promise is of eternal life on earth, through receiving the “blessing” of forgiveness through Jesus. It is by being baptised into Christ, the descendant, that we share the promises made to him; and so Rom. 8:17 calls us “joint heirs with Christ”. People from all nations “bless themselves” by becoming part of that descendant through baptism into Him- they thus appropriate to themselves the promised blessings (Gen. 22:18 RVmg.).

We can summarise the two strands of the promises given to Abraham.

1. The Land

Abraham and his descendant, Jesus, and those in him would inherit the land of Canaan and by extension the whole earth, and live there forever. In this life they would not receive it, but would do so at the last day, when Jesus returns.

2. The Descendant

This was primarily Jesus. Through Him the sins (“enemies”) of mankind would be overcome, so that the blessings of forgiveness would be made available world-wide. By baptism into the name of Jesus we become part of the descendant promised to Abraham. These same two threads occur in New Testament preaching, and, not surprisingly, it is often recorded that when people heard them taught, they were then baptised. This was, and is, the way through which these promises can be made to us. We can now understand why, as an old man faced with death, Paul could define his hope as “the hope of Israel” (Acts 28:20): the true Christian hope is the original Jewish hope. Christ’s comment that “salvation is of the Jews” (Jn. 4:22) must also refer to the need to become spiritual Jews, so that we can benefit from the promises of salvation through Christ which were made to the Jewish fathers.

We read that the early Christians preached:

1. “The things concerning the Kingdom of God
2. the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12).

These were the very two things explained to Abraham under slightly different headings.

1. Promises about the land
2. Promises about the descendant.

The descendant or “seed” must have the characteristics of its ancestor. If we are to be the true descendant of Abraham we must therefore not only be baptised but also have a very real faith in God’s promises, just as he had. He is therefore called “the father of all them that believe...who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had” (Rom. 4:11,12). “Know therefore (i.e. really take it to heart!) that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham” (Gal. 3:7). Paul is alluding here to the practice of Gentile converts to Judaism [“proselytes”] taking the name *ben Avraham*, son of Abraham. The real conversion to the hope of Israel, Paul is saying, is not through joining Judaism but through faith and baptism (Gal. 3:27-29).

Real faith must show itself in some sort of action, otherwise, in God’s eyes, it isn’t faith (James 2:17). We demonstrate our belief in these promises that we have studied by first being baptised, so that they come to apply to us personally (Gal. 3:27-29). This is even an Old Testament idea- for David says that the true believer will share the promise to Abraham that “his descendant shall inherit the land”, and thus God will make us know personally His covenant with us (Ps. 25:13,14 RVmg.). So do you really believe God’s promises? This is a question we must continually ask ourselves all our lives long.

The Old and New Covenants

It should be evident by now that the promises to Abraham summarise the Gospel of Christ. The other major set of promises which God made were with the Jews in the context of the law of Moses. These stated that if the Jews were obedient to this law, then they would be

physically blessed in this life (Dt. 28). There was no direct promise of eternal life in this series of promises, or “covenant”. So we see that there have been two “covenants” made.

1. To Abraham and his descendant, promising forgiveness and eternal life in God’s Kingdom when Christ returns. This promise was also made in Eden and to David. This is the “new covenant”. When this “new covenant” is made with Israel when Christ returns, it will include the promise to Abraham that “I will be their God” (Jer. 31:33 cf. Gen. 17:8).

2. To the Jewish people at the time of Moses, promising them peace and happiness in this present life if they obeyed the law which God gave to Moses.

God promised Abraham forgiveness and eternal life in the Kingdom, but this was only possible through the sacrifice of Jesus. For this reason we read that Christ’s death on the cross confirmed the promises to Abraham (Gal. 3:17; Rom. 15:8; Dan. 9:27; 2 Cor. 1:20), therefore his blood is called the “blood of the new testament” (covenant, Mt. 26:28). It is to remember this that Jesus told us to regularly take the cup of wine, symbolising his blood, to remind us of these things (see 1 Cor. 11:25): “This cup is the new testament (covenant) in my blood” (Lk. 22:20). There is no point in “breaking bread” in memory of Jesus and his work unless we understand these things.

The sacrifice of Jesus made forgiveness and eternal life in God’s Kingdom possible; he therefore made the promises to Abraham sure; he was “a surety of a better testament” (Heb. 7:22). Heb. 10:9 speaks of Jesus taking “away the first (covenant), that he may establish the second”. This shows that when Jesus confirmed the promises to Abraham, he did away with another covenant, that was the covenant given through Moses. The verses already quoted about Jesus confirming a new covenant by his death, imply that there was an old covenant which he did away with (Heb. 8:13).

This means that although the covenant concerning Christ was made first, it did not come into operation until his death, therefore it is called the “new” covenant. The purpose of the “old” covenant made through Moses was to point forward to the work of Jesus, and to highlight the importance of faith in the promises concerning Christ (Gal. 3:19,21). Conversely, faith in Christ confirms the truth of the law given to Moses (Rom. 3:31). Paul sums it up: “The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Gal. 3:24). It is for this purpose that the law through Moses has been preserved, and is still beneficial for us to study.

We can summarise as follows.

- Promises concerning Christ made to Abraham - New Covenant.
- Promises to Israel associated with the law given to Moses - Old Covenant.
- Death of Christ - Old Covenant ended (Col. 2:14-17); New Covenant came into operation.

“I Will Be With You”

There are two other things promised to Abraham and his descendants: “I will be their God... I will be with you” (Gen. 17:8; 26:3; 28:15 cf. Ex. 6:7). The Lord Jesus Christ is ‘God with us’ (Emmanuel, Is. 7:14). For those of us who have part in these promises concerning Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God, God will be with us and guide us to that happy end. Time and again God’s people in their times of desperation have come back to these promises to Abraham, in their realisation that truly God *is* with us (e.g. 2 Chron. 32:7,8). Covenant relationship with God means that He will give us foretastes of His future salvation by being our God *now* and going with us in salvation *now* (Ps. 111:9). And we will respond to this, and fulfil the truth of 2 Cor. 1:20, which says that the sure outworking of God’s promises to us results in us glorifying Him.

3.3 The Promise to David

David, like Abraham and many other recipients of God’s promises, did not have an easy life. He grew up as the youngest son in a large family which, in the Israel of 1000 B.C., meant looking after the sheep and running errands for his older brothers (1 Sam. 15-17). During this time he learnt a level of faith in God which few men have since approached.

The day came when Israel were faced with the ultimate challenge from their aggressive neighbours, the Philistines; they were challenged to let one of their men fight the giant Goliath, the Philistine champion, on the understanding that whoever won that fight would rule over the losers. With God’s help David defeated Goliath by using a sling, which earned him even greater popularity than their king (Saul). “Jealousy is cruel as the grave” (Song 8:6), words which were proved true by Saul’s persecution of David chasing him around the wilderness of southern Israel.

Eventually David became king, and to show his appreciation of God’s love toward him during the wilderness of his life, he decided to build God a temple. The reply from God was that David’s son, Solomon, would build the temple and that God wanted to build *David* a house (2 Sam. 7:4-13). Then followed a detailed promise which repeats much of what was told Abraham, and which also filled in some other details.

“And when your days are fulfilled, and you shall sleep with your fathers, I will set up your descendant after you, which shall proceed out of your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you: your throne shall be established forever” (v.12-16).

From our previous studies we would expect the “descendant” to be Jesus. His description as the Son of God (2 Sam. 7:14) confirms this, as do many other references in other parts of the Bible.

- “I am the... offspring of David”, Jesus said (Rev. 22:16).

- “(Jesus), made of the family [AV “seed”] of David according to the flesh” (Rom. 1:3).
- “Of this man’s descendants (David’s) has God, according to His promise, raised unto Israel a saviour, Jesus” (Acts 13:23).
- The angel told the virgin Mary concerning her son, Jesus: “The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father (ancestor) David...and of his Kingdom there shall be no end” (Lk. 1:32,33). This is applying the promise of David’s descendant, in 2 Sam. 7:13, to Jesus.

With the descendant firmly identified as Jesus, a number of details now become significant.

1. The Descendant

“Your descendant... which shall proceed out of your body... I will be his father, and he shall be my son.” “Of the fruit of your body will I set upon your throne” (2 Sam. 7:12,14; Ps. 132:10,11). Jesus, the descendant, was to be a literal, bodily descendant of David, and yet have God as his Father. This could only be achieved by the virgin birth as described in the New Testament; Jesus’ mother was Mary, a descendant of David (Lk. 1:32), but he had no human father. God acted miraculously upon Mary’s womb by the Holy Spirit in order to make her conceive Jesus, and so the Angel commented: “Therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God” (Lk. 1:35). The “virgin birth” was the only way in which this promise to David could be properly fulfilled.

2. The House

“He shall build an house for My name” (2 Sam. 7:13) shows that Jesus will build a temple for God. God’s “house” is where He is willing to live, and Is. 66:1,2 tells us that He will come to live in the hearts of men who are humble to His word. Jesus is therefore building a spiritual temple for God to dwell in, made up of the true believers. Descriptions of Jesus as the foundation stone of God’s temple (1 Pet. 2:4-8) and of Christians as the temple stones (1 Pet. 2:5) now slot into place.

3. The Throne

“I will establish the throne of his (Christ’s) kingdom for ever... your (David’s) house and your kingdom... your throne shall be established for ever” (2 Sam. 7:13,16 cf. Is. 9:6,7). Christ’s kingdom will therefore be based on David’s kingdom of Israel; this means that the coming kingdom of God will be a re-establishment of the kingdom of Israel. To fulfil this promise, Christ must reign on David’s “throne”, or place of rulership. This was literally in Jerusalem. This is another proof that the kingdom must be established here on earth in order to fulfil these promises.

4. The Kingdom

“Your house and your kingdom shall be established for ever *before you*” (2 Sam. 7:16) suggests that David would witness the establishment of Christ’s eternal kingdom. This was therefore an indirect promise that he would be resurrected at Christ’s return so that he could see with his own eyes the kingdom being set up world-wide, with Jesus reigning from Jerusalem.

It is a tragedy that parts of Christendom have adopted doctrines which flatly contradict these marvellous truths.

- If Jesus physically “pre-existed”, i.e. he existed as a person before he was born, then this makes nonsense of these promises that Jesus would be David’s descendant.
- If the kingdom of God will be in heaven, then Jesus cannot re-establish David’s kingdom of Israel, nor can he reign from David’s “throne” or place of rulership. These things were literally on the earth, and so their re-establishment must be in the same place.

STUDY 3: Questions

1. Which of God's promises predicts a constant struggle between sin and the righteous?

- The promise to Noah
- The promise in Eden
- The promise to David
- The promise to Abraham

2. Which of the following statements are true concerning the promise in Eden?

- The seed of the serpent is Lucifer
- Christ and the righteous are the woman's seed
- The seed of the serpent was temporarily wounded by Christ

The seed of the woman was bruised by Christ's death.

3. Where would Abraham's seed live for ever?

- In Heaven
- In the city of Jerusalem
- On the earth

Some in Heaven and some on earth.

4. Which of the following were promised to David?

- That his great descendant would reign for ever
- That his 'seed' would have a Kingdom in Heaven

That the seed would be God's son

That his seed, Jesus, would live in Heaven before birth on earth.

5. How can we become the seed of Abraham?

6. Will the earth ever be destroyed?

Yes

No

7. How do God's promises prove your answer to question 6?

8. Explain the promise in Eden in Genesis 3:15.

Study 4: Death

4.1 THE NATURE OF MAN

To understand our true nature, we need to consider what the Bible says about the creation of man. The record is in plain language, which, if taken literally, leaves us in no doubt about exactly what we are by. “The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground... out of it (the ground) you (Adam) were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 2:7; 3:19). There is absolutely no hint here that man has any inherent immortality; there is no part of him that will live on after death.

There is a marked Biblical emphasis on the fact that man is fundamentally composed of mere dust: “We are the clay” (Is. 64:8); “man is of the earth, made of dust;” (1 Cor. 15:47); man’s “foundation is in the dust” (Job 4:19); “and man would return to dust” (Job 34:14,15). Abraham admitted that he was “but dust and ashes” (Gen. 18:27). Immediately after disobeying God’s command in Eden, God “drove out the man...lest he put out his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever” (Gen. 3:24,22). If man had an immortal element within him naturally, this would have been unnecessary.

CONDITIONAL IMMORTALITY

The following passages should be proof enough that this immortality is conditional, and is not something that we naturally possess.

- “Christ... has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10; 1Jn. 1:2). He is the “author” or “cause” of “eternal salvation” (Heb. 2:10; 5:9 RVmg.).
- “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you (i.e. ‘inherent in you’). Whoever eats My flesh, and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” - to give him this “eternal life” (Jn. 6:53,54). Christ’s reasoning throughout John 6 is that he is the “bread of life”, and that only through correct response to him can there be any hope of immortality (Jn. 6:47,50,51,57,58).
- “God has given us (believers) eternal life, and this life is in His Son” (1 Jn. 5:11). There can be no hope of immortality for those not “in Christ”.

4.2 The Soul

In the light of the foregoing it ought to be inconceivable that man has an ‘immortal soul’ or any immortal element within him naturally. The Hebrew and Greek words which are translated ‘soul’ in the Bible (‘Nephesh’ and ‘Psoche’ respectively) are also translated in the following ways:

Body, Breath, Creature, Heart, Mind, Person, Himself, Life

The ‘soul’ therefore refers to the person, body or self. The famous ‘Save Our Souls’ (S.O.S.) clearly means ‘Save us from death!’ The ‘soul’ is therefore ‘you’, or the summation of all the things that make up a person. It is understandable, therefore, that many modern versions of the Bible (e.g. the N.I.V.) rarely use the word ‘soul’, translating it instead as ‘you’ or ‘the person’. The animals which God created are called “living creatures... every living thing that moves” (Gen. 1:20,21). The Hebrew word translated “creatures” and “living thing” here is ‘nephesh’, which is also translated ‘being’; for example in Gen. 2:7: “...and man became a living being”. Thus man is a ‘soul’ or ‘living being’, just as the animals are ‘souls’ or ‘living beings’. The only difference between mankind and animals is that man is mentally superior to them; he is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26), and some men are called to know the Gospel through which the hope of immortality is opened up to them (2 Tim. 1:10). As regards our fundamental nature and the nature of our death, there is no difference between man and animals.

