

The Promise

Daily Bible Readings
introducing the Christian message

Dear Friend,

Thank you for taking this booklet to use with your readings from the Holy Bible. The Bible is different from every other book because it is the word of God. He revealed himself to the holy prophets and apostles who wrote down what he told them. The writing of these men is also known as 'Scripture'. The Christian message which is found in the Holy Scriptures is wonderful and important, and everyone should now what that message is.

This booklet is not intended for use without the Bible. I suggest that you read the Bible passage, then the daily notes and refer back to the Bible reading as you use the notes. Pray and ask God to help you understand what you read from the Bible. Never rush your Bible reading and think about what you have read.

You may have recently become a Christian or you may be interested in knowing more about the Christian faith. It is my prayer that God will help all my readers to know what Christians believe and to lead you into a deeper knowledge of God.

Why is this booklet called 'The Promise?' - The Bible has hundreds of precious promises within its pages, but from the very beginning, we read of the promise of a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. I wish to focus your attention on this promise and to show its relevance to us.

May God bless you and help you as you read his precious word.

Yours sincerely,

Alec Taylor.

I am grateful to Stephen Rees, pastor of Grace Baptist Church, Stockport, for permission to include material from his notes for the first nine days of these readings.

Key to notes

- All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version unless stated otherwise. They are printed in italics. **If you have a different translation of the Bible, you will still be able to use these notes.**
- The number in brackets, eg. (6) refers to the verse number in the passage that we are reading; (2:16) refers us to another chapter and verse in the book of the Bible we are reading. If we were reading from Genesis, this would be Genesis chapter 2, verse 6.
- Where verses from other books of the Bible are brought to our attention, the name of the book is also indicated in the brackets, eg. (Psalm 19:1).
- Where I ask you to compare another verse of Scripture, I prefix the reference with cp. (eg. cp. Psalm 1:1). I prefer this to the more common abbreviation, cf. which relates to the obsolete word 'confer.'

Day 1

Genesis 1:1-31

God - The Almighty Creator of the universe

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. - These opening words of the Holy Bible are the key to understanding life, for if we leave God out of our thinking, we will certainly go wrong. Our universe did not come about by accident nor by chance! It is the handiwork of God (Psalm 19:1). Many wonder whether the ages of the rocks prove the world to be millions of years old rather than a few thousand. We must remember that God created a mature world, rocks and all! Adam was a fully developed man on the day he was created.

Consider the character of God as it is shown in this chapter:-

God is eternal. - He has always existed and he was there, in the beginning before anything was made (1).

God is almighty. - He made the whole universe, in all its vastness, out of nothing (1).

God is wise. - He had a great plan, which he carried out step by step, stage by stage, over six days of creation.

God is a God of beauty. - He filled his world with an astonishing array of beautiful and wonderful creatures (11, 21, 25).

God is kind. - He spoke words of blessing over the creatures he made - even the birds and the fish (22).

Notice how often we are told that everything God created was good, indeed very good (31). The world that God made was a perfect world without suffering, conflict or death. Animals did not devour one another (30). God commanded *every beast of the earth* to eat plants. This, of course, runs flatly against the modern theory of evolution which teaches that from the beginning, creatures evolved through a process of conflict and suffering ('The survival of the fittest'). Evolutionists teach that pain and death are simply an inevitable part of life. The Bible teaches that all suffering and death entered the world through man's disobedience against God (3:17-19; Romans 5:12; 8:20-22). Who do you believe?

Note:- For those who are interested in the scientific issues concerning creation and evolution, I recommend the literature and videos of 'Answers in Genesis' (UK) and their beautifully produced colour magazine, 'Creation ex nihilo'. Their address is P.O. Box 5262, Leicester, LE2 3XU (Telephone - 0116 270 8400).

Day 2

Genesis 2:1-3:8

A wonderful world spoiled by sin

God made the first man and woman and put them in a garden full of delights and joys. He gave them his whole creation to enjoy freely (2:9,16, 19-20). He gave them to one another to be companions and lovers (2:20-25). Best of all, he gave them his own blessing and favour. There was only one thing that God withheld from them. They were forbidden to eat of the fruit from the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*. They did not need their own *knowledge of good and evil*. God wanted them to trust in him to decide what was good for them and what was not. To eat this fruit would be to say that they were no longer willing to allow God to choose what was best for them. It would be a declaration of independence and rebellion. God warned them that if they disobeyed him and took the fruit, it would bring death - the death of their bodies and the everlasting ruin of their souls (2:17).

We are not told here that it was Satan who spoke through the serpent, but the New Testament confirms that this is so (2 Corinthians 11:3,14; Revelation 12:9). His question to Eve was framed to make God appear to be unkind and unfair (3:1). He then told her that God had lied to them by warning them that disobedience to him would bring death (3:4). He promised, "*You will be like God*" (5-6). They would have such God-like power and wisdom, that they would no longer need God nor would they be obliged to obey him. Eve took the fruit and shared it with her husband. They had no reason to believe the serpent rather than God who had created them and given them great happiness. They were ungrateful and rebellious.

Satan promised them much but they soon proved him to be a liar! The moment they ate the fruit, they were gripped with a sense of guilt, shame and fear. They were ashamed of their nakedness and made garments of leaves to cover themselves. They were afraid of God and tried to hide themselves from him (7-8). Satan still deceives people into believing that disobeying God leads to freedom and fulfillment. **God's warnings are true! Sin leads to nothing but misery, shame and everlasting ruin!**

Day 3

Genesis 3:9-24

The first promise of a Saviour

God is very good and merciful! He did not abandon the rebels but came to the garden to seek the guilty couple who had wronged him so much. He first called to Adam, because Adam was created first and was head over his wife, responsible for the whole human family. God called him, "*Where are you?*" (9). Adam would not accept responsibility for his sin and he blamed Eve, and she blamed the serpent (12-13). People still make excuses for their sins!