“What happens to the sons of men also happens to beasts; one thing befalls them: (note the double emphasis): as one dies, so dies the other... man has no advantage over beasts... All (i.e. man and animals) go to one place (the grave); all are from the dust, and all return to dust” (Ecc. 3:19,20). The inspired writer of Ecclesiastes prayed that God would help men to appreciate this hard fact, “that (men) may see that they themselves are like beasts” (Ecc. 3:18). It is therefore to be expected that many people will find this fact hard to accept; indeed, it can be humiliating to realise that by nature we are just animals, living out the same instincts of self-preservation, survival of the fittest and procreation. The N.I.V. translation of Ecc. 3:18 says that God ‘tests’ man by making him see that he is just an animal; i.e. those who are humble enough to be His true people will realise the truth of this, but those who are not will fail this ‘test’. The philosophy of humanism - the idea that human beings are of such supreme importance and value - has quietly spread throughout the world. It is a considerable task to clear our thinking of the influence of humanism. The plain words of Ps. 39:5 are a help: “Man at his best state is but vapour”. “It is not for man to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23 N.I.V.).

One of the most basic things that we know is that all human bodies - indeed all “living creatures” - eventually die. The ‘soul’, therefore, dies; it is the exact opposite of something that is immortal. Indeed, 652 of the 754 times the Hebrew word *nephesh* occur, it is used about the soul or creature dying. It is not surprising that about a third of all uses of this word in the Bible are associated with the death and destruction of the ‘soul’. The very fact that the word ‘soul’ is used in this way shows that it cannot be something which is indestructible and immortal.

- “The soul who sins shall die” (Ez. 18:4).

- God can destroy the soul (Mt. 10:28). Other references to souls being destroyed are: Ez. 22:27 (people = *nephesh*); Prov. 6:32; Lev. 23:30 (person = *nephesh*).
- All the “people” (*nephesh*) that were within the city of Hazor were killed by the sword (Josh. 11:11; cf. Josh. 10:30-39).
- “...every living creature (*psuche*). died” (Rev. 16:3; cf. Ps. 78:50).

4.3 THE SPIRIT OF MAN

There is an unfortunate confusion in many people’s minds between the soul and the spirit. This is aggravated by the fact that in some languages and Bible translations, the English words ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’ have only one equivalent. The ‘soul’ fundamentally referring to all the constituents of a person can sometimes refer to the spirit as well. However, normally there is a difference in meaning between ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’ as used in the Bible; soul and spirit can be ‘divided’ (Heb. 4:12).

The Hebrew and Greek words for ‘spirit’ (‘Ruach’ and ‘Pneuma’ respectively) are also translated in the following ways.

Life, Spirit, Mind, Wind, Breath

We have studied the idea of ‘spirit’ in Study 2.1. God uses His spirit to preserve the natural creation, including man. The spirit of God which is within man is therefore the life force within him. “The body without the spirit is dead” (James 2:26). “God breathed into (Adam’s nostrils) the breath (spirit) of life; and man became a living being” (Gen. 2:7). Job speaks of “the breath of God” as being “in my nostrils” (Job 27:3 cf. Is. 2:22). The spirit of life within us is therefore given to us at birth, and remains as long as our body is alive. When God’s spirit is withdrawn from anything, it immediately perishes - the spirit is the life force. If God “gather to Himself His spirit and His breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust. If you have understanding, hear this” (Job 34:14-16). The last sentence again hints that man finds this exposure of his real nature very hard to come to terms with.

When God takes away His spirit from us at death, not only does our body die, but our entire consciousness ceases. David’s appreciation of this led him to trust in God rather than in creatures as weak as man. Ps. 146:3-5 is a tough counter to the claims of humanism: “Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth (the dust from which we are made); in that very day his plans perish. Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help”.

At death, “the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it” (Ecc. 12:7). We have shown earlier that God is present everywhere through His spirit. In this sense “God is Spirit” (Jn. 4:24). When we die we ‘breathe our last’ in the sense that God’s spirit within us departs from us. That spirit is absorbed into God’s spirit which is all around us; so at death “the spirit will return to God”.

4.4 Death Is Unconsciousness

From what we have learnt so far about the soul and spirit, it should follow that while dead, a person is totally unconscious. Whilst the actions of those responsible to God will be remembered by Him (Mal. 3:16; Rev. 20:12; Heb. 6:10), there is nothing in the Bible to suggest that we have any consciousness during the death state. It is hard to argue with the following clear statements concerning this.

- “(Man’s) spirit (breath K.J.V.) departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day (moment) his plans perish” (Ps. 146:4).
- “The dead know nothing... their love, their hatred, and their envy is now perished” (Ecc. 9:5,6). There is no “wisdom in the grave” (Ecc. 9:10) - no thinking and therefore no consciousness.
- Job says that on death, he would be “as though he had not been” (Job 10:18-19); he saw death as the oblivion, unconsciousness and total lack of existence which we had before we were born.
- Man dies as the animals do (Ecc. 3:19); if man consciously survives death somewhere, so must they, yet both Scripture and science are silent about this.
- God “remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes... it is gone, and its place remembers it no more” (Ps. 103:14-16).

4.5 The Resurrection

The Bible emphasises that the hope of the righteous will be at the resurrection, at the coming of Christ (1 Thess. 4:16). The resurrection of the responsible dead will be the first thing Christ will do; this will be followed by the judgment. If the ‘soul’ went to heaven at death there would be no need for the resurrection. Paul said that if there is no resurrection, then all effort to be obedient to God is pointless (1 Cor. 15:32). Surely he would not have reasoned like this if he believed that he would also be rewarded with his ‘soul’ going to heaven at death? The implication is that he believed the resurrection of the body to be the only form of reward. Christ encouraged us with the expectation that the recompense for faithful living now would be at “the resurrection” (Lk. 14:14).

At his return, Christ “will transform our lowly body, that it may be conformed to his glorious body” (Phil. 3:20,21). As he now has a literal bodily form, energised purely by Spirit rather than blood, so we will share a similar reward. Those who have died and decomposed to dust will “awake and sing” (Is. 26:19). At the judgment we will receive a recompense for how we have lived this life in a bodily form (2 Cor. 5:10). Those who have lived an unspiritual life will be left with their present mortal body, which will then rot back to dust; whilst those who in their lives have tried to overcome the unspiritual mind with that of the Spirit “will reap from it a harvest of eternal life” (Gal. 6:8 R.E.B.) in the form of a Spirit-filled body.

The whole of 1 Cor. 15 speaks in detail of the resurrection; it will always repay careful reading. 1 Cor. 15:35-44 explains how that as a seed is sown and then emerges from the ground to be given a body by God, so the dead will likewise rise, to be rewarded with a body. As Christ rose from the grave and had his mortal body changed to an immortalised body, so the true

believer will share his reward (Phil. 3:21). Through baptism we associate ourselves with Christ's death and resurrection, showing our belief that we too will share the reward which he received through his resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5). Through sharing in his sufferings now, we will also share his reward: "carrying about (now) in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body" (2 Cor. 4:10). "He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit" (Rom. 8:11). With this hope, we therefore wait for "the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23), through that body being immortalised.

Job clearly expressed his understanding of how, despite his body being eaten by worms in the grave, he would, in a bodily form, receive his reward: "My redeemer lives, and...shall stand at last on the earth: and after my skin is destroyed, ... in my flesh (or bodily form) I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" (Job 19:25-27). Isaiah's hope was identical: "My dead body shall...arise" (Is. 26:19).

Very similar words are found in the account of the death of Lazarus, a personal friend of Jesus. Instead of comforting the man's sisters by saying that his soul had gone to heaven, the Lord Jesus spoke of the day of resurrection: "Your brother will rise again". The immediate response of Lazarus' sister Martha shows how much this was appreciated by the early Christians: "Martha said to him, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (Jn. 11:23,24). Like Job, she did not understand death to be the gateway to a life of bliss in heaven, but, instead, looked forward to a resurrection "at the last day" (cf. Job's "at last"). The Lord promises: "Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father...I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn. 6:44,45).

4.6 RESPONSIBILITY TO GOD

Whether or not someone will be raised depends on whether they are responsible to the judgment. The basis of our judgment will be how we have responded to our knowledge of God's word. Christ explained: "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him - the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day" (Jn. 12:48). Those who have not known or understood the word of Christ, and therefore had no opportunity to accept or reject him, will not be accountable to the judgment. "As many as have sinned without (knowing God's) law, will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law (i.e. knowing it), will be judged by the law" (Rom. 2:12). Thus those who have not known God's requirements will perish like the animals; whilst those who knowingly break God's law need to be judged, and therefore raised to face that judgment.

In God's sight "sin is not imputed when there is no law"; "by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 5:13; Rom. 3:20). Without being aware of God's laws as revealed in His Word, "sin is not imputed" to a person, and therefore they will not be raised or judged. Those who do not know God's Word will therefore remain dead, as will animals and plants, seeing they are in the same position. "Man who...does not understand, is like the beasts that perish" (Ps. 49:20). "Like sheep they are laid in the grave" (Ps. 49:14).

It is the knowledge of God's ways that makes us responsible to Him for our actions and therefore necessitates our resurrection and appearance at the judgment seat. It should therefore be understood that it is not only the righteous or those baptised who will be raised, but also all who are responsible to God by reason of their knowledge of Him. This is an oft-repeated Scriptural theme.

- Jn. 15:22 shows that knowledge of the Word brings responsibility: "If I (Jesus) had not come and spoken to them, they have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin". Rom. 1:20,21 likewise says that knowing God leaves men "without excuse".
- "Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father...I (Christ) will raise him up at the last day" (Jn. 6:44,45).
- "That servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few. (e.g. by remaining dead). For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more" (Lk. 12:47,48) - so how much more *God*?
- "Therefore, to him who *knows* to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).
- Israel's special responsibility to God was on account of His revelations to them concerning Himself (Am. 3:2). "Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities ..." "and you shall all bow down to the slaughter; because, when I called, you did not answer; when I spoke, you did not hear, but did evil" (Is. 65:12).

Knowledge of God making us responsible to the judgment seat, it follows that those without this knowledge will not be raised, seeing that they do not need to be judged, and that their lack of knowledge makes them "like the beasts that perish" (Ps. 49:20). There are ample indications that not all who have ever lived will be raised.

- The people of the ancient nation of Babylon "will ... sleep a perpetual sleep and not awake" after their death because they were ignorant of the true God (Jer. 51:39; Is. 43:17).
- Isaiah encouraged himself: "O Lord our (Israel's) God, other masters besides You have had dominion over us (e.g. the Philistines and Babylonians)...They are dead, they will not live (again); they are deceased, they will not rise...all their memory to perish" (Is. 26:13,14). Note the triple emphasis here on their not being raised: "will not live (again)...will not rise...all their memory to perish". By contrast, Israel had the prospect of resurrection on account of their knowledge of the true God: "Your (Israel's) dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise" (Is. 26:19).

4.7 HELL

The popular conception of hell is of a place of punishment for wicked ‘immortal souls’ straight after death, or the place of torment for those who are rejected at the judgment. It is our conviction that the Bible teaches that hell is the grave, where all men go at death.

As a word, the original Hebrew word ‘sheol’, translated ‘hell’, means ‘a covered place’. ‘Hell’ is the anglicised version of ‘sheol’; thus when we read of ‘hell’ we are not reading a word which has been fully translated. A ‘helmet’ is literally a ‘hell-met’, meaning a covering for the head. Biblically, this ‘covered place’, or ‘hell’, is the grave. There are many examples where the original word ‘sheol’ is translated ‘grave’. Indeed, some modern Bible versions scarcely use the word ‘hell’, translating it more properly as ‘grave’. A few examples of where this word ‘sheol’ is translated ‘grave’ should torpedo the popular conception of hell as a place of fire and torment for the wicked.

- “Let the wicked... be silent in the grave” (sheol [Ps. 31:17]) - they will not be screaming in agony.
- “God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave” (sheol [Ps. 49:15]) - i.e. David’s soul or body would be raised from the grave, or ‘hell’.

The belief that hell is a place of punishment for the wicked from which they cannot escape just cannot be squared with this; a righteous man can go to hell (the grave) and come out again. Hos. 13:14 confirms this: “I will ransom them (God’s people) from the power of the grave (sheol); I will redeem them from death”. This is quoted in 1 Cor. 15:55 and applied to the resurrection at Christ’s return. Hannah’s words in 1 Sam. 2:6 are very clear: “The Lord kills and makes alive (through resurrection); he brings down to the grave (sheol), and brings up”.

Seeing that ‘hell’ is the grave, it is to be expected that the righteous will be saved from it through their resurrection to eternal life. Thus it is quite possible to enter ‘hell’, or the grave, and later to leave it through resurrection. The supreme example is that of Jesus, whose “soul was not left in Hades (hell), nor did his flesh see corruption” (Acts 2:31) because he was raised. Note the parallel between Christ’s ‘soul’ and his ‘flesh’ or body. That his body “was not *left* in Hades” implies that it was there for a period, i.e. the three days in which his body was in the grave. That Christ went to ‘hell’ should be proof enough that it is not just a place where the wicked go.

Both good and bad people go to ‘hell’, i.e. the grave. Thus Jesus “made his grave with the wicked” (Is. 53:9). In line with this, there are other examples of righteous men going to hell, i.e. the grave. Jacob said that he would “go down into the grave (hell)... mourning” for his son Joseph (Gen. 37:35).

It is one of God’s principles that the punishment for sin is death (Rom. 6:23; 8:13; James 1:15). We have previously shown death to be a state of complete unconsciousness. Sin results in total destruction, not eternal torment (Mt. 21:41; 22:7; Mk. 12:9; James 4:12), as surely as people were destroyed by the Flood (Lk. 17:27,29), and as the Israelites died in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:10). On both these occasions the sinners *died* rather than being eternally tormented. It is

therefore impossible that the wicked are punished with an eternity of conscious torment and suffering.

The record of Jonah's experiences also contradicts this. Having been swallowed alive by a huge fish, "Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God from the fish's belly. And he said: 'I cried...to the Lord...out of the belly of Sheol (hell) I cried'" (Jonah 2:1,2). This parallels "the belly of Sheol" with that of the fish. The fish's belly was truly a 'covered place', which is the fundamental meaning of the word 'sheol'. Obviously, it was not a place of fire, and Jonah came out of "the belly of Sheol" when the fish vomited him out. This pointed forward to the resurrection of Christ from 'hell' (the grave) - see Mt. 12:40.

FIGURATIVE FIRE

However, the Bible does frequently use the image of eternal fire in order to represent God's anger with sin, which will result in the total destruction of the sinner in the grave. Sodom was punished with "eternal fire" (Jude v. 7), i.e. it was totally destroyed due to the wickedness of the inhabitants. Today that city is in ruins, submerged beneath the waters of the Dead Sea; in no way is it now on fire, which is necessary if we are to understand 'eternal fire' literally. Likewise Jerusalem was threatened with the eternal fire of God's anger, due to the sins of Israel: "Then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched" (Jer. 17:27). Jerusalem being the prophesied capital of the future Kingdom (Is. 2:2-4; Ps. 48:2), God did not mean us to read this literally. The houses of the great men in Jerusalem were burnt down with fire (2 Kings 25:9), but that fire did not continue eternally. Fire represents the anger/punishment of God against sin, but His anger is not eternal (Jer. 3:12). Fire turns what it burns to dust; and we know that the ultimate wages of sin is death, a turning back to dust. This perhaps is why fire is used as a figure for punishment for sin.

Time and again God's anger with the sins of Jerusalem and Israel is likened to fire: "My anger and My fury will be poured out on this place - (Jerusalem)...it will burn, and not be quenched" (Jer. 7:20; other examples include Lam. 4:11 and 2 Kings 22:17).

GEHENNA

In the New Testament there are two Greek words translated 'hell'. 'Hades' is the equivalent of the Hebrew 'sheol' which we have discussed earlier. 'Gehenna' is the name of the rubbish tip which was just outside Jerusalem, where the refuse from the city was burnt. Such rubbish tips are typical of many developing cities today (e.g. 'Smoky Mountain' outside Manila in the Philippines.) As a proper noun - i.e. the name of an actual place - it should have been left untranslated as 'Gehenna' rather than be translated as 'hell'. 'Gehenna' is the Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew 'Ge-ben-Hinnon'. This was located near Jerusalem (Josh. 15:8), and at the time of Christ it was the city rubbish dump. Dead bodies of criminals were thrown onto the fires which were always burning there, so that Gehenna became symbolic of total destruction and rejection.

Again the point has to be driven home that what was thrown onto those fires did not remain there forever - the bodies decomposed into dust. "Our God (will be) a *consuming* fire"

(Heb. 12:29) at the day of judgment; the fire of His anger with sin will consume sinners to destruction rather than leave them in a state of only being singed by it and still surviving. At the time of God's previous judgments of His people Israel at the hand of the Babylonians, Gehenna was filled with dead bodies of the sinners among God's people (Jer. 7:32,33).

In his masterly way, the Lord Jesus brought together all these Old Testament ideas in his use of the word 'Gehenna'. He often said that those who were rejected at the judgment seat at His return would go "to hell (i.e. Gehenna), into the fire that shall never be quenched ... where their worm does not die" (Mk. 9:43,44). Gehenna would have conjured up in the Jewish mind the ideas of rejection and destruction of the body, and we have seen that eternal fire is an idiom representing the anger of God against sin, and the eternal destruction of sinners through death.

STUDY 4: Questions

1. What happens after death?
 - a) The soul goes to Heaven
 - b) We are unconscious
 - c) The soul is stored somewhere until judgment
 - d) Wicked souls go to hell and the good ones to Heaven.
2. What is the soul?
 - a) An immortal part of our being
 - b) A word meaning 'body, person, creature'
 - c) Exactly the same as the spirit
 - d) Something which goes to Heaven or hell after death.
3. What is the spirit of man?
4. Briefly describe the nature of man.
5. List two Bible verses which prove that death is a state of unconsciousness.
6. What do you know about the judgment seat of Christ?
7. Who will be resurrected and judged?
8. What is hell?
9. What is Gehenna?

Study 5 The Kingdom of God

5.1 Defining The Kingdom Of God

Our previous studies have shown that it is God's purpose to reward His faithful people with eternal life at the return of Christ. This eternal life will be spent on earth; God's repeated promises concerning this never imply that the faithful will go to heaven. Only Jesus went to Heaven, and He promised His followers that although they could not go *there* (Jn. 13:33), He would come back to earth and eternally be with them *here* (Jn. 14:3). Our salvation and eternal life will be experienced in a bodily form (Rom. 8:11,23), and the arena of this salvation will be the Kingdom of God, to be literally and physically established upon this earth. "The Gospel (good news) of the kingdom of God" (Matt. 4:23) was preached to Abraham in the form of God's promises concerning eternal life on earth (Gal. 3:8). The "kingdom of God" is therefore the time after Christ's return when these promises will be fulfilled. Whilst God is ultimately the King of His entire creation even now, He has given man freewill to rule the world and his own life as he wishes. Thus at present the world is comprised of "the kingdom of men" (Dan. 4:17).

At Christ's return, "the kingdoms of this world (will) become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). Then God's will and desires will be completely and openly performed in this earth. Hence Jesus' command for us to pray: "Your kingdom come (that) Your will be done in earth, as it is (now) in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). Because of this, the "kingdom of God" is a phrase interchangeable with "the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 13:11 cp. Mark 4:11). "Heaven" is often put for 'God' (Mt. 21:25; Lk. 15:18; Jn. 3:27). Note that we never read of 'the kingdom *in* heaven'; it is the kingdom *of* heaven which will be established by Christ on earth at his return. "We are a colony of heaven" (Phil. 3:20 Moffatt). As God's will is completely obeyed by the angels in heaven (Ps. 103:19-21), so it will be in the future kingdom of God, when the earth will only be inhabited by the righteous, who will then be "equal unto the angels" (Luke 20:36).

Entering the kingdom of God at Christ's return is therefore the end result of all our Christian endeavour in this life (Matt. 25:34; Acts 14:22). We are now under the kingship of God, and in that sense we live our lives by Kingdom principles. The parables of the Kingdom of God are all about the kind of life we should now live if we wish to live that kind of life eternally. The Kingdom of God, both in its present and future aspects, is a major theme of God's revelation; "all the counsel [will] of God" is paralleled with "the kingdom of God" (Acts 20:25 cp. 27). All that it stands for, and our being in it, is all God's will. Philip's preaching of "Christ" is defined as teaching "the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:5,12). Passage upon passage remind us of how "the kingdom of God" was the main burden of Paul's preaching (Acts 19:8; 20:25; 28:23,31). It is therefore of paramount importance that we fully understand the doctrine of the Kingdom of God, seeing that it forms a vital part of the Gospel message.

Although we should be living now by Kingdom principles, "flesh and blood cannot *inherit* the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 15:50). Our *inheritance* is our salvation which will be revealed "in the last time" (1 Pet. 1:4,5). We are "*heirs* of the kingdom which he has promised to them that love him" (James 2:5), seeing that baptism makes us heirs of the promises to Abraham - which promises comprise the basic Gospel of the Kingdom (Matt. 4:23; Gal. 3:8,27-29). It is therefore common to come across promises of *inheriting* the kingdom at Christ's return, when the promises to Abraham will be fulfilled (Matt. 25:34; 1 Cor. 6:9,10; 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5). The very use of this language of future inheritance shows that the kingdom is not the believer's present possession.

5.2 THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE PAST

God is frequently described as "the king of Israel" (Isa. 44:6 cp. Isa. 41:27; 43:15; Ps. 48:2; 89:18; 149:2); it follows that the people of Israel were His kingdom. They began to be God's kingdom through entering into a covenant with Him at Mount Sinai, shortly after they had escaped from Egypt through the Red Sea. In response to their willingness to keep this covenant, they would "be unto (God) a kingdom... and an holy nation" (Ex. 19:5,6). Thus "When Israel went out of Egypt... Israel (was) His dominion" or kingdom (Ps. 114:1,2). After entering into this agreement, Israel travelled through the wilderness of Sinai and settled down in the promised land of Canaan. As God was their King, they were ruled over by "Judges" (e.g. Gideon and Samson) rather than kings. These judges were not kings, but Divinely guided administrators who governed certain parts of the country rather than ruling over the whole land. They were often raised up by God for specific purposes, e.g. to lead Israel to repentance and deliver them from their enemies. When the Israelites asked judge Gideon to be their king, he replied, "I will not rule over you...the Lord shall rule over you" (Jud. 8:23).

The last judge was Samuel. In his time the Israelites asked for a human king in order to be like the nations around them (1 Sam. 8:5,6). Throughout history, God's true people have been tempted to underestimate the closeness of their relationship to God, and to sacrifice this for an appearance of similarity to the world around them. These temptations are most acute in our present world. God lamented to Samuel: "They have rejected me, that I should not reign over them" (1 Sam. 8:7). However, God granted them kings, beginning with wicked Saul. After him came righteous David, and a whole line of kings descended from him. The more spiritually-minded kings realized that Israel were still God's kingdom, even though they had rejected His kingship. They therefore recognized that they were ruling Israel on God's behalf rather than in their own right.

Understanding this principle enables us to make sense of the description of Solomon, David's son, reigning on "(God's) throne, to be king for the Lord your God" (2 Chron. 9:8; 1 Chron. 28:5; 29:23). Solomon's reign of great peace and prosperity pointed forward to (or was 'typical' of) the future Kingdom of God. This is why it is emphasized that he was king over Israel on God's behalf, as Jesus will also sit on God's throne as King of Israel for God (Matt. 27:37,42; John 1:49; 12:13).

Many of the righteous kings recorded in the Old Testament enjoyed reigns which were typical of Christ's future Kingdom. Thus as Hezekiah and Solomon received presents and tribute

from the surrounding nations (1 Kings 10:1-4; 2 Kings 20:12), and saw the land of Israel blessed with astounding fertility and prosperity (1 Kings 10:5-15; Isa. 37:30), so in Christ's world-wide Kingdom the same things will be seen on a far greater scale.

THE JUDGMENT OF GOD

As a result of Solomon's apostasy, the kingdom of Israel was divided into two; Solomon's son, Rehoboam, ruled over the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and half the tribe of Manasseh, whilst Jeroboam ruled over the other ten tribes. This ten-tribe kingdom was called Israel, or Ephraim, whilst the two-tribes were called Judah. The people of all these tribes, for the most part, followed Solomon's bad example - they claimed to believe in the true God, whilst at the same time worshipping the idols of the surrounding nations. Time and again God pleaded with them, through the prophets, to repent, but to no avail. Because of this, He punished them by driving them out of the kingdom of Israel into the lands of their enemies. This was through the Assyrians and Babylonians invading Israel and taking them away captive: "Many years did you (God) forbear them, and testified against them by your spirit (word) in your prophets: yet would they not give ear: therefore you gave them into the hand of the people of the (surrounding) lands" (Neh. 9:30).

The ten-tribe kingdom of Israel had no good kings at all. Jeroboam, Ahab, Jehoahaz etc. are all recorded in the book of Kings as idol-worshippers. Their last king was Hoshea, during whose reign Israel was defeated by Assyria, and the ten tribes carried into captivity (2 Kings 17). From this they never returned.

The two-tribe kingdom of Judah had some good kings (e.g. Hezekiah and Josiah), although the majority were evil. Due to the people's repeated sins, God overturned Judah as His kingdom in the reign of their last king, Zedekiah. This was caused by their being invaded by the Babylonians, who took them captive to Babylon (2 Kings 25). They remained in Babylon for 70 years, after which some returned to Israel under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah. They never again had their own king, being ruled by the Babylonians, Greeks and Romans. Jesus was born during the period of Roman rulership. Due to Israel's rejection of Jesus, the Romans invaded them in A.D. 70 and scattered them world-wide. Only in the past 100 years have they started to return, thus heralding the return of Christ.

Ezekiel 21:25-27 prophesied this ending of God's kingdom as seen in the nation of Israel: "You, profane, wicked prince of Israel (i.e. Zedekiah), whose day is come...Thus says the Lord God; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown (i.e. Zedekiah would cease to be king): this shall not be the same...I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more, *until* he come whose right it is; and I will give it him". Passage after passage in the prophets laments the ending of God's kingdom (Hos. 10:3; Lam. 5:16; Jer. 14:21; Dan. 8:12-14).

The triple 'overturning' of Ez. 21:25-27 refers to the three invasions made by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. The watchful student will see in these verses another example of how the kingdom of God and its king can be treated as parallel; Zedekiah's overthrow was that of God's kingdom (see Section 5:2). Thus God's kingdom as it was in the nation of Israel ended: "I...will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel" (Hos.1:4). "It

shall be no more, *until...*" carries the implication that the kingdom would revive when "he come whose right it is; and (God) will give it him". God will "give (Jesus) the throne of his father David...and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:32,33) - at Christ's return. This, therefore, is when the promise of the kingdom's restoration will be fulfilled.

RESTORATION OF ISRAEL

There is a tremendous theme throughout the Old Testament prophets of the *restoration* of God's Kingdom on Messiah's return. Christ's disciples were well tuned in to this: "When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt you at this time *restore again the Kingdom to Israel?*" i.e. 'Will Ezekiel 21:27 be fulfilled now?' Jesus replied by saying that the exact time of his second coming they would never know, although the angels immediately afterwards assured them that he would, indeed, return at some point (Acts 1:6-11).

The restoration of the kingdom of God/Israel will therefore be at the second coming. Thus Peter preached that God would send "Jesus Christ...whom the heaven must receive (i.e. he must remain there) *until* the times of *restitution* of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets" (Acts 3:20,21). The second coming will bring about the re-establishment of God's kingdom as a restoration of the old kingdom of Israel.

The restoration of God's kingdom is truly the theme of "all (God's) holy prophets":-

- "In mercy shall the throne be established: and he (Jesus) shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David (at the second coming - Luke 1:32,33), judging... and hasting righteousness" (Isa. 16:5).
- "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David (i.e. David's "throne" of Luke 1:32,33) that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it *as in the days of old*" (Amos 9:11). The last phrase is clearly the language of restoration.
- "Their (Israel's) children also shall be *as aforetime*, and their congregation shall be established before me" (Jer. 30:20).
- "The Lord shall choose Jerusalem *again*" (Zech. 2:12), making it the capital of His world-wide Kingdom (cp. Ps. 48:2; Isa. 2:2-4).
- "The *former* dominion" or Kingdom is to return to Jerusalem (Mic. 4:8 RV).
- As God *was* in the land of Israel in their past, so when the Kingdom is re-established it will again be known that "The Lord is there" (Ez. 35:9 cp. 48:35).
- "I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them, *as at the first... Again* there shall be heard in this place... the voice of joy...For I will cause to return the captivity of the land, *as at the first... again* in this place (Jerusalem)... shall be an habitation of shepherds...the flocks (shall) pass *again*" (Jer. 33:7-13).

The return of Christ to establish this Kingdom is truly "the hope of Israel", to which we must become related by baptism.

5.3 THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE FUTURE

We have seen that Abraham was promised that through his Seed people from all parts of the world will be blessed; Rom. 4:13 extends this to mean that the whole earth will be inherited by those people who are 'in' Abraham's Seed, i.e. Christ. The image prophecy of Dan. 2 explains how Christ will return as the little stone, and then the kingdom will gradually spread world-wide (cp. Ps. 72:8). This means that the Kingdom of God will not just be located in Jerusalem or the land of Israel, as some maintain, although these areas will certainly be its heartland.