God pronounced judgement on the serpent, then on Eve and lastly on Adam. The serpent was cursed and forced to crawl on the ground (14-15). Eve was told that she would suffer pain in child-bearing. All nature would be cursed because of Adam's disobedience, and he himself would suffer the penalty of death. The guilty pair were expelled from the garden. They had brought ruin on themselves and death came into the world (Romans 5:12).

God is angry when we sin, but words of hope are found even in his words of judgment. The Lord said that there would always be enmity between the descendants ('seed') of the serpent and the descendants ('seed') of the woman. God speaks of one descendant of the woman in particular - *He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel*. (15; cp. 1 John 3:8). God promised that one day a man would come, descended from Eve, who would crush Satan's head, though in doing so, he would himself suffer greatly. **This is the first promise of the Saviour who the Bible goes on to reveal is the Lord Jesus Christ.** He defeated Satan when he died on the cross to rescue those who trust in him from the grip of Satan and of sin.

God made tunics from animal skins to clothe Adam and Eve (21). Some innocent creature died so that they could be fit to stand in God's presence. **This is the first indication that atonement for sin is only possible through the sacrificial death of a substitute.** God's holy Son, Jesus Christ would save sinners from eternal death by dying in their place. Apart from his death, there is no hope for any of us!

Day 4

Genesis 4:1-26

True and false religion

Sin brought a bitter harvest into the lives of Adam and Eve. Cain their first son became a murderer, slaying his younger brother. Both the sons had been taught about the Lord and we find them bringing offerings to God. Cain had worked hard by the sweat of his face to obtain a harvest from the cursed ground (3:17-19). He brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to God as a sacrifice but God rejected his offering. God requires blood sacrifice to atone for sin (Hebrews 9:22). He accepted Abel's offering which fulfilled his requirements. God gave Cain an opportunity to offer the kind of sacrifice he required but in his anger, refused to do as God required (1-7). In his jealous rage he shed blood by murder rather than by animal sacrifice. Cain's 'religion' did not produce love for God or for his brother.

Abel's offering was accepted because he knew that he was a sinner and that he could only know forgiveness through the death of an innocent creature. Abel trusted in God to forgive him because a substitute had died in his place. We know that the death of an animal could never pay for Abel's sins or ours. Abel's sacrifice looked forward to the sacrifice of the promised Saviour many centuries later.

Many people still have not learned that we must come to God on his terms. They vainly imagine that their good works and their honest way of life will gain them acceptance with God. They do not understand that they are sinners who fall short of God's holy standards. There is only one way to God and that is through the Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). The message of the cross may seem foolish (1 Corinthians 1:18) but it is only through the shed blood of Jesus that there is forgiveness and cleansing from sin (Ephesians 1:7; 1 John 1:7).

Cain was driven from God's presence. His descendants were accomplished in technology and the arts, but their civilisation was brutal and cruel (16-24). God gave Adam another son, Seth, whose descendants worshipped God as Abel had done and they called *on the name of the LORD* (25-26).

Day 5

Genesis 6:1-22

God destroys the wicked with a great flood

There was not only a population explosion in the world by the time of Noah (1) but also an explosion of wickedness. There was no machinery of government, of law and order to keep evil in check. People were free to live as they chose, to behave according to their sinful nature. Left to itself and without restraint, the human race became unspeakably wicked (5). We read later that the earth was corrupt and filled with violence (11-12). What had happened to all the godly people? - *The sons of God* from the godly line of Seth (4:25) intermarried with women from the godless line of Cain because those women were beautiful (2). Most of them were drawn into a wicked lifestyle because they married wicked people!

God was watching and he was grieved. - *The LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and he was grieved in his heart* (5-6). Human wickedness causes God real pain! One man was different, Noah, a descendant of Seth *was a just*

man, perfect ('or blameless') *in his generations. Noah walked with God* (9). What does it mean to 'walk with God'? - It means that Noah knew God personally. He was very much aware of the reality of God in his life. When very few people had any faith in God, Noah had a strong faith and he had reverence for God ('*godly fear*' - Hebrews 11:7). He was a good man in a wicked world and he obeyed God. Why was he so different? It was the grace of God in his life (8)! **When the Bible speaks of 'grace', it means God's mercy to undeserving sinners.** God chose Noah, changed his heart and made him a true believer.

Genesis chapters 8 and 9 describe the flood which God sent on the earth to punish the wicked. God destroyed the whole of the human race with the exception of Noah and his family. Noah built the ark as God had instructed him and only he and his family escaped the disaster. The Bible tells us that there will be another, far more terrible, day of judgement, when the world as we know it will end (cp. 2 Peter 3:3-13). How can you be safe when God finally judges the world? Only by repenting of your sins and trusting in Jesus Christ now.

Day 6

Genesis 12:1-9

Abraham, the father of many nations

Men lived for hundreds of years before the flood destroyed the earth but their lifespan was shortened after this time, though many people still lived in excess of two hundred years. Abram was a descendant of Shem, one of Noah's three sons (Genesis chapter 11). He was a man of great faith whose trust in God is described in the New Testament as well as in the book of Genesis (Romans 4:1-22; Hebrews 11:8-17).