Those who follow Christ in this life will be "kings and priests; and we shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:10). We will rule over settlements of various sizes and number; one will rule over ten cities, another over five (Luke 19:17). Christ will share his rulership over the earth with us (Rev. 2:27; 2 Tim. 2:12). "A king (Jesus) shall reign in righteousness, and princes (the believers) shall rule in judgment" (Isa. 32:1; Ps. 45:16).

Christ is to reign for ever on David's re-established throne (Luke 1:32,33), i.e. he will have David's place and position of rulership, which was in Jerusalem. As Christ will reign from Jerusalem, this will be the capital of the future Kingdom. Nations "will go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts" in Jerusalem (Zech. 14:16).

Given this greater commitment to Godliness, it is not surprising that Christ "shall judge among the nations... they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa. 2:4). The absolute authority of Christ and total justice of his arbitration in disputes will result in the nations willingly changing their military hardware into agricultural machinery, and abandoning all military training. "In his days shall the righteous flourish" (Ps. 72:7) - spirituality will then be exalted, and respect will be paid to those who reflect God's characteristics of love, mercy, justice etc. Contrast this with the present exaltation of the proud, self-assertive and selfishly ambitious.

The willing beating of "swords into plowshares" will be part of a much greater agricultural change which will come upon the earth. As a result of Adam's sin, the ground was cursed for his sake (Gen. 3:17-19), with the result that great effort is presently needed to get food from it. In the Kingdom "there shall be a handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the (once barren) mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like (the crops of) Lebanon" (Ps. 72:16). "The plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that sows seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine" (Amos 9:13), such will be the improved fertility of the earth, and the reduction of the curse on the ground pronounced in Eden.

Isaiah 35:1-7 contains a matchless prophecy of how infertile land will be changed, resulting in an aura of joy and happiness almost oozing from the land, due to the easier and more spiritual way of life of those who work it: "The wilderness... shall be glad... the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall... rejoice even with joy and singing... for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall

become a pool". Even the natural aggression between the animals will be removed: "the wolf and the lamb shall feed together", and children will be able to play with snakes (Is. 65:25; 11:6-8).

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the Kingdom of God should not be seen as a tropical island paradise, which the righteous will enjoy in a similar way to which men enjoy sunbathing amidst the glories of nature. The fundamental purpose of the Kingdom of God is to give glory to God, until the earth is full of glory to Him "as the waters cover the sea" (Hab. 2:14). This is God's ultimate aim: "As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord" (Num. 14:21). Glory to God means that the inhabitants of the earth will appreciate, praise and copy His righteous attributes; because the world will be in this state, God will allow the physical earth to reflect this, too. Thus "the meek shall inherit the earth (in the Kingdom), and shall delight themselves in the abundance of (spiritual) peace" (Ps. 37:11), rather than in enjoying the easy life. Those "which do hunger and thirst after righteousness...shall be filled" with it in the Kingdom (Matt. 5:6).

We need to seek "(God's) righteousness", i.e. to try to develop a love of God's character, which means that we want to be in God's Kingdom because righteousness will be glorified there, because we want to be completely morally perfect rather than just because we, personally, want to escape death and live an easy life for eternity.

5.4 THE MILLENNIUM

At this point in our study of life in the Kingdom, the thoughtful reader will probably be asking, 'Doesn't this picture of the Kingdom of God all seem rather human?' People in the Kingdom will still be producing babies (Isa. 65:23) and even dying (Isa. 65:20). These people will still have disputes which Christ will settle (Isa. 2:4), and will still need to work the ground in order to survive, even though this will be much easier than at present. This all seems a far cry from the promises that the righteous will receive eternal life, and a nature like God's, being made equal to the angels, who do not marry or reproduce (Luke 20:35,36) The answer lies in the fact that the first part of the Kingdom of God will last for 1,000 years - a 'Millennium' (see Rev. 20:2-7). During this Millennium there will be two groups of people on earth:-

1 The saints - those of us who have followed Christ acceptably in this life, who will have been given eternal life at the judgment seat. Note: a 'saint' means 'a called out' person, and refers to any true believer.

2 The ordinary, mortal people who did not know the Gospel at the time of Christ's return - i.e. they were not responsible to the judgment seat.

When Christ comes, two men will be in the field, one will be taken (to judgment), and the other left (Lk. 17:36); those who are "left" will be in this second group.

Having received God's nature at the judgment seat, the saints will be unable to die or produce children. The descriptions of people experiencing these things in the Kingdom must therefore apply to the second group - those who are alive at the time of Christ's return, but who

did not know God's requirements. The reward of the righteous is to be "kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:10). Kings have to reign over somebody; those people who were ignorant of the Gospel at the time of the second coming will therefore be left alive, to be reigned over. Through being "in Christ" we will share His reward - which is to be the king of the world: "He that overcomes...to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron...even as *I* received of my Father" (Rev. 2:26,27).

Christ's parable of the pounds now falls into place - the faithful servants were rewarded with ten or five towns to rule over in the Kingdom (Luke 19:12-19). Knowledge of God's ways will not spread immediately Christ is declared King in Jerusalem; the people will travel to Jerusalem in order to find more knowledge about God (Isa. 2:2,3). Recall, too, how the mountain of Dan. 2:35,44 (representing the Kingdom of God) gradually spreads over the earth. It will be the duty of the saints to spread the knowledge of God and therefore His Kingdom.

Should Christ come today:

1. The responsible dead will be raised and, along with the responsible living, taken to the judgment seat.
2. The responsible wicked will be punished with death, and the righteous given eternal life. Judgment will also be given to the nations who resist Christ.
3. The righteous will then rule over those people who are then alive, but who are not responsible to God; they will teach them the Gospel as "kings and priests" (Rev. 5:10).
4. This will last for 1,000 years. During this time all the mortal people will hear the Gospel and therefore be responsible to God. These people will live much longer and happier lives.
5. At the end of the Millennium there will be a rebellion against Christ and the saints, which God will put down (Rev. 20:8,9).
6. At the end of the 1,000 years, all those who have died during that time will be resurrected and judged (Rev. 20:5,11-15).
7. The wicked amongst them will be destroyed, and the righteous will join us in having eternal life.

The purpose of God with the earth will then have been completed. It will be filled with immortal, righteous beings. God's Name 'Yahweh Elohim' (meaning 'He who will be revealed in a group of mighty ones') will then be fulfilled. Never again will sin, and therefore death, be experienced on earth; the promise that the seed of the serpent would be totally destroyed by being hit in the head, will then have been completely fulfilled (Gen. 3:15). During the Millennium, Christ will have reigned "till he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death... And when all things shall be subdued unto him (God), then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him (God) that put all things under him, that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:25-28).

This is "the end, when he (Christ) shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father" (1 Cor. 15:24). What will follow in this period when God is "all in all" we are not told; all we know is that we will have eternal life, God's nature, and we will live to glorify and please God. It is presumption to even enquire further into what the state after the Millennium will be like.

STUDY 5: Questions

1. Which of the following is the time for the establishment of God's Kingdom?

- It has always been established
- At Christ's return
- At the day of Pentecost in the first century
- In the hearts of believers at their conversion.

2. Did the Kingdom of God exist in the past? If so, in what form?

3. When did it end?

4. What is the Millennium?

- A reign of grace in our hearts
- A 1000 year reign of the believers in Heaven
- A 1000 year reign of Satan on the earth

The first 1000 years of God's future Kingdom on earth.

5. What will the Kingdom be like?

6. What will the present believers do in the Millennium?

- Be rulers over the mortal people
- Be rulers in Heaven
- We do not know
- Live on another planet

7. Was the message about the Kingdom of God preached:

- Just in the New Testament
- Just by Jesus and the apostles
- In both Old and New Testaments
- Just in the Old Testament

STUDY 6 Satan and the Devil

6.1 God And Evil

Many Christians, along with many other religions, believe that there is a being or monster called the devil or satan who is the originator of the problems which are in the world and in our own lives, and who is responsible for the sin which we commit. The Bible clearly teaches that God is all-powerful. We have seen in Study 1.4 that the angels cannot sin. If we truly believe these things, then it is impossible that there is any supernatural being at work in this universe that is opposed to Almighty God. If we believe that such a being *does* exist, then surely we are questioning the supremacy of God Almighty. This issue is so important that the correct understanding of the devil and satan must be considered a vital doctrine. We are told in Heb. 2:14 that Jesus destroyed the devil by his death; therefore unless we have a correct understanding of the devil, we are likely to misunderstand the work and nature of Jesus.

In the world generally, especially in the Christian world, there is the idea that the good things in life come from God and the bad things from the devil or satan. This is not a new idea; the Babylonians, for example, believed there were two gods, a god of good and light, and a god of evil and darkness, and that those two were locked in mortal combat. Cyrus, the great King of Persia, believed just this. Therefore God told him, “*I am the Lord, and there is no other; there is no God besides me...I form the light, and create darkness, I make peace, and create calamity* (‘evil’ KJV, ‘disaster’ NIV); *I the Lord do all these things*” (Is. 45:5-7,22). God creates peace and He creates evil, or disaster. In this sense there is a difference between evil and sin, which is man’s fault; sin entered the world as a result of man, not God (Rom. 5:12).

God told Cyrus and the people of Babylon that “there is no (other) God besides me”. The Hebrew word ‘*el*’ translated ‘God’ fundamentally means ‘strength, or source of power’. God was saying that there is no source of power in existence apart from Him. This is the reason why a true believer in God should not accept the idea of a supernatural devil or demons.

GOD: THE CREATOR OF DISASTER

The Bible abounds with examples of God bringing evil into people’s lives and into this world. Am. 3:6 says that if there is calamity in a city, God has done it. If, for example, there is an earthquake in a city, it is often felt that ‘the devil’ had designs on that city, and had brought about the calamity. But the true believer must understand that it is *God* who is responsible for this. Thus Mic. 1:12 says that “disaster came down *from the Lord* to the gate of Jerusalem”. In the book of Job we read how Job, a righteous man, lost the things which he had in this life. The book teaches that the experience of ‘evil’ in a person’s life is not directly proportional to their obedience or disobedience to God. Job recognized that “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away” (Job 1:21). He does not say ‘The Lord gave and satan took away’. He commented to his wife: “Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not (also) accept adversity?” (Job 2:10). At the end of the book, Job’s friends comforted him over “all the adversity that *the Lord* had brought upon him” (Job 42:11 cp. 19:21; 8:4).

Thus God, who is in control of all things, uses wicked people to bring evil as a chastisement or punishment on His people. “For whom the Lord loves he chastens...If you endure chastening ...afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Heb. 12:6-11). This shows that the trials which God gives us lead eventually to our spiritual growth. It is setting the Word of God against itself to say that the devil is a being which forces us to sin and be unrighteous, whilst at the same time he supposedly brings problems into our lives which lead to our developing “the peaceable fruit of righteousness”. The orthodox idea of the devil runs into serious problems here. Especially serious for it are passages which speak of delivering a man to satan “that his spirit may be saved”, or “that (they) may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20). If satan is really a being bent on causing men to sin and having a *negative* spiritual effect upon people, why do these passages speak of ‘satan’ in a *positive* light? The answer lies in the fact that an adversary, a “satan” or difficulty in life, can often result in positive spiritual effects in a believer’s life.

If we accept that evil comes from God, then we can pray to God to do something about the problems which we have, e.g. to take them away. If He doesn’t, then we know that they are sent from God for our spiritual good. Now if we believe that there is some evil being called the devil or satan causing our problems, then there is no way of coming to terms with them. Disability, illness, sudden death or calamity have to be taken as just bad luck. If the devil is some powerful, sinful angel, then he will be much more powerful than us, and we will have no choice but to

suffer at his hand. By contrast, we are comforted that under God's control, "all things (in life) work together for good" to the believers (Rom. 8:28). There is therefore no such thing as 'luck' in the life of a believer.

THE ORIGIN OF SIN

It must be stressed that *sin* comes from inside us. It is our fault that we sin. Of course, it would be nice to believe that it was not our fault that we sin. We could freely sin and then excuse ourselves with the thought that it was really the devil's fault, and that the blame for our sin should be completely laid upon him. It is not uncommon that in cases of grossly wicked behaviour, the guilty person has begged for mercy because he says that he was possessed by the devil at the time and was therefore not responsible for himself. But, quite rightly, such feeble excuses are judged to hold no water at all, and the person has sentence passed upon him.

We need to remember that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23); sin leads to death. If it is not our fault that we sin, but that of the devil, then a just God ought to punish the devil rather than us. But the fact that we are judged for our own sins shows that we are responsible for our sins. The idea of the devil being a specific person outside of us rather than the principle of sin *within* us is an attempt to move the responsibility for our sins away from ourselves. This is yet another example of men refusing to come to terms with what the Bible teaches about man's nature.

"There is *nothing* that enters a man from outside which can defile him...For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders... pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man" (Mk. 7:15-23).

The idea that there *is* something sinful outside of us which enters us and causes us to sin is incompatible with the plain teaching of Jesus here. From *within*, out of the heart of man, come *all* these evil things. This is why, at the time of the flood, God considered that "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21). James 1:14 tells us how we are tempted: "each one (it is the same process for each human being) is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed". We are tempted by our *own* evil desires; not by anything outside of us. "Where do wars and fights come from among you?", James asks; "Do they not come from *your* desires for pleasure?" (James 4:1). Each of us has specific, personal temptations. They therefore have to be generated by our *own* evil desires, because they are personal to us. It has been truly said that we are our own worst enemies.

The book of Romans is largely concerned with sin, its origin, and how to overcome it. It is highly significant that there is no mention of the devil and just one of satan in the book; in the context of speaking about the origin of sin, Paul does not mention the devil or satan at all. In the same way, 'the devil' is a New Testament concept. If there is an external being who makes us sin, surely he would have been mentioned extensively in the Old Testament? But there is a very profound and significant silence about this. The record of the Judges period, or Israel in the wilderness, show that at those times Israel were sinning a great deal. But God did not warn them about some powerful supernatural being or force which could enter them and make them sin. Instead, He encouraged them to apply themselves to His word, so that they would not fall away to the ways of their own flesh (e.g. Dt. 27:9,10; Josh. 22:5).

Paul laments: "nothing good dwells in me – my unspiritual self, I mean - ...for though the will to do good is there, the ability to effect it is not...if what I do is against my will, clearly it is no longer I who am the agent, but sin that has its dwelling in me" (Rom. 7:18-21 REB). Now he does not blame his sin on an external being called the devil. He located his own evil nature as the real source of sin: it is not I that do it, "but *sin that has its dwelling in me*. I discover this principle, then; that when I want to do right, only wrong *is within my reach*." So he says that the opposition to being spiritual comes from something that he calls "sin...dwelling in me". Sin is "the way of [man's] heart" (Is. 57:17). Every thoughtful, spiritually minded person will come to the same kind of self-knowledge.