God told Abram to leave his country and his relatives and go to a land that he would show to him (1-3; cp. Acts 7:2-4). The Lord promised to bless him and said that he would be a blessing to others. All the families (or nations) of the earth would be blessed through him. - "*I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing ... In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*" (2-3).

When Adam sinned, God's curse fell on the whole earth (3:17). Misery and death came on the whole human race. Now, Abram is told that one day, all the earth will be blessed. A way would be opened for people of all nations to escape from the curse and to receive eternal life. This great blessing would come through a saviour who would be a descendant of Abram. This promise may have appeared to be far-fetched, because Abram's wife, Sarah, had been unable to bear children and was now well past the age of childbearing. God is able to do the impossible! He is the Almighty! Sarah at last, had the promised son, Isaac, from whose son, Jacob, came the Jewish nation and the promised Saviour (Genesis 18:1-15; 21:1-7)!

God later changed Abram's name to Abraham which means *father of many nations* (17:5). The Jewish nation is a great nation today. They are Abraham's physical descendants but there are far more people who are his spiritual descendants. All who trust in Jesus Christ, the promised Saviour, are children of Abraham (Galatians 3:6-9, 29). **Are you one of Abraham's children?**

Day 7

Exodus 12:1-33

The Feast of the Passover

Jacob and his sons went to Egypt during a severe famine, where his favourite son, Joseph had risen to great influence (Joseph's story is told in Genesis chapters 37, 39 to 50). Their descendants (the Israelites) grew in great numbers and were in Egypt for four hundred years. Towards the end of this time, there was a new ruler (or Pharaoh) who feared and hated the Israelites. He enslaved and oppressed them but God raised up a deliverer named Moses (see Exodus chapters 1 to 4).

God sent Moses to Pharaoh with a message - *"Let my people go"* (5:1). Pharaoh stubbornly refused despite nine dreadful disasters which God sent on the land of Egypt (chapters 7 to 10). God then sent something far worse. In one night, the first-born child in every household in Egypt would die. The Israelites were not exempt; they too were sinners. There was a way to escape the disaster. A lamb that was without blemish, was killed for each household, and its blood sprinkled around doorway of the house (7). The lamb was to be roasted in fire and then hurriedly eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. The people were to be prepared for a quick departure from Egypt (8-12). The sprinkled blood was to protect Israel's first-born against the judgment of the Lord. God said, *"When I see the blood, I will pass over you"* (13). He would spare the life of their first-born because an innocent creature had died in their place. Sin brings death (Romans 6:23). The blood of the sacrifice represents a life given to atone for sin. God does not pass over sin without blood sacrifice (Leviticus 17:11).

At a Passover feast almost 2000 years ago, the holy Son of God was crucified at Calvary. The New Testament speaks of Christ as the Passover Lamb who was sacrificed for us (1 Corinthians 5:7; John 1:29, 1 Peter 1:19). Just as a lamb was a substitute for the first-born of each Hebrew household, so the Lord Jesus died as a substitute for sinners (Isaiah 53:4-6; 1 Peter 3:18). **Those who trust in him are forgiven and have eternal life** (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:1-5). Have you repented of your sin? Have you asked Jesus to save you?

Day 8

Exodus 20:1-17

The Ten Commandments

Three months after they left Egypt, the Israelites arrived at a mountain in the desert, called Sinai (Exodus 19:1). God came down to the top of the mountain which was covered by a thick cloud. The thunder crashed, lightning flashed and the trumpet blast which summoned the people to the edge of the mountain grew louder and louder. The mountain shook at the awesome presence of God and the people trembled (19:16-19). God was showing the people that he is holy and that those who break his law are in great peril.

God called Moses to the top of the mountain and gave him the ten commandments. The first four of these commandments concern our relationship to God, and the other six, our relationship to other people. They stem from the two greatest commandments - *"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength"* and *"You shall love your neighbour as yourself"* (Mark 12:29-31).

God will not tolerate any rival in our affections and worship. - “*You shall have no other gods before me*” (3). He forbids us to make images of himself (4). We must worship God as he is revealed in the Bible. He is absolutely perfect, holy, powerful and good. Our own idea of God is not acceptable! God will punish those who speak to him or about him in a careless or irreverent manner (7). God commanded that one day in seven should be observed as a holy day of worship (8-11).

We are to honour our parents and respect human life because God made man in his own image (12-13; cp. Genesis 1:27). Murder is forbidden, but it is possible to commit murder in the heart (Matthew 5:21-22). We are to respect marriage - adultery is sin (14) and we must not steal (15). Lying is forbidden (16) and we must not covet what belongs to others (17). God will punish not only sinful outward actions but also sinful desires!

No one can truthfully say that they have always kept these commandments. We need Jesus to be our Saviour and our Lord!

Day 9

Exodus 24:1-8

The blood of the covenant

God made a covenant with the Israelites at Mount Sinai. A covenant is a binding agreement between two or more people, bringing them into a special relationship and commitment to each other. The covenant brought great responsibilities as well as great privileges to the people of God. The Ten Commandments and the laws recorded in chapters 21 to 23 were written in the ‘*the book of the Covenant*’ (4,7). The solemn promises made by the people that they would obey God’s words (3, 7) were soon to be broken (cp. 32:1-6).

“*The blood of the covenant*” (8) was vital to the people of the covenant. It was through blood sacrifice that atonement was made for sin. - *Without shedding of blood there is no remission* (or ‘forgiveness of sin’ - Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22). The covenant which God made with Israel is known as the old covenant. The Lord Jesus came to give us the new covenant which is *a better covenant*. The blood sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed forward to the great sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross (Hebrews 9:6-15).

What are the marks of true religion?

1. The teaching that only the blood of Christ can atone for sin. He alone is the way to God the Father (John 14:6). When he instituted the Lord’s Supper, Jesus took the cup of wine as a symbol of his blood shed to save sinners. He said, “*This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you*” (Luke 22:20).

2. Covenant people are also people of the Book (the Bible). We must know the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15-16; 1 Peter 2:2) and obey them (John 14:15). **A religion which denies the necessity of the blood of Christ for the pardon of sin, or which denies the supreme authority of Scripture and the need to submit to God’s word is false - have nothing to do with it!**

Note:- The Holy Bible is divided into two sections - The Old Testament and the New Testament. The word ‘testament’ means ‘covenant.’ The first part of the Bible deals with the old covenant, the second with the new covenant.

Day 10

Deuteronomy 7:1-26

Chosen to be a special treasure to God

God chose Israel to be his special people through whom the promised Messiah (Saviour) would come. Why did God choose Israel? Because they were great in number? Not at all! They were very few (7)! There was nothing in them to attract the love of God, yet he chose them to be “*a special treasure*” to himself (6). This is a wonderful illustration of the grace of God. We are saved by grace, not works! (Ephesians 2:8-10). God’s grace reaches the most unlikely people, humanly speaking. No wonder John Newton, saved from the depths of wickedness could write, ‘Amazing grace! how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!’ How wonderful that God should save hell-deserving sinners and make them his special treasure. The LORD is “*the faithful God who keeps covenant*” (9). Moses encouraged the people to trust and obey God who would then bless them in Canaan, the promised land (12-24). - “*He will love you and bless you ... you shall be blessed above all peoples*” (13-14).

The Old Testament goes on to show that after the Israelites went into the promised land, they were persistently unfaithful to God. He sent prophets to warn them that they would be punished for their sin if they failed to amend their wicked ways. He raised up great men to lead them but Israel finally rejected God and he rejected them. He always had a godly remnant who loved him and obeyed him, however.

Many of the promises given to Israel are also given to the church. Verse 6 is picked up in 1 Peter 2:9 with reference to Christians. The story of the church is similar to that of Israel. Many, many churches have abandoned the faith of their founding fathers. The Bible is no longer believed nor is the gospel preached. There are godly remnants left in some of these churches but many have left to join churches where the Bible is loved, taught and obeyed. Christians too, are “*blessed above all peoples*” and chosen by God to be holy and to enjoy priceless spiritual blessings in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-4). If you are not interested in pleasing God by leading a holy life, you should ask yourself whether or not you are a genuine Christian.

Day 11

2 Samuel 7:1-29

The promised Saviour - a King from David’s line

David was the greatest king to reign over Israel but he had to overcome many enemies before he established his kingdom. The ark of the covenant, which represented God’s presence among his people, was still housed in the tabernacle (a tent). David felt it unseemly that the Lord was being worshipped in a tent while he lived in a fine house (1-2). He wanted to build a house for God and Nathan the prophet encouraged him to follow his God-honouring desires (3). The Lord had different plans however, which he revealed to Nathan that night (4-17). It was not his will for David to build the temple, because he had been a man of war who had shed blood (1 Chronicles 28:3). God revealed that his son who would succeed him as king would build a house for him (12-13; cp. 1 Chronicles 28:4-6). Solomon, son of David was to have a magnificent temple built for the glory of God.

David wanted to build a house for God (5) but the Lord promised him, “*I will build you a house*” (11, 27). This was not a house made of timber, stone, marble, nor any other building material. It was a dynasty which would last for ever (16), over which the Lord Jesus would reign. He is a far greater king than David. When the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would be the mother of the promised Messiah, he said of Jesus, “*He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end*” (Luke 1:32-33). When people called him the Son of David, they were recognising that he was the promised Saviour and King (Matthew 21:9; 22:41-45).

The Lord reminded David of his blessing upon his life (8-11) and the king was overwhelmed by the wonder and greatness of God’s plan and he poured out his heart in worship and praise (18-29). **If you put the Lord first in you life, he will give you more than you could ever imagine.** Ponder Matthew 6:33. Are you seeking first the kingdom of God and righteousness?

Day 12

Psalm 2

Opposition to God and to the rule of the promised Saviour

There are 150 psalms which have always been a hymn book for Israel and for the church. Half of the psalms were written by King David. Many of the psalms, including Psalm 2, look forward to the coming of a greater King than David. They speak of the promised Saviour. Kings of Israel were anointed with oil at their coronation, but God’s holy Son was anointed with the Holy Spirit. The words ‘Messiah’ and ‘Christ’ mean ‘anointed’.

The psalm opens with question, *Why do the nations rage...?* These people and their rulers are angry with God and are determined to reject his rule! You may wonder why they should have such antagonism towards God? - They love their sinful ways which they will have to forsake if they are to serve the Lord. How futile for them to oppose the LORD and *his Anointed* (Jesus). This refrain was taken up by the church at Jerusalem when persecuted by the religious authorities (Acts 4:25-26). The puny opposition of men against God and his people brings laughs of derision from the Almighty. *He who sits in the heavens shall laugh* (4). God is quite undisturbed by the raging of the wicked and he has set his King on this holy hill of Zion (6)! He cannot be toppled from his throne! Remember how Pharaoh came to grief in opposing the Lord (Exodus 14:27-31; 15:1-18). Christ is the almighty King who will come again to severely punish all who oppose him (Revelation 2:27; 6:12-17; 19:11-16).