6.2 THE DEVIL AND SATAN

Sometimes the original words of the Bible text are left untranslated ("Mammon", in Mt. 6:24, is an Aramaic example of this). 'Satan' is an untranslated Hebrew word which means 'adversary', while 'devil' is a translation of the Greek word 'diabolos', meaning a liar, an enemy or false accuser. 'satan' has been transferred from the Hebrew untranslated, just like 'Sabaoth' (James 5:4), 'Armageddon' (Rev. 16:16) and 'Hallelujah' (Rev. 19:1-6). If we are to believe that satan and the devil are some being outside of us which is responsible for sin, then whenever we come across these words in the Bible, we have to make them refer to this evil person. The Biblical

usage of these words shows that they can be used as ordinary nouns, describing ordinary people. This fact makes it impossible to reason that the words devil and satan as used in the Bible do in themselves refer to a great wicked person or being outside of us.

THE WORD 'SATAN' IN THE BIBLE

1 Kings 11:14 records that "The Lord raised up an adversary (same Hebrew word elsewhere translated "satan") against Solomon, Hadad the Edomite". "And God raised up another adversary (another satan)...Rezon ...he was an adversary (a satan) of Israel" (1 Kings 11:23,25). This does not mean that God stirred up a supernatural person or an angel to be a satan/adversary to Solomon; He stirred up ordinary men. Mt. 16:22,23 provides another example. Peter had been trying to dissuade Jesus from going up to Jerusalem to die on the cross. Jesus turned and said unto *Peter*: "Get behind me, Satan...you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men". Thus Peter was called a satan. The record is crystal clear that Christ was not talking to an angel or a monster when he spoke those words; he was talking to Peter.

Because the word 'satan' just means an adversary, a good person, even God Himself, can be termed a 'satan'. The word 'satan' does not therefore necessarily refer to sin. The sinful connotations which the word 'satan' has are partly due to the fact that our own sinful nature is our biggest 'satan' or adversary, and also due to the use of the word in the language of the world to refer to something associated with sin. God Himself can be a satan to us by means of bringing trials into our lives, or by standing in the way of a wrong course of action we may be embarking on. But the fact that God can be called a 'satan' does not mean that He Himself is sinful.

The books of Samuel and Chronicles are parallel accounts of the same incidents, as the four gospels are records of the same events but using different language. 2 Sam. 24:1 records: "The Lord...moved David against Israel" in order to make him take a census of Israel. The parallel account in 1 Chron. 21:1 says that "Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David" to take the census. In one passage God does the 'moving', in the other satan does it. The only conclusion is that God acted as a 'satan' or adversary to David. He did the same to Job by bringing trials into his life, so that Job said about God: "With the strength of Your hand You oppose me" (Job 30:21); 'You are acting as a satan against me', was what Job was basically saying. Or again, speaking of God: "I must appeal for mercy to my accuser (satan)" (Job 9:15 NRSV).

THE WORD 'DEVIL' IN THE BIBLE

The word 'devil' too is an ordinary word rather than a proper name. However, unlike 'satan', it is always used in a bad sense. Jesus said, "Did I not choose you, the twelve (disciples), and one of you is a devil? He spoke of Judas Iscariot..." (Jn. 6:70) who was an ordinary, mortal man. He was not speaking of a personal being with horns, or a so-called 'spirit being'. The word 'devil' here simply refers to a wicked man. 1 Tim. 3:11 provides another example. The wives of church elders were not to be 'slanderers'; the original Greek word here is 'diabolos', which is the same word translated 'devil' elsewhere. Thus Paul warns Titus that the aged women in the ecclesia should not be 'slanderers' or 'devils' (Tit. 2:3). And likewise he told Timothy (2 Tim. 3:1,3) that "In the last days...*men* will be...slanderers (devils)". This does not mean that human beings will turn into superhuman beings, but that they will be increasingly wicked. It ought to be quite clear from all this that the words 'devil' and 'satan' do not refer to a fallen angel or a sinful being outside of us.

SIN, SATAN AND THE DEVIL

The words 'satan' and 'devil' are used figuratively to describe the natural sinful tendencies within us which we spoke of in Study 6.1. These are our main 'satan' or adversary. Our lusts are deceitful (Eph. 4:22), and so the devil or 'deceiver' is an appropriate way of describing them. They are personified, and as such they can be spoken of as 'the devil' - our enemy, a slanderer of the truth. This is what our natural 'man' is like - the 'very devil'. The connection between the devil and our evil desires - sin within us - is made explicit in several passages: "Since the children (ourselves) have flesh and blood, he (Jesus) too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14 NIV). The devil is here described as being responsible for death. But "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). Therefore sin and the devil must be parallel. Similarly James 1:14 says that our evil desires tempt us, leading us to sin and therefore to death; but Heb. 2:14 says that the devil brings death. The same verse says that Jesus had our nature in order to destroy the devil. Contrast this with Rom. 8:3: "God ... by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man (that is, in our human nature) ... condemned sin in sinful man". This shows that the devil and the sinful tendencies that are naturally within human nature are effectively the same. It is vitally important to understand that Jesus was tempted just like us.

Misunderstanding the doctrine of the devil means that we cannot correctly appreciate the nature and work of Jesus. It was only because Jesus had our human nature - the 'devil' within him - that we can have the hope of salvation (Heb. 2:14-18; 4:15). By overcoming the desires of his own nature Jesus was able to destroy the devil on the cross (Heb. 2:14). If the devil *is* a personal being, then he should no longer exist. Heb. 9:26 says that Christ appeared "to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself". Heb. 2:14 matches this with the statement that through his death Christ destroyed the devil in himself. By His death Jesus in prospect destroyed "the body of sin" (Rom. 6:6), i.e. human nature with its potential to sin in our very bodies.

"He who sins is of the devil" (1 Jn. 3:8), because sin is the result of giving way to our own natural, evil desires (James 1:14,15), which the Bible calls 'the devil'. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1 Jn. 3:8). If we are correct in saying that the devil is our evil desires, then the works of our evil desires, i.e. what they result in, are our sins. This is confirmed by 1 Jn. 3:5: "He (Jesus) was manifested to take away our sins". This confirms that "our sins" and "the works of the devil" are the same. Acts 5:3 provides another example of this connection between the devil and our sins. Peter says to Ananias: "Why has satan filled your heart?" Then in verse 4 Peter says "Why have you *conceived this thing in your heart?*" Conceiving something bad within our heart is the same as satan filling our heart. If we ourselves conceive something, e.g. a sinful plan, then it begins *inside us*. Is. 59:13 defines lying as "conceiving and uttering *from the heart* words of falsehood". If a woman conceives a child, it doesn't exist outside of her; it begins inside her. James 1:14,15 use the same figure in describing how our desires *conceive* and bring forth sin, which brings forth death. Ps. 109:6 parallels a sinful person with a 'satan': "Set a wicked man over him: and let an accuser (satan) stand at his right hand", i.e. in power over him (cp. Ps. 110:1).

All through the Old Testament there is the same basic message - that the human heart is the source of disobedience to God. The Proverbs especially stress the need to give serious attention to the state of the heart. The human mind is the arena of spiritual conflict. David speaks of how "transgression" speaks deep in the heart of the wicked, inciting them to sin (Ps. 36:1 NRSV). The New Testament develops this idea further by calling the unspiritual element in the "heart of man" our enemy / adversary / opponent. The English pop star Cliff Richard expressed this connection between the devil and the human mind in one of his well known songs: "She's a devil woman, with evil on her mind". I'd describe the 'devil' as the 'echo' which I observe going on in my mind, and I'm sure you've had the same experience. "I believe in God", we think, and there comes back an echo 'Yes, but... is He *really* out there? Maybe this is just living out the expectations of my upbringing...?'. Or, "OK, I should be generous to that cause. OK, I'll give them some money". And the echo comes back: 'Yes but what if they aren't sincere? Can you really afford it? You need to be careful with your money...'. It's this 'echo' that is the Biblical 'devil'.

PERSONIFICATION

However, you may reasonably reply: 'But it does talk as if the devil is a person!' That is quite correct; Heb. 2:14 speaks of "him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil". Even a small amount of Bible reading shows that it often uses personification - speaking of an abstract idea as if it is a person. Thus Prov. 9:1 speaks of a woman called 'Wisdom' building a house, Prov. 20:1 compares wine to "a mocker", and Rom. 6:23 likens sin to a paymaster giving wages of death.. Our devil, the 'diabolos', often represents our evil desires. Yet you cannot have abstract diabolism; the evil desires that are in a man's heart cannot exist separately from a man; therefore 'the devil' is personified. Sin is often personified as a ruler (e.g. Rom. 5:21; 6:6,17; 7:13-14). It is understandable, therefore, that the 'devil' is also personified, seeing that 'the devil' also refers to sin. In the same way, Paul speaks of us having two beings, as it were, within our flesh (Rom. 7:15-21): the man of the flesh, 'the devil', fights with the man of the spirit. Yet it is evident that there are not two literal, personal beings fighting within us. This sinful part of our nature is personified as "the evil one" (Mt. 6:13 R.V.) - the Biblical devil. The same Greek phrase translated "evil one" here is translated as "wicked person" in 1 Cor. 5:13, showing that when a person gives way to sin, his "evil one" - he himself - becomes an "evil one", or a 'devil'. Even in the Old Testament, sin was personified as 'Belial' (1 Sam. 2:12 mg.). It really has to be accepted that 'devil' and 'satan' are used to personify sin, because if we read these words as always meaning a literal being, then we have serious contradictions. Thus "the devil" is a lion (1 Pet. 5:8), a hunter (2 Tim. 2:26) and a snake (Rev. 12:9); it can't be all these things. Whatever the devil is (and we believe it to essentially refer to human sin), it is personified in various ways.

DEVIL' AND 'SATAN' IN A POLITICAL CONTEXT

These words 'devil' and 'satan' are also used to describe the wicked, sinful world order in which we live. The social, political and pseudo-religious hierarchies of mankind can be spoken of in terms of 'the devil'. The devil

and satan in the New Testament often refer to the political and social power of the Jewish or Roman systems. Thus we read of the devil throwing believers into prison (Rev. 2:10), referring to the Roman authorities imprisoning believers. In this same context we read of the church in Pergamos being situated where satan's throne, was - i.e. the place of governorship for a Roman colony in Pergamos, where there was also a group of believers. We cannot say that satan himself, if he exists, personally had a throne in Pergamos. Individual sin is defined as a transgression against God's law (1 Jn. 3:4). But sin expressed collectively as a political and social force opposed to God is a force more powerful than individuals; it is this collective power which is sometimes personified as a powerful being called the devil. In this sense Iran and other Islamic powers have called the United States, "the great satan" - i.e. the great adversary to their cause, in political and religious terms. This is how the words 'devil' and 'satan' are often used in the Bible.

In conclusion, it is probably true to say that in this subject more than any other, it is vital to base our understanding upon a balanced view of the whole Bible, rather than building doctrines on a few verses containing catch-phrases which appear to refer to the common beliefs concerning the devil. Study 6.1 and this section will repay careful, prayerful re-reading. It is submitted that the doctrinal position outlined there is the only way of being able to have a reasonable understanding of all the passages which refer to the devil and satan. Those words can be used as ordinary nouns, or in some places they refer to the sin which is found within our own human nature. Some of the most widely misunderstood passages which are quoted in support of the popular ideas are considered in the Digressions which accompany this study.

Those who have problems in accepting our conclusions need to ask themselves: (1) Is sin personified? Clearly it is. (2) Is it true that 'satan' can be used just as a noun? Yes, it is. What real problem, therefore, can there be in accepting that sin is personified as our enemy/satan? The world is often personified in John's letters and Gospel (see R.V.); what better title for this personification than 'satan' or 'the devil'?

STUDY 6: Questions

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1. Who is responsible for our problems and trials?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> God</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Chance</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> A sinful being called Satan</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> False accuser/ slanderer</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Lucifer</p> |
| <p>2. What is responsible for our temptation to sin?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Our own human nature</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> God</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Evil spirits</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> A sinful being called satan.</p> | <p>4. What does 'satan' mean as a word?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> A sinner</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> An adversary</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> King of demons</p> |
| <p>3. What does 'devil' mean as a word?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Sin</p> | <p>5. Can the word 'satan' be applied to good people?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p> |
| | <p>6. What can 'satan' and 'devil' refer to figuratively?</p> |

Study 7 The Lord Jesus Christ

7.1 OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES OF JESUS

Throughout the Psalms and prophets of the Old Testament there are countless prophecies about what Messiah would be like:

OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY	FULFILMENT IN CHRIST
“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Ps. 22:1)	These were the very words of Jesus on the cross (Mt. 27:46)
“I am despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him” (Ps. 22:6-8)	Israel despised Jesus and mocked him (Lk. 23:35; 8:53); they shook their heads (Mt. 27:39), and said this as He hung on the cross (Mt. 27:43)
“My tongue cleaves to my jaws...they pierced my hands and my feet” (Ps. 22:15,16)	This was fulfilled in Christ’s thirst on the cross (Jn. 19:28). The piercing of hands and feet refers to the physical method of crucifixion used.
“They parted my garments among them, and cast lots upon my clothing” (Ps. 22:18)	The precise fulfilment of this is found in Mt. 27:35.
Note that Ps. 22:22 is specifically quoted as applying to Jesus in Heb. 2:12	
“I am become a stranger unto my brothers, and am an alien unto my mother’s children. For the zeal of your house has eaten me up” (Ps. 69:8,9)	This well describes Christ’s feeling of estrangement from his Jewish brethren and his own family (Jn. 7:3-5, Mt. 12:47-49). This is quoted in John 2:17.
“They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink” (Ps. 69:21)	This happened while Christ was on the cross (Matt. 27:34)
The whole of Isaiah 53 is a remarkable prophecy of Christ’s death and resurrection, every verse of which had an unmistakable fulfilment. Just two examples will be given.	
“As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opens not his mouth” (Is. 53:7)	Christ, the Lamb of God, remained silent during his trial (Mt. 27:12,14)
“He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death” (Is.	Jesus was crucified along with wicked criminals (Mt. 27:38), but

53:9)

was buried in the tomb of a rich man
(Mt. 27:57-60).

That the Law of Moses pointed forward to Christ, and the prophets prophesied of him, should be proof enough that Jesus did not exist physically before his birth. The false doctrine of the physical ‘pre-existence’ of Christ before birth makes a nonsense of the repeated promises that he would be the *descendant* of Eve, Abraham and David. The early preachers emphasized that Jesus was “of David’s posterity” [Gk. *Spermatos*- Acts 2:29-31; 13:23; Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8]. If he were already existing up in heaven at the time of these promises, God would have been incorrect in promising these people a descendant who *would be* Messiah. The genealogies of Jesus, recorded in Mt. 1 and Lk. 3, show how Jesus had a pedigree which stretched back to those people to whom God had made the promises.