The promised Messiah, the Saviour, is also revealed in this psalm as the Son of God (7). This title does not mean that he came into being after God the Father. We shall see in later readings that the Lord Jesus has always existed. Verse 7 is quoted in Acts 13:32-33 and Hebrews 1:5 with reference to Jesus. If you are not a Christian, take to your own heart the Psalmist’s words to the kings of the earth. - *Be wise .. serve the LORD with fear .. Kiss (a sign of obeisance and humility) the Son, lest he be angry .. Blessed are all those who put their trust in him* (10-12). **Are you reverently serving the Lord? Have you put your trust in him?**

Day 13

Psalm 22:1-21

The suffering of the Saviour

We have already seen that the promised Saviour was to be a descendant of Abraham, the Father of the nation of Israel, and that he would be a king with an everlasting throne, coming from the line of David. How would he be a Saviour? - By suffering for sinners! Psalm 22 gives a vivid prophecy of his suffering. C.H. Spurgeon, a well-known Baptist preacher in the nineteenth century, writes these words with reference to Psalm 22. - 'Before us we have a description both of the darkness and of the glory of the cross, the suffering of Christ and the glory which shall follow. Oh for grace to draw near and see this great sight! We should read reverently, putting off our shoes from off our feet, as Moses did at the burning bush, for if there be holy ground anywhere in Scripture it is in this psalm.'

Though David wrote the psalm and may have felt at times that he was forsaken by God, he never knew what it was to be actually God-forsaken. He didn't have his hands and feet pierced by crucifixion (16). Compare the crucifixion account in Matthew chapter 27 with this psalm (eg. Verse 1 is quoted in Matthew 27:46; verse 8 with Matthew 27:43; verse 18 with Matthew 27:35). Christ's thirst (John 19:28) is vividly described in verse 15, *My tongue clings to my jaws*.

The physical sufferings of Christ were terrible, but he had also to endure the wicked mocking of men (6-8, 12-13). Even worse, he was forsaken by the Father (1). We must never imagine that Christ's sufferings were eased because he is God. He suffered as a man who took our sins upon himself to be punished in our place. The Father did not spare him (Romans 8:32; cp. Isaiah 53:10). The holy Son of God knew the hell of being God-forsaken and cried out, *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* (1). He knew horror, clinging darkness, confusion and intense loneliness as he hung on the cross. **Do you understand that the Lord Jesus paid a tremendous price to save sinners? Can you honestly say that you love the Lord Jesus? Do you seek always to please him by obeying his commandments?**

Day 14

Isaiah 6:1-8

The prophet sees the glory of the Saviour

King Uzziah, the tenth king to rule after his ancestor, David, intruded into the priestly ministry by burning incense to God. The Lord struck him with leprosy on account of his presumption; a reign of 52 years ended in disgrace (2 Chronicles 26:16-23). A long earthly reign had ended, but in the year that Uzziah died (740 BC), Isaiah received a vision of God in the temple. He saw the King who lives and reigns for ever. He writes, *I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up* (1). His life was transformed and God called him to be a prophet. Judah was in spiritual decline and there was apprehension among the people as Assyria had become increasingly powerful and belligerent. In this uncertain situation, Isaiah was reminded that God is absolutely sovereign. He cannot be toppled from his throne!

The New Testament refers to this vision and informs us that Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, the promised Saviour, who is God (John 12:41; cp. Hebrews 1:3, 8)! He was overwhelmed by the majesty and dazzling splendour of the

exalted God. He was gripped by the truth of God's holiness, for he repeatedly used the title, *'the Holy One of Israel'* when speaking of the Lord (e.g. 1:4; 5:19, 24; 10:17, 20). The seraphim (winged angelic beings) are sinless, yet they covered their faces in the presence of God (2).

Isaiah keenly felt his own sinfulness in the presence of the Lord (5). **An appreciation of God's holiness brings a sense of our own sin and unworthiness.** The only acceptable way to serve God is *'with reverence and godly fear'* (Hebrews 12:28). Isaiah had a work to do for God but he needed to be cleansed from his sin. He needed to have clean lips in order to speak for God (7)! If you are to serve God acceptably, you must know the cleansing work of the blood of Christ in your life (1 John 1:7) and be holy (1 Peter 1:15-16).

God later revealed to Isaiah that the Lord Jesus would be born of a virgin (7:14) and that he is the almighty God who would reign for ever upon the throne of David (9:6-7).

Day 15

Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12

The Saviour punished by God the Father to save sinners

The prophet wrote these words some seven hundred years before the Lord Jesus died at Calvary. His description of Christ's suffering is so accurate however, that it would seem that he is actually standing at the cross reporting the death of Jesus. The passage begins with the promise, *He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high* (52:13). Isaiah did not see a vision of awe-inspiring majesty, however, but of the most appalling suffering. The face and body of Christ were mutilated beyond recognition (14). - *He shall sprinkle* (or 'startle') *many nations* (15). Kings shall see him and bow before him when he is highly exalted (Philippians 2:9-11). They will shut their mouths in wonder as they see his wounds.

The Son of God was born in obscurity and poverty *as a root out of dry ground* (2). His divine glory was veiled by his humble human roots and he was *despised and rejected* (3). His suffering was so intense that he is described as a *Man of sorrows* (3) who travailed in soul (11) and who *poured out his soul unto death* (12). He died with the wicked (the two robbers) and he was buried in a rich man's tomb (9). He suffered without complaining - *He opened not his mouth* (7).