The promise to David concerning Christ precludes his physical existence at the time the promise was made: “I *will* set up your descendant [singular] *after* you, which *shall* proceed out of your body...I *will be* his father, and he *shall be* my son” (2 Sam. 7:12,14). Notice the future tense used here. Seeing that God *would be* Christ’s Father, it is impossible that the Son of God could have already existed at that point in time when the promise was made. That this seed “*shall proceed out of your body*” shows that he was to be a literal, physical descendant of David. “The Lord has sworn in truth unto David...Of the fruit of your body will I set upon your throne” (Ps. 132:11).

Similar future tenses are used in other prophecies concerning Christ. “I *will* raise (Israel) up a Prophet like unto (Moses)” (Dt. 18:18) is quoted in Acts 3:22,23, which defines the “Prophet” as Jesus. “A virgin (Mary) *shall* conceive, and bear a son, and *shall* call his name Immanuel” (Is. 7:14). This was clearly fulfilled in Christ’s birth (Mt. 1:23).

7.2 The Virgin Birth

The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary with the message that “you shall conceive in your womb, and bring forth a son, and shall call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest...Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? (i.e. she was a virgin). And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God” (Lk. 1:31-35).

Twice it is emphasized that Jesus *would be* the Son of God on his birth; evidently the Son of God did not exist before his birth. Again, the many future tenses need to be noted - e.g. “he *shall be* great”. If Jesus were already physically in existence as the angel spoke those words to Mary, he would already have been great. Jesus was the “offspring” of David (Rev. 22:16), the Greek ‘genos’ implying Jesus was ‘generated from’ David. He was born “of” Mary (Lk. 1:35).

That Jesus was ‘conceived’ in Mary’s womb (Lk. 1:31) is also proof that he could not have physically existed before this time. If we ‘conceive’ an idea, it begins within us. Likewise Jesus was conceived inside Mary’s womb - he began there as a foetus, just like any other human being. Jn. 3:16, the Bible’s most famous verse, records that Jesus was the “only *begotten* Son” of God. Millions of people who recite this verse fail to meditate upon what it implies. If Jesus was “begotten”, he ‘began’ (a related word to “begotten”) when he was conceived in Mary’s womb. If Jesus was begotten by God as his Father, this is clear evidence that his Father is older than he - God has no beginning (Ps. 90:2) and therefore Jesus cannot be God Himself.

The very description of Mary in the Gospels as Christ’s “*mother*” in itself destroys the idea that he existed before his birth of Mary. Mary was an ordinary human being, with normal human parents. This is proved by the fact that she had a cousin, who gave birth to John the Baptist, an ordinary man (Lk. 1:36). The Roman Catholic idea that Mary was not of ordinary human nature would mean that Christ could not truly have been both “Son of man” and “Son of God”. These are his frequent titles throughout the New Testament. He was “Son of man” by reason of having a totally human mother, and “Son of God” because of God’s action on Mary through the Holy Spirit (Lk. 1:35), meaning that God was his Father. This beautiful arrangement is nullified if Mary was not an ordinary woman.

God does not decide on His plans on the spur of the moment, devising extra parts to His purpose as human history unfolds. God had a complete plan formulated right from the beginning of creation (Jn. 1:1). His desire to have a Son was therefore in His plan from the beginning. He loved that Son before he was born, just as parents may

love a child still in the womb. The whole of the Old Testament reveals different aspects of God's plan of salvation in Christ.

7.3 Differences Between God And Jesus

There is a fine balance to be drawn between those passages which emphasise the degree to which "God was in Christ", and those which highlight his humanity. The latter group of passages make it impossible to justify Biblically the idea that Jesus is God Himself, "very God of very God", as the doctrine of the Trinity wrongly states. (This phrase "very God of very God" was used at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D., where the idea of God being a 'trinity' was first promulgated; it was unknown to the early Christians.) The word 'trinity' never occurs in the Bible.

One of the clearest summaries of the relationship between God and Jesus is found in 1 Tim. 2:5: "There is *one* God, *and* one *mediator* between God and men, the *man* Christ Jesus". Reflection upon the highlighted words leads to the following conclusions.

- As there is only *one* God, it is impossible that Jesus could be God; if the Father is God and Jesus is also God, then there are two Gods. "But to us there is but one God, the Father" (1 Cor. 8:6). 'God the Father' is therefore the only God. It is therefore impossible that there can be a separate being called 'God the Son', as the false doctrine of the trinity states. The Old Testament likewise portrays Yahweh, the one God, as the Father (e.g. Is. 63:16; 64:8).
- In addition to this one God, there is the mediator, the man Christ Jesus - "...*and* one mediator...". That word "and" indicates a difference between Christ and God.
- As Christ is the "mediator" it means that he is a go-between. A mediator between sinful man and sinless God cannot be sinless God Himself; it had to be a sinless man, of sinful human nature. "The *man* Christ Jesus" leaves us in no doubt as to the correctness of this explanation. Even though he was writing after the ascension of Jesus, Paul does not speak of "the God Christ Jesus".

Several times we are reminded that "God is not a man" (Num. 23:19; Hos. 11:9); yet Christ was clearly "the Son of man" or, as he is often called in the New Testament, "the *man* Christ Jesus". The Greek text calls him "son of *anthropos*", i.e. of mankind, rather than "son of *aner*" [husband, man]. In Hebrew thought, "the Son of man" meant an ordinary, mortal man (Is. 51:12). "For since by man [Adam] came death, by man [Jesus] came also the resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor. 15:21). Yet He was also "the Son of the Highest" (Lk. 1:32). God being "*The* Highest" indicates that only He has ultimate highness; Jesus being "the *Son* of the Highest" shows that he cannot have been God Himself in person. The very language of Father and Son which is used about God and Jesus, makes it obvious that they are not the same. Whilst a son may have certain similarities to his father, he cannot be one and the same person, nor be as old as his father.

In line with this, there are a number of obvious differences between God and Jesus, which clearly show that Jesus was not God himself.

GOD	JESUS
"God cannot be tempted" (James 1:13).	Christ "was in all points tempted like as we are" (Heb. 4:15).
God cannot die - He is immortal by nature (Ps. 90:2; 1 Tim. 6:16).	Christ died and was in the grave for three days (Mt. 12:40; 16:21). He was once under the "dominion" of death (Rom. 6:9).
God cannot be seen by men (1 Tim. 6:16; Ex. 33:20).	Men saw Jesus and handled him (1 Jn. 1:1 emphasises this).

When we are tempted, we are forced to choose between sin and obedience to God. Often we choose to disobey God; Christ had the same choices, but always chose to be obedient. He therefore had the possibility of sinning, although he never actually did. It is unthinkable that God has any possibility of sinning. We have shown that the seed of David promised in 2 Sam. 7:12-16 was definitely Christ. Verse 14 speaks of Christ's possibility of sinning: "If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him".

The Centurion reasoned that because he was under authority, he therefore had authority over others; and he applies this very same logic to the abilities of the Lord Jesus. Because He was under *God's* authority, therefore and thereby He would have the power to have other things under His authority. And the Lord commended the Centurion for that perception. Clearly the Lord Jesus is to be understood as under the Father's authority; and it is only because He is in this subordinate position, that He has authority over all things now.

7.4 THE NATURE OF JESUS

The word 'nature' means 'fundamental, essential being'. We have shown in Study 1 that the Bible speaks of only two natures - that of God, and that of man. By nature God cannot die, be tempted etc. It is evident that Christ was not of God's nature during his life. He was therefore of human nature. From our definition of the word 'nature' it is evident that Christ could not have had two natures simultaneously. It was vital that Christ was tempted like us (Heb. 4:15), so that through his perfect overcoming of temptation he could gain forgiveness for us. "We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like us" (Heb. 4:15) expresses a truth negatively. It suggests that even in the first century there were those who thought that Jesus "cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities"; the writer is stressing that this is *not* the case; Jesus *can* be touched in this way. These incipient tendencies to wrong understanding of the nature of Jesus came to full fruit in the false doctrine of the trinity. The wrong desires which are the basis of our temptations come from within us (Mk. 7:15-23), from within our human nature (James 1:13-15). It was necessary, therefore, that Christ should be of human nature so that he could experience and overcome these temptations.

Heb. 2:14-18 puts all this in so many words.

“As the children (us) are partakers of flesh and blood (human nature), he (Christ) also himself likewise partook of the same (nature); that through death he might destroy... the devil... For truly he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the (nature of the) seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it was appropriate that he be made like unto his brothers, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest... to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to help them that are tempted”.

This passage places extraordinary emphasis upon the fact that Jesus had human nature: “He *also himself likewise*” partook of it (Heb. 2:14). This phrase uses three words all with the same meaning, just to drive the point home. He partook “of the *same*” nature; the record could have said ‘he partook of IT too’, but it stresses, “he partook of the *same*”. Heb. 2:16 similarly labours the point that Christ did not have angels’ nature, seeing that he was the seed of Abraham, who had come to bring salvation for the multitude of believers who would become Abraham’s seed. Because of this, it was necessary for Christ to have human nature. In *every* way he had “to be made like unto his brothers” (Heb. 2:17) so that God could grant us forgiveness through Christ’s sacrifice. To say that Jesus was not totally of human nature is therefore to be ignorant of the very basics of the good news of Christ.

Whenever baptised believers sin, they can come to God, confessing their sin in prayer through Christ (1 Jn. 1:9); God is aware that Christ was tempted to sin exactly as they are, but that he was perfect, overcoming that very temptation which they fail. Because of this, “God for Christ’s sake” can forgive us (Eph. 4:32). It is therefore vital to appreciate how Christ was tempted just like us, and needed to have our nature for this to be possible. Heb. 2:14 clearly states that Christ had “flesh and blood” nature to make this possible. “God is spirit” (Jn. 4:24) by nature and as “spirit” He does not have flesh and blood. Christ having “flesh” nature means that in no way did he have God’s nature during his mortal life.

Previous attempts by men to keep God’s word, i.e. to overcome totally temptation, had all failed. Therefore “God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and by a sacrifice for sin, condemned sin, in the flesh” (Rom. 8:3).

“The wages of sin is death”. To escape this predicament, man needed outside help. By himself he is incapable of perfection; it was and is not possible for us as fleshly creatures to redeem the flesh. God therefore intervened and gave us His own Son, who experienced our “sinful flesh”, with all the temptation to sin which we have. Unlike every other man, Christ overcame every temptation, although he had the possibility of failure and sinning just as much as we do. Rom. 8:3 describes Christ’s human nature as “sinful flesh”. A few verses earlier, Paul spoke of how in the flesh “dwells no good thing”, and how the flesh naturally militates against obedience to God (Rom. 7:18-23). In this context it is all the more marvellous to read that Christ had “sinful flesh” in Rom. 8:3. It was because of this, and his overcoming of that flesh, that we have a way of escape from our flesh; Jesus was intensely aware of the potential to sin within his own nature. He was once addressed as “Good master”, with the implication that he was “good” and perfect by nature. He responded: “Why do you call me good? There is none good but one, that is, God” (Mk. 10:17,18). On another occasion, men started to testify of Christ’s greatness due to a series of outstanding miracles which he had performed. Jesus did not capitalise on this “because he knew all, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in

man” (Jn. 2:23-25, Greek text). Because of his great knowledge of human nature (“he knew *all*” about this), Christ did not want men to praise him personally in his own right, he was aware of his own nature.

All this can seem almost impossible to believe; that a man with our weak nature could in fact be sinless by character. It requires less faith to believe that ‘Jesus was God’ and was therefore perfect. Hence the attraction of this false doctrine. Those who knew the half-sisters of Jesus in first century Palestine felt the same: “...his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then has this man these things? And they were offended in him” (Mt. 13:56,57). And countless others have likewise stumbled in this way.

7.5 THE HUMANITY OF JESUS

The Gospel records provide many examples of how completely Jesus had human nature. It is recorded that he was weary, and had to sit down to drink from a well (Jn 4:6). “Jesus wept” at the death of Lazarus (Jn. 11:35). Most supremely, the record of his final sufferings should be proof enough of his humanity: “Now is my soul troubled”, he admitted as he prayed for God to save him from having to go through with his death on the cross (Jn. 12:27). He “prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup (of suffering and death) pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as you will” (Mt. 26:39). This indicates that at times Christ’s fleshly desires were different from those of God.

However, during his whole life Christ always submitted his own will to that of God in preparation for this final trial of the cross. “I can of mine own self do nothing; as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which has sent me” (Jn. 5:30). This difference between Christ’s will and that of God is proof enough that Jesus was not God.

Throughout our lives we are expected to grow in our knowledge of God, learning from the trials which we experience in life. In this, Jesus was our great example. He did not have complete knowledge of God poured into him any more than we have. From childhood “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature (i.e. spiritual maturity, cp. Eph. 4:13), and in favour with God and man” (Lk. 2:52). “The child grew, and became strong in spirit” (Lk. 2:40). These two verses portray Christ’s physical growth as parallel to his spiritual development; the growth process occurred in him both naturally and spiritually. If “The Son is God”, as the Athanasian Creed states concerning the ‘Trinity’, this would not have been possible. Even at the end of his life, Christ admitted that he did not know the exact time of his second coming, although the Father did (Mk. 13:32). He asked questions of the teachers of the Law at age 12, eager to learn; and often He spoke of what He had *learnt* and *been taught* by His Father.

Obedience to God’s will is something which we all have to learn over a period of time. Christ also had to go through this process of learning obedience to his Father, as any son has to. “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience (i.e. obedience to God) by the things which he suffered; and being *made* perfect (i.e. spiritually mature), he became the author of eternal salvation” as a result of his completed and total spiritual growth (Heb. 5:8,9). Phil. 2:7,8 (further commented on in Digression 27) records this same process of spiritual growth in Jesus,

culminating in his death on the cross. He “*made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form (demeanour) of a servant... he humbled himself and became obedient unto...the death of the cross.*” The language used here illustrates how Jesus consciously grew spiritually, humbling himself completely, so that finally he “*became obedient*” to God’s desire that he should die on the cross. Thus he was “*made perfect*” by the way he accepted his suffering.

It is evident from this that Jesus had to make a conscious, personal effort to be righteous; in no way was he automatically made so by God, which would have resulted in him being a mere puppet. Jesus truly loved us, and gave his life on the cross from this motive. The constant emphasis upon the love of Christ for us would be hollow if God compelled him to die on the cross (Eph. 5:2,25; Rev. 1:5; Gal. 2:20). If Jesus was God, then he would have had no option but to be perfect and then die on the cross. That Jesus *did* have these options, enables us to appreciate his love, and to form a personal relationship with him.