It is important that we understand that the death of Christ was no accident! - *Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him* (10; cp. Acts 2:23; 4:27, 28). Why did Jesus die on the cross? - *He was wounded for our transgression, he was bruised for our iniquities* (5). He died for God's people (the elect) - *For the transgression of my people he was stricken* (8; cp. Matthew 1:21). The sinless Saviour was *numbered with the transgressors* (12) and punished by God the Father - *The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all* (6). **Do you really love God? Have you responded to his love by forsaking your sin? Do you seek to please him with all your heart?**

*Amazing love! how can it be
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?*

Day 16

Jeremiah 31:23-40

The promise of the new covenant

The wonderful promises in this chapter were given during the dark days of judgement upon Judah. The expressions, "*Behold, the days are coming*" is found three times in our reading (27, 31, 38). There are prophecies here which relate to the return of the remnant of the Jews to their land (23-30; 38-40) and beyond this time to the new covenant in which Jewish and Gentile believers are united in Christ (31-37). The Lord Jesus is the Mediator of this *better covenant, which was established on better promises* than those given to Israel of old (Hebrews 8:6). Some of the promises here in Jeremiah are applied to Christians in the New Testament (33-34; cp. Hebrews 8:8-12; 10:16-17).

Those who belong to the new covenant are a holy people who love God's law. One of the marks of belonging to this covenant is that the Lord puts his law into our minds and writes it in our hearts (33). If we do not delight in reading God's word and obeying what the Lord has to say to us, we must question whether we are genuine Christians.

Let us think of some of the privileges enjoyed in the new covenant:-

- Each Christian has a personal relationship with the living God. He is no longer distant or unknown to us, but he says, "*I will be their God, and they shall be my people ... they all shall know me*" (33-34). God invites the Christian to come to him in prayer, addressing him as *our Father in heaven* (Matthew 6:9).
- God says, "*I will forgive their iniquities, and their sin I will remember no more*" (34). Satan may accuse and condemn the Christian, but God has forgiven him. Christians are able to rejoice in those wonderful words of scripture, *If God is for us, who can be against us? and who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also make intercession for us* (Romans 8:31, 34).

"Their sin I will remember no more."

Day 17

John 1:1-14

The Saviour, who is God, takes human flesh

John introduces us to the Lord Jesus Christ by describing him as '*the Word*' (1,14). *In the beginning was the Word* - this title is given to Jesus because God the Father reveals himself through Christ and speaks through him (18; Hebrews 1:1-2). John leaves us in no doubt concerning the identity of the Lord Jesus. He was with God before the universe was made and he is God (1-2)!

Creation is the work of the Trinity. - Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Genesis 1:1-12; notice the '*us*' in Genesis 1:26; 3:22). John here stresses the work of the Lord Jesus in creation. He is the Creator of all things (3; cp. Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:10). He is also the Giver of life who brings light to men who are in darkness because of sin (3-4). '*Life*' here and in much of this gospel refers to spiritual life, and '*light*' is spiritual light of understanding (cp. 5:40; 9:39-41). John the Baptist was sent

by God to bear witness of the Lord Jesus who is also described as *'the Light'* (6-9; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46).

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (14). Just think about this for a moment! The Lord Jesus took human flesh with all of its limitations and weaknesses, except that he was and is sinless (cp. 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 7:26). He knew hunger, thirst, weariness and pain. He is described as a *Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief* (Isaiah 53:3). The truth of the Incarnation (Christ taking human flesh) is essential to the Christian faith (1 John 4:2-3), but we must always remember that the Lord Jesus did not cease to be God when he took human flesh! He is both God and man!

He came into the world that he had made and was not recognised (10). His own Jewish nation failed to acknowledge him (11), *but as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God* (12). Man's will and nationality have no bearing on this new birth into the family of God; it is a supernatural, sovereign work of God himself (13)! **Have you received the Lord Jesus Christ into your life as your Lord and Saviour and placed your trust in him?**

Day 18

Luke 1:1-38

The angel tells Mary that she is to give birth to the Saviour

The Christian faith is based on facts, not on myths nor on the ideas of men. The events described in Luke's gospel and the rest of scripture really happened! Luke writes of those *things which are most surely believed among us* (1). The days of Herod (5) were evil and troubled times for Judea. The king was a tyrant and the land was under Roman occupation. Zacharias the priest and his wife Elizabeth were a godly couple but they were childless and Elizabeth was now past the age of child-bearing; this would have brought them much heartache, just as it does to those in a similar situation today. Zacharias could not believe the words of the angel Gabriel promising a son (5-19). He was to prove that *"with God nothing is impossible"* (37).

During the sixth months of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary. She was puzzled and troubled by his greeting which told her that she was highly favoured and that the Lord was with her (26-29). He then revealed that she would conceive and bear a Son whom she should call Jesus. - *He will be great and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David* (32). Mary could not understand how this could be, since she was a virgin, but Gabriel told her that she would conceive by the Holy Spirit and that the child would be called the Son of God (30-35). Gabriel encouraged Mary with the news that her relative, Elizabeth, had conceived a son in her old age, *"For with God nothing will be impossible"* (36-37).