It was because of Christ’s willingness to give his life voluntarily that God was so delighted with him: “Therefore does my Father love me, because I lay down my life... No man takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself” (Jn. 10:17,18). That God was so pleased with Christ’s willing obedience is hard to understand if Jesus was God, living out a life in human form as some kind of tokenistic association with sinful man (Mt. 3:17; 12:18; 17:5). These records of the Father’s delight in the Son’s obedience, is proof enough that Christ had the possibility of disobedience, but consciously chose to be obedient.

CHRIST’S NEED OF SALVATION

Because of his human nature, Jesus was mortal as we are. In view of this, Jesus needed to be saved from death by God. Intensely recognising this, Jesus “offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him (God) that was able to save him from death, and was heard for his piety” (Heb. 5:7 A.V. mg.). The fact that Christ had to plead with God to save him from death rules out any possibility of him being God in person. After Christ’s resurrection, death had “*no more dominion over him*” (Rom. 6:9), implying that beforehand it did.

Many of the Psalms are prophetic of Jesus; when some verses from a Psalm are quoted about Christ in the New Testament, it is reasonable to assume that many of the other verses in the Psalm are about him too. There are a number of occasions where Christ’s need for salvation by God is emphasised.

- **Ps. 91:11,12** is quoted about Jesus in Mt. 4:6. Ps. 91:16 prophesies how God would give Jesus salvation: “With long life (i.e. eternal life) will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.” Ps. 69:21 refers to Christ’s crucifixion (Mt. 27:34); the whole Psalm describes Christ’s thoughts on the cross: “Save me, O God...Draw nigh unto my soul, and redeem it...Let your salvation, O God, set me up on high” (vs. 1,18,29).
- **Ps. 89** is a commentary upon God’s promise to David concerning Christ. Concerning Jesus, Ps. 89:26 prophesies: “He shall cry unto me (God), You art my father, my God, and the rock of my *salvation*.”

- Christ's prayers to God for salvation were heard; he was heard because of his personal spirituality, not because of his place in a 'trinity' (Heb. 5:7). That *God* resurrected Jesus and glorified him with immortality is a major New Testament theme.
- "*God*...raised up Jesus...Him has *God* exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour" (Acts 5:30,31).
- "*God*...has glorified his Son Jesus...whom *God* has raised from the dead" (Acts 3:13,15).
- "This Jesus has *God* raised up" (Acts 2:24,32,33).
- Jesus himself recognised all this when he asked *God* to glorify him (Jn. 17:5 cp. 13:32; 8:54).

If Jesus was God Himself, then all this emphasis would be out of place, seeing that God cannot die. Jesus would not have needed saving if he were God. That it was God who exalted Jesus demonstrates God's superiority over him, and the separateness of God and Jesus. In no way could Christ have been "very and eternal God (with) two...natures...Godhead and manhood", as the first of the 39 Articles of the Church of England states. By the very meaning of the word, a being can only have one nature. We submit that the evidence is overwhelming that Christ was of our human nature.

7.6 THE RELATIONSHIP OF GOD WITH JESUS

Considering how God resurrected Jesus leads us on to think of the relationship between God and Jesus. If they are "co-equal...co-eternal", as the trinity doctrine states, then we would expect their relationship to be that of equals. We have already seen ample evidence that this is not the case. The relationship between God and Christ is similar to that between husband and wife: "The head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 11:3). As the husband is the head of the wife, so God is the head of Christ, although they have the same unity of purpose as should exist between husband and wife. Thus "Christ is God's" (1 Cor. 3:23), as the wife belongs to the husband.

God the Father is often stated to be Christ's God. The fact that God is described as "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:3; Eph. 1:17) even after Christ's ascension to heaven, shows that this is *now* their relationship, as it was during Christ's mortal life. It is sometimes argued by trinitarians that Christ is only spoken of as less than God during his life on earth. The New Testament letters were written some years after Christ ascended to heaven, yet still God is spoken of as Christ's God and Father. Jesus still treats the Father as his God.

Revelation, the last book of the New Testament, was written many years after Christ's glorification and ascension, yet it speaks of God as "his (Christ's) God and Father" (Rev. 1:6 R.V.). In this book, the resurrected and glorified Christ gave messages to the believers. He speaks of "the temple of my God...the name of my God...the city of my God" (Rev. 3:12). This proves that Jesus even now thinks of the Father as his God - and therefore he (Jesus) is not God.

During his mortal life, Jesus related to his Father in a similar way. He spoke of ascending "unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (Jn. 20:17). On the cross, Jesus displayed his humanity to the full: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46). Such words are impossible to understand if spoken by God Himself. The very fact that

Jesus prayed to God "with strong crying and tears" in itself indicates the true nature of their relationship (Heb. 5:7; Lk. 6:12). God evidently cannot pray to Himself. Even now, Christ prays to God on our behalf (Rom. 8:26,27 N.I.V. cp. 2 Cor. 3:18 R.V. mg.).

7.7 Jesus As Our Representative

Jesus was representative of us, being in all points "made like his brethren" (Heb. 2:17). "He suffered death ... for everyone " (Heb. 2:9 NIV). When we commit a sin - e.g. we are angry - God can forgive us if we are "in Christ" (Eph. 4:32). This is because God can compare us with Christ, a man like us who was tempted to sin - e.g. to be angry - but who overcame every temptation. Therefore God can forgive us our sin - of anger - on account of our being in Christ, covered by his righteousness. Christ being our representative is therefore the means by which God can show us His grace, whilst upholding His own righteous principles.

If Jesus was God rather than being solely of human nature, he could not have been our representative. This is another example of where one wrong idea leads to another. Because of this, theologians have developed many complex ways of explaining Christ's death. The popular view of apostate Christendom is that man's sins placed him in a debt to God which of himself he could not pay. Christ then cleared the debt of each believer by his blood, shed on the cross. Many a Gospel Hall preacher has expressed it like this: "It was as if we were all lined up against a wall, about to be shot by the devil. Jesus then rushed in; the devil shot him instead of us, so we are now free."

These elaborate theories are without any firm Biblical support. There is the obvious contradiction that if Christ died *instead* of us, then we should not die. As we still have human nature, we must still die; salvation from sin and death will finally be revealed at the judgment (when we are granted immortality). We did not receive this at the time Christ died. Christ's death destroyed the devil (Heb. 2:14) rather than the devil destroying him.

7.8 The Sabbath

The Sabbath was specifically "a sign between them (Israel) and Me (God), that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them" (Eze. 20:12). As such, it has never been intended to be binding on Gentiles (non-Jews). "... the Lord has given *you* [not all mankind] the Sabbath (Ex. 16:29; Neh. 9:14).

Through Christ's death on the cross, the Law of Moses was done away, so that there is now no necessity to observe the Sabbath or, indeed, any festival (Col. 2:14-17). The early Christians who returned to keeping parts of the Mosaic Law, e.g. the Sabbath, are described by Paul as returning "to the weak and miserable principles (NIV) to which you desire again to be in bondage. You observe days (e.g. the Sabbath) and months and seasons and years (i.e. the Jewish festivals). I am afraid for you, lest I have laboured for you in vain" (Gal. 4:9-11). This is the seriousness of attempting to keep the Sabbath as a means to salvation. It is clear that observing the Sabbath is irrelevant to salvation: "One man esteems one day above another (i.e. in spiritual significance); another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He

who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it" (Rom. 14:5,6).

Because of this, it is understandable that we do not read of the early believers keeping the Sabbath. Indeed, it is recorded that they met on "the *first* day of the week", i.e. Sunday: "... on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread ..." (Acts 20:7). That this was a widespread practice is indicated by Paul advising the believers at Corinth to take up a collection "on the first day of the week" (1 Cor. 16:2), i.e. at their regular meetings on that day. All the believers are described as being priests (1 Peter 2:9) - who were exempt from keeping the Sabbath (Matt. 12:5).

If we are to keep the Sabbath, we must do so properly; we have earlier shown that it is fatal to keep the Mosaic Law partially, because this will result in our condemnation (Gal. 3:10; James 2:10).

The Lord Jesus invites those who follow Him to accept the "rest" which He gives (Mt. 11:28). He uses a Greek word which is used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, for the Sabbath rest. Jesus was offering a life of Sabbath, of rest from trust in our own works (cp. Heb. 4:3,10). We shouldn't, therefore, keep a Sabbath one day per week, but rather live our whole lives in the spirit of the Sabbath.

STUDY 7: Questions

1. How can we benefit from the death and resurrection of Jesus?
2. Must we keep the Sabbath now in order to be saved?
3. Did Jesus physically exist before his birth?
 Yes
 No
4. Which of the following statements are true about Mary?
 She was a perfect, sinless woman
 She was an ordinary woman
 She was made pregnant with Jesus by the Holy Spirit
 She now offers our prayers to Jesus.
5. List three differences between God and Jesus.
6. Jesus was different from us because:
 He never sinned
 He was God's own begotten son
 He could never have sinned
 He was automatically made righteous by God
7. In which of the following ways was Jesus similar to God?
 He had God's nature in his life on earth
 He had a perfect character like God
 He knew as much as God
 He was directly equal to God

. Does the Bible teach that God is a trinity?

Study 8: Baptism into Jesus

8.1 THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF BAPTISM

Several times in earlier studies we have mentioned the vital importance of baptism; it is the first step of obedience to the Gospel message. Heb. 6:2 speaks of baptism as one of the most basic doctrines. We have left its consideration until this late stage because true baptism can only occur after a correct grasp of the basic truths which comprise the Gospel. We have now completed our study of these. If you wish to become truly associated with the great hope which the Bible offers through Jesus Christ, then baptism is an absolute necessity.

“Salvation is of the Jews” (Jn. 4:22) in the sense that the promises concerning salvation were made only to Abraham and his seed. We can only have those promises made to us if we become *in* the seed, by being baptised *into* Christ (Gal. 3:22-29). Then, all that is true of the Lord Jesus becomes true of us. Thus Zacharias quoted prophecies about the seed of Abraham and David as applying to all believers (Lk. 1:69,73,74). Without baptism, we are outside covenant relationship with God. This is why Peter urged: “repent *and* be baptised” in order to receive forgiveness. *Only as many* as have been baptised into Christ are in Him and therefore have the promises of salvation made to Abraham made to them (Gal. 3:27). *If* we share in Christ’s death and resurrection through baptism, *then* - and only then - “we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection... we shall also live with Him” (Rom. 6:5,8).

Jesus therefore clearly commanded his followers: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel (which is contained in the promises to Abraham - Gal. 3:8) to every creature. He who believes *and* is baptised will be saved” (Mk. 16:15,16). Reflection upon this word “and” reveals that belief of the Gospel alone cannot save us; baptism is not just an optional extra in the Christian life, it is a vital prerequisite for salvation. This is not to say that the act of baptism alone will save us; it must be followed by a lifetime of continued openness to God’s working in us. Jesus emphasised this: “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:5). When the barrier of unforgiven sin is removed by grace, when we are ‘covered’ with Christ’s righteousness, then we enjoy a personal covenant relationship with God.

This is an on-going process: “Being born again... through the word of God” (1 Pet. 1:23). Thus it is through our continued response to the spirit word that we become born of the spirit (see Study 2.2).

We are “baptised *into* Christ” (Gal. 3:27), *into* his name and that of the Father (Acts 19:5; 8:16; Mt. 28:19). We can’t be “in Christ” without being baptized. Unless we are “washed”, we have “no part” in Christ (Jn. 13:8). But note that we are baptised into *Christ* - not into a church or any human organisation. By baptism into him we become a people called by Christ’s name, just as Israel were likewise described as having God’s name (2 Chron. 7:14). Frequently God warns that the fact Israel carried His name gave them a grave responsibility to act appropriately, as His witnesses to the world. The same is true for us who are baptised into Christ’s name. Without baptism we are not “in Christ”, and therefore not covered by his saving work (Acts 4:12). Peter weaves a powerful parable around this fact: he likens the ark in the time of Noah to Christ, showing that as the ark saved Noah and his family from the judgment that came upon sinners, so baptism into Christ will save believers from eternal death (1 Pet. 3:20,21). Noah entering into the ark is likened to our entering into Christ through baptism. All those outside the ark were destroyed by the flood; standing near the ark or being a friend of Noah was quite irrelevant. The only way of salvation is, and was, to be inside the Christ/ark. It is evident that the second coming, which the flood typified (Lk. 17:26,27), is nearly upon us. Entry into the Christ/ark by baptism is therefore of the utmost urgency. Human words really do fail to convey this sense of urgency; the Biblical type of entry into the ark in Noah’s time is more powerful.

The early Christians obeyed Christ’s command to travel preaching the Gospel and baptising; the book of Acts is the record of this. A proof of the vital importance of baptism is to be found in the way that this record emphasises how *immediately* people were baptised after understanding and accepting the Gospel (e.g. Acts 8:12,36-39; 9:18; 10:47; 16:15). This emphasis is understandable once it is appreciated that without baptism our learning of the Gospel is in vain; baptism is a vitally necessary stage to pass through on the road to salvation. In some cases the inspired record seems to highlight how, despite many human reasons to delay baptism, and many difficulties in performing the act, it is so important that people made every effort to overcome all these, with God’s help.

The prison keeper at Philippi was suddenly plunged into the crisis of his life by a massive earthquake which completely broke up his high security prison. The prisoners had ample opportunity to escape - something which would have cost him his life. His faith in the Gospel then became real, so much so that “the same hour of the night he was baptised...immediately” (Acts 16:33). If anyone had an excuse to delay baptism it was him. The threat of execution for neglect of duty hung over his head, yet he saw clearly what was the most important act to be

performed in his entire life and eternal destiny. Thus he overcame the immediate problems of his surrounding world (i.e. the earthquake), the pressures of his daily employment and the intense nervous trauma he found himself in - to be baptised. Many a hesitant candidate for baptism can take true inspiration from that man. That he could make such an act of faith is proof enough that he already had a detailed knowledge of the Gospel, seeing that such real faith only comes from hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17 cf. Acts 17:11).

In Acts 16:14,15 we read how Lydia heeded “the things spoken by Paul. And when she ... (was) baptised...”. It is *assumed* that anyone who hears and believes the Gospel will be baptised - the baptism is seen as an inevitable part of response to the preaching of the Gospel. Good works are not enough - we *must* be baptised as well. Cornelius was “a devout man and one who feared God... who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always”, but this wasn’t enough; he had to be shown what he *must do* which he hadn’t done - to believe the Gospel of Christ and be baptised (Acts 10:2,6).

Acts 8:26-40 records how an Ethiopian official was studying his Bible whilst riding in a chariot through the desert. He met Philip, who extensively explained the Gospel to him, including the requirement for baptism. Humanly speaking, it must have seemed impossible to obey the command to be baptised in that waterless desert. Yet God would not give a command which He knows some people cannot obey. “As they went down the road, they came to some water”, i.e. an oasis, where baptism was possible (Acts 8:36). This incident answers the baseless suggestion that baptism by immersion was only intended to be performed in areas where there was ample, easily accessible water. God will always provide a realistic way in which to obey His commandments.

The apostle Paul received a dramatic vision from Christ which so pricked his conscience that as soon as possible he “arose and was baptised” (Acts 9:18). Again, it must have been tempting for him to delay his baptism, thinking of his prominent social position and high-flying career mapped out for him in Judaism. But this rising star of the Jewish world made the correct and immediate decision to be baptised and openly renounce his former way of life. He later reflected concerning his choice to be baptised: “What things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ...I have suffered the loss of all things (i.e. the things he once saw as “gain” to him), and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ...forgetting those things which are behind (the “things” of his former Jewish life), and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize ...” (Phil. 3:7,8,13,14).

8.2 HOW SHOULD WE BE BAPTISED?

The Greek word ‘baptizo’, which is translated ‘baptise’ in the English Bible, does *not* mean to sprinkle; it means to completely wash and immerse in a liquid (see the definitions in the concordances of Robert Young and James Strong). This word is used in classical Greek concerning ships sinking and being ‘baptised’ (i.e. submerged) in water, or a bucket being submerged in well water. It is also used with reference to a piece of cloth being dyed from one colour to another by ‘baptising’, or dipping it into a dye. To change the colour of the cloth, it is evident that it had to be fully immersed under the liquid, rather than have the dye sprinkled upon it. Jn. 13:26 uses the Greek *bapto* to describe how the Lord dipped a piece of bread in wine. That immersion is indeed the correct form of baptism is borne out by the following verses:-

- “John also was baptising in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptised” (Jn. 3:23). This shows that “much water” was required for baptism; if it was done by sprinkling a few drops of water, then just one bucket of water would have sufficed for hundreds of people. The people came to this spot on the banks of the River Jordan for baptism, rather than John going round to them with a bottle of water.
- Jesus, too, was baptised by John in the River Jordan - *into* the Jordan (Mk. 1:9 RVmg.). “As soon as Jesus was baptised, he went up out of the water” (Mt. 3:13-16NIV). His baptism was clearly by immersion - he “went up... *out of* the water” after baptism. One of the reasons for Jesus being baptised was in order to set an example, so that no one could seriously claim to follow Jesus without copying his example of baptism by immersion.
- In similar fashion, Philip and the Ethiopian official “went down *into* the water...and he baptised him. Now when they came up *out of* the water...” (Acts 8:38,39). Remember that the official asked for baptism when he saw the oasis: “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptised?” (Acts 8:36). It is almost certain that the man would not have undertaken a desert journey without at least some water with him in a bottle. If baptism were by sprinkling, it could therefore have been done without the need of the oasis.

- Baptism is a burial (Col. 2:12), which implies a total covering.
- Baptism is called a ‘washing away’ of sins (Acts 22:16). The point of true conversion is likened to a ‘washing’ in Rev. 1:5; Tit. 3:5; 2 Pet. 2:22; Heb. 10:22 etc. This language of washing is far more relevant to baptism by dipping than to sprinkling.

There are several Old Testament indications that acceptable approach to God was through some form of washing.

The priests had to wash completely in a bath called the ‘laver’ before they came near to God in service (Lev. 8:6; Ex. 40:7,32). The Israelites had to wash in order to cleanse themselves from certain uncleanness (e.g. Dt. 23:11), which was representative of sin.

A man called Naaman was a Gentile leper who sought to be healed by the God of Israel. As such he represents sin-stricken man, effectively going through a living death due to sin. His cure was by dipping in the River Jordan. Initially he found this simple act hard to accept, thinking that God would want him to do some dramatic act, or to dip himself in a large and well-known river, e.g. the Abana. Similarly, we may find it hard to believe that such a simple act can ultimately bring about our salvation. It is more attractive to think that our own works and public association with a large, well-known church (cf. the river Abana) can save us, rather than this simple act of association with the true hope of Israel. After dipping in Jordan, Naaman’s flesh “was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean” (2 Kings 5:9-14).

It is worth noting that most of the early artistic descriptions of baptism in Roman catacombs and sarcophagi show the candidate standing in water, being baptized by immersion.

There should now be little room for doubt that ‘baptism’ refers to a complete dipping in water after first understanding the basic message of the Gospel. This Bible-based definition of baptism does not make any reference to the status of the person who actually does the baptism physically. Baptism being an immersion in water after belief of the Gospel, it is theoretically possible to baptise oneself. We can guide you through this from a distance if you wish. However, because baptism is only baptism by reason of the correct faith which one holds at the time of the immersion, it is definitely advisable to be baptised by another believer of the faith.

8.3 THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

One of the reasons for baptism by immersion is that going under the water symbolises our going into the grave - associating us with the death of Christ, and indicating our ‘death’ to our previous life of sin and ignorance. Coming up out of the water connects us with the resurrection of Christ, relating us to the hope of resurrection to eternal life at his return, as well as to living a new life now, spiritually triumphant over sin on account of Christ’s victory achieved by his death and resurrection.

“...all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death. We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death (by baptism), we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection” (Rom. 6:3-5 NIV).

Because salvation has been made possible only through Christ’s death and resurrection, it is vital that we associate ourselves with these things if we are to be saved. The symbolic dying and rising again with Christ, which baptism enacts, is the only way to do this. It should be noted that sprinkling does not fulfil this symbol. At baptism, “our old self (way of life) was crucified” along with Christ on the cross (Rom. 6:6 NIV); God “made us alive with Christ” at baptism (Eph. 2:5 NIV). However, we still have human nature after baptism, and therefore the fleshly way of life will keep raising its head. The ‘crucifixion’ of our flesh (human nature) is therefore an on-going process which only *begins* at baptism, hence Jesus told the believer to take up his cross each day and follow him, as it were, in the procession towards Calvary (Lk. 9:23; 14:27). Whilst a life of true crucifixion with Christ is not easy, there is unspeakable consolation and joy through being also united with Christ’s resurrection.

“Baptism ... now saves you ... by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 3:21NIV) because our association with Christ’s resurrection to eternal life gives us access to the same at his return. It is through sharing in this resurrection, then, that we will finally be saved. Jesus stated this in very simple terms: “Because I live, you will live

also” (Jn. 14:19). Paul likewise: “We were reconciled to God through the death of His Son ... we shall be saved by His life” (resurrection; Rom. 5:10).

Time and again it is emphasised that by associating ourselves with Christ’s death and sufferings in baptism, and our subsequent way of life, we will surely share in his glorious resurrection:

“If we died with (Christ), we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him” (2 Tim. 2:11,12).

“We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body ... because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus ... will also raise us with Jesus” (2 Cor. 4:10,11,14NIV).

Paul shared in “the fellowship of (Christ’s) sufferings, being (by his hard experience of life) conformed to His death, if, by any means, I might attain to the resurrection from the dead.” as experienced by Christ (Phil. 3:10,11 cf. Gal 6:14).

8.4 BAPTISM AND SALVATION

Baptism associates us with the death of Christ, hence it is only through baptism that we can have access to forgiveness. We are “buried with (Christ) in baptism and raised with him through ... the power of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins ... (God) made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins” (Col. 2:12,13NIV). We are “washed... in the name of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 6:11) - i.e. baptism into the name of Jesus is the means by which our sins are washed away. The descriptions of the believers as being washed from their sins in the blood of Christ therefore refers to their doing this by means of baptism (Rev. 1:5; 7:14; Tit. 3:5 [NIV] speak of this as “the washing of rebirth”, referring to our being “born of water” at baptism [Jn. 3:5]).

In the light of all this, it is understandable that Peter’s response to the question, “What shall we do?” was, “Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ *for* the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:37,38NIV). Baptism into Christ’s name is *for* the forgiveness of sins; it’s that important. There is no salvation except in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12), and we can only share that name by being baptised into it. This fact means that non-Christian religions can in no way lead to salvation.

Christ’s resurrection to eternal life was a sign of his personal triumph over sin. By baptism we associate ourselves with this, and therefore we are spoken of as having been raised along with Christ, sin no longer having power over us, as it no longer did over him. Through baptism we are therefore “set free from sin ... sin shall not have dominion over you” after baptism (Rom. 6:18,14). However, after baptism we still sin (1 Jn. 1:8,9); sin is still in a position to enslave us again if we turn away from Christ. We are therefore presently sharing in Christ’s death and sufferings, although baptism demonstrates how we are also associated with Christ’s resurrection, which we have hope of sharing at his return.

Only in prospect are we free from sin. “He who believes and is baptised *will* be saved” (Mk. 16:16) at Christ’s second coming. Ultimate salvation does not occur straight after baptism, but at the judgment seat (1 Cor. 3:13). Indeed, there is no need for the doctrine of the judgment if we receive salvation at baptism, nor should we have to die. “He who endures to the end will be saved” (Mt. 10:22).

Even after his baptism, Paul (and all Christians) had to strive towards salvation (Phil. 3:10-13; 1 Cor. 9:27); he spoke of the *hope* of eternal life (Tit. 1:2; 3:7; 1 Thes. 5:8; Rom. 8:24) and of those who “*will inherit* salvation” (Heb. 1:14). At the judgment seat, the righteous will go *into* eternal life (Mt. 25:46). Paul’s marvellous, inspired logic shines through in Rom. 13:11 - he reasons that after baptism we can know that each day we live and endure is one day closer to Christ’s second coming, so that we can rejoice that “now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed”. Our salvation is therefore not now possessed. Salvation is conditional; we will be saved *if* we hold fast a true faith (Heb. 3:12-14), *if* we remember in faith the basic doctrines which comprise the Gospel (1 Tim. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:1,2), and *if* we continue in those things which are in keeping with such a great hope (2 Pet. 1:10).

The Greek verb translated “saved” is therefore sometimes used in the continuous tense, showing that salvation is an on-going process which is occurring within us by reason of our continued obedience to the Gospel. Thus the believers are spoken of as “*being* saved” by their response to the Gospel (1 Cor. 1:18; other examples of this continuous theme are in Acts 2:47 and 2 Cor. 2:15). This Greek word for “saved” is only used in the past tense

concerning the great salvation which Christ made possible on the cross, and which we can associate ourselves with by baptism (2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 3:5).

This is all exemplified by God's dealings with natural Israel, which form the basis for His relationship with spiritual Israel, i.e. the believers. Israel left Egypt, representing the world of the flesh and false religion which we are associated with before baptism. They passed through the Red Sea and then travelled through the wilderness of Sinai into the promised land, where they were fully established as God's Kingdom. Their crossing of the Red Sea is typical of our baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2); the wilderness journey of our present life, and Canaan of the Kingdom of God. Jude v. 5 describes how many of them were destroyed during the wilderness journey: "The Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe." Israel were therefore "saved" from Egypt, as all those who are baptised are "saved" from sin. If one of those Israelites had been asked, "Are you saved?" their response could have been, "Yes", but this would not mean that they would *ultimately* be saved.

In the same way as Israel turned back to Egypt in their hearts (Acts 7:39) and reverted to a life of flesh-pleasing and false beliefs, so those who have been "saved" from sin by baptism can likewise fall away from the blessed position in which they stand. The possibility of our doing the same as natural Israel in the wilderness is highlighted in 1 Cor. 10:1-12, Heb. 4:1,2 and Rom. 11:17-21. There are numerous examples in Scripture of those who were once "saved" from sin by baptism, later falling into a position which meant they will be condemned at Christ's return (e.g. Heb. 3:12-14; 6:4-6; 10:20-29). The 'once saved always saved' idea of zealous 'evangelical' preachers is exposed for what it is by such passages - complete flesh-pleasing sophistry.

As with all things, a correct sense of balance is needed in trying to understand to what extent we are "saved" by baptism. By becoming "in Christ" by baptism, we are saved in prospect; we really do have a *sure* hope of being in God's Kingdom if we continue to abide in Christ as we are when we rise from the waters of baptism. At any point in time after our baptism we should be able to have humble confidence that we will certainly be accepted into the Kingdom at Christ's return. We cannot be *ultimately* certain, because we may fall away the next day; we do not know our personal spiritual future in this life.

We must do all we can to maintain the good conscience which we have with God at baptism; to "keep our first love" (Rev. 2:4). Baptism is the "pledge (response mg.) of a good conscience" (1 Pet. 3:21,NIV); the baptismal candidate pledges (promises) to keep that clear conscience with God.

Even though baptism is of vital importance to our salvation in Christ, we must be careful not to give the impression that by the one act or 'work' of baptism alone we will be saved. We have earlier shown how that a life of continued fellowshiping of Christ's crucifixion is necessary: "Unless one is born of water *and* the spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:5). A comparison of this with 1 Pet. 1:23 shows that the birth which occurs at a true baptism must be followed by our gradual regeneration by the spirit-word. Salvation is not just due to baptism: it is a result of grace (Eph. 2:8), faith (Rom. 1:5) and hope (Rom. 8:24), among other things. The argument is sometimes made that salvation is by faith alone, and therefore a 'work' like baptism is irrelevant. However, James 2:17-24 makes it clear that such reasoning makes a false distinction between faith and works; a true faith, e.g. in the Gospel, is demonstrated to be genuine faith by the works which it results in, e.g. baptism. "... a man is justified by works and not by faith only" (James 2:24). In several cases of baptism, the believer asked what he must "do" to be saved; the reply always involved baptism (Acts 2:37; 9:6; 10:6; 16:30). 'Doing' the 'work' of baptism is therefore a necessary indication of our belief of the Gospel of salvation. The work of saving us has ultimately been done by God and Christ, but we need to do "works befitting repentance" and believe in this (Acts 26:20 cf. Mk. 16:15,16).

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STUDY 8: Questions

1. Do you think you can be saved without baptism?
2. What does the word 'baptism' mean?
 - Commitment
 - Sprinkling
 - Belief
 - Dipping/immersion
3. What is the meaning of baptism as explained in Rom. 6:3-5?
4. When should we be baptised?
 - After learning the true Gospel and repenting
 - As a small baby
 - After getting interested in the Bible
- When we want to join a church
5. What are we baptised into?
 - The church who baptises us
 - The word of God
 - Christ
 - The Holy Spirit
6. Which of the following happens after baptism?
 - We become part of Abraham's seed
 - We will never sin again
 - We are definitely saved for all time
 - Our sins are forgiven
7. Will baptism alone save us?

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