Mary's humble submission to God's will is lovely to consider (38). Betrothal in those times was more binding than engagement in the western world but it was not marriage. Mary would have to face the shame (in the eyes of the world) of conceiving before marriage (cp. Matthew 1:18-20). This passage clearly teaches that the Lord Jesus was born of a virgin. Those who refuse to believe this generally reject all other accounts of the supernatural in the Bible. **God is infinitely great and powerful - why should we consider anything to be too hard for him?**

The birth of the Saviour

And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered (1). The timing of this decree could hardly have been worse for Joseph and Mary. They were obliged to go to Joseph's ancestral city of Bethlehem for the census (3-4). Mary was heavily pregnant and not fit for the journey from Nazareth (they did not have the comforts of modern travel). To make matters worse, they were unable to find accommodation in the crowded city. The Lord Jesus was born in an outbuilding where the innkeeper kept his animals (5-7). We must look beyond the decree of Caesar Augustus to the eternal decree of God, **whose purpose can never be thwarted** (Isaiah 14:27; 46:10; Ephesians 1:11). He had purposed that Christ should be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). **Caesar decreed because God had already decreed (cp. Proverbs 21:1)!**

The shepherds were terrified when they saw the angel standing before them to announce the birth of Christ. He reassured them and told them that he was bringing them *good tidings of great joy which will be to all people*. The good news is the birth of a Saviour, the promised Christ (or 'Messiah'). **The title 'Lord' (11) indicates that Jesus is God - God was manifested in the flesh** (1 Timothy 3:16). The shepherds then hurried to Bethlehem to see the new-born King. Their account of the angelic visitation would have greatly encouraged Joseph and Mary. *Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen* (20).

The Lord Jesus was born under the law and was circumcised the eighth day from his birth (21: cp. Galatians 4:4). According to the law of Moses, a woman was unclean for forty days from the birth of her son. Her purification was completed with the sacrifice of a lamb as a burnt offering and a young pigeon or turtle dove as a sin offering. Those who were poor were able to substitute another of these birds in place of the lamb (Leviticus 12). Verse 24 indicates that Joseph and Mary were poor. - They had not yet received the gifts from the wise men (Matthew 2:11).

King Herod thwarted in his plan to kill the Saviour

The wise men traveled many miles to see the Messiah but the chief priests and scribes who knew the Scriptures which promised his coming, showed little interest in his birth (4-6). One might have expected that these religious Jews would have been eager to investigate the wise men's story but this was not the case. How very sad!

Matthew wrote his gospel to convince his Jewish readers that the Lord Jesus was the promised Messiah. Jesus came as the "*King of the Jews*" (2) but he is also to be worshipped by Gentiles (eg. the wise men). Herod the Great, who was king at the time of the birth of Jesus, had been given the title "King of the Jews" by the Romans, so you can imagine his alarm and consternation to hear the question, "*Where is he who is born the King of the Jews?*" (2). Herod was a power-crazed tyrant who ruthlessly ruled Palestine for forty years. Anyone who posed a threat to him was exterminated. He executed his first wife, Mariamne and three of his sons. He engineered a drowning 'accident' to get rid of Mariamne's brother, Aristobulus, a

very popular high priest. He did not act out of character in his plot to kill the Lord Jesus.

Crafty Herod asked the wise men to return and tell him when they had found Jesus so that he also could worship the infant. Herod's plot was thwarted when God warned the wise men in a dream that they should not return to him (12). The Lord Jesus came into the world to die for sinners, but it was not in God's purpose for him to be killed before the time that he had appointed (cp. John 8:20). Herod saw Jesus as a threat and his fear turned to murderous hatred. Some thirty-three years later, the Son of God was rejected by his own nation and Pontius Pilate had the title, "*the King of the Jews*" put on the cross (John 19:17-22). **Are you like Herod who rejected Jesus?** Be wise like those who sought Jesus, found him, and worshipped him. Repent of your sin and trust in him. You will discover that he is a wonderful Saviour!

Day 21

Luke 4:16-37

Jesus rejected in his own town of Nazareth

The Lord Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his public ministry. His teaching in the synagogues of Galilee was acclaimed far and wide (14-15) but he encountered strong opposition in his own town of Nazareth. He stood up in the synagogue to read the Scriptures and was handed the scroll containing the prophecy of Isaiah. Turning to chapter 61, verses 1 and 2, he told an expectant congregation that this Scripture was being fulfilled before them that very day (16-21). He made it quite plain that he was indeed the Messiah promised in those verses.

Though the people marveled at his gracious words, they regarded him only as Joseph's son. They wanted to see him perform miracles before they would be convinced. Jesus repeated the proverb, "*No prophet is accepted in his own county*" and reminded them of the rejection by Israel of the prophets Elijah and Elisha. The very people who had earlier marveled at his gracious words were now filled with hatred. They attempted to throw Jesus down from a cliff, but he was miraculously preserved (22-30).

The Lord Jesus was welcomed in the fishing town of Capernaum. Those who heard Jesus in the synagogue were not only astonished at the authority of his teaching but also at his authority and power over demons (32, 36). Peter's mother-in-law was healed on the same day (31-39). At sunset (when the sabbath ended), many sick people were brought to Jesus and he healed them and cast out many demons (40-41). The demons also acknowledged him as the Son of God for they knew that he was the Christ (41). **They knew the Messiah when they met him even though the religious leaders who heard him did not believe.** Satan and his evil spirits are powerful, but the Lord Jesus is even more powerful! - "*He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out*" (36). The crowds tried to make the Lord Jesus stay in the region around Capernaum, but he told them that he had been sent to preach the kingdom of God and that he must go to other cities with this message (42-44).

Day 22

John 3:1-18

A devout Jew meets the Saviour

Nicodemus, a respected Jewish teacher, came to see the Lord Jesus one night to find out more about him, and he discovered some very important truths. He learned that being religious does not guarantee a place in heaven - to enter the kingdom of God, a person had to be *born again*. Why must we be born again?

- Because of our sinful human nature - *All have sinned and those who are in the flesh cannot please God* (6; cp. Romans 3:23; 8:8).
- Because of our spiritual blindness - *"Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"* (3).
- Because our eternal destiny depends upon it - *"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God"* (5). To be in the kingdom of God means to have eternal life and inexpressible joy. To be out of the kingdom means to perish, having the wrath of God upon us (16, 36). **On the day of judgement, those who are not born again will wish that they had never been born at all!**

The new birth is vital for salvation (*'must'*, 7) and so is the death of Christ for sinners - *"Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up"* (14). Jesus reminded Nicodemus of the time when Israel rebelled against Moses and against God in the wilderness. The Lord punished them by sending poisonous serpents among the people and many died. The others confessed their sin and begged Moses to pray for them. God told Moses to make a serpent of brass and lift it up on a pole in the camp of Israel. All those who had been bitten were told to look at the serpent and those who did so were saved from death (Numbers 21).

The Lord Jesus was also lifted up to save sinners! - *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life"* (16). The Jews were expecting Messiah to come to punish their enemies, but Jesus did not come to condemn the world, but to bring salvation by dying to be punished for our sins (17). Whoever believes (trusts) in the Lord Jesus, whether he is a Jew or a Gentile, has everlasting life! **Dear Reader, have you been born again?** - *"You must be born again."*

Day 23

Mark 15:1-47

The Son of God is crucified

The chief priests and the Sanhedrin needed the approval of the Roman governor for the execution of Jesus who was silent in the face of his accusers (1-5). Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent and wanted to release him (10; Luke 23:4, 14-16, 22). There was a custom at Passover for the governor to set a prisoner free at the request of the people. Pilate saw this as an opportunity to release the innocent Jesus and he gave them a stark choice. - He would release a murderer, Barabbas, or Jesus (6-10). Pilate expected the crowd to ask for the release of Jesus, but his plan failed. - They demanded the release of Barabbas.

Ponder the appalling suffering of the Lord Jesus! The scourge was a whip with several thongs into which knotted small pieces of metal or bone. When a victim was lashed, his flesh was torn away. Jesus was scourged before being handed over to the

soldiers and the whole garrison made fun of him. They clothed him in a mock royal robe of purple and put a crown of thorns on his head. They beat him with a reed (a piece of wood, which was put into his right hand as an imitation royal sceptre, Matthew 27:29). They spat on him as they knelt in mock worship (15-20).

The chief priests and soldiers taunted Jesus, saying, "*He saved others, himself he cannot save*" (31). Those words had a far deeper significance than his enemies realised. **He could have saved himself and come down from the cross, but he would not! (cp. Matthew 26:53)**. It was not the nails that fixed him to the cross, but his great love for sinners like you and me! We are here faced with a scene of judgment. The cry, "*My God, my god, why have you forsaken me?*" expresses something of the horror in the appalling suffering of our Saviour as he bore our sins. The Roman centurion was profoundly affected as he saw Jesus die. The enemies of Christ had said, "*If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross*" (Matthew 27:40), but the centurion exclaimed, "*Truly this man was the Son of God*" (39). Do you now understand why the Lord Jesus died on the cross?

Day 24

Luke 24:1-32

The King rises from the dead

The women who followed the Lord Jesus were faithful to the very end (23:49, 55-56). It was early Sunday morning and they found that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb and that the body of Jesus was missing (1-3). The two angels reminded the perplexed women that Jesus had said that he would be crucified and that he would rise the third day (4-7; cp. 18:31-34). They then remembered his words and hurried to tell the good news to the disciples but *their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them* (8-11). Peter rushed to the tomb to check out the women's story and found the cloths that had been wrapped around the body of Jesus. He went away marveling at what had happened (12).

The downcast followers of Jesus were travelling from Jerusalem to Emmaus on the day that he rose from the dead. As they discussed the events of the past few days, they were joined by the risen Lord but were restrained from recognising him. He asked them what they were talking about and why they were so sad. One of them, Cleopas, expressed surprise that he had not heard how Jesus of Nazareth had been condemned by the chief priests and rulers and had been crucified. They had hoped that he would have redeemed Israel. Like many Jews, they had been mistaken in expecting the Christ to rule over a visible and political kingdom and they had not been convinced by the report of the women that Jesus had risen from the dead (13-24).

Jesus said to them, "*O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!*" He then explained the Scriptures to prove that the Messiah had to suffer and to die before entering his glory (25-27). **We have seen from our earlier readings that the Old Testament is full of references to Christ for those who have eyes to see!** As they approached Emmaus, they persuaded the Stranger to stay with them. When he prayed before the meal, their eyes were opened to recognise him and then he vanished from their sight. They remembered how their hearts had burned within them when he opened the Scriptures to them (28-32).

Day 25

Luke 24:33-53

The risen Lord ascends to heaven

After the risen Lord had been revealed himself to the two at Emmaus, they were so excited, that they immediately returned to Jerusalem to share their good news. They found a rejoicing company who told them that the Lord had appeared to Simon Peter. They told the disciples of their encounter with Jesus and how they had recognised him in the breaking of bread (33-35). While they were sharing these things, Jesus appeared and stood among them. They were terrified, thinking that they had seen a ghost. The risen Lord Jesus reassured them and invited them to touch him and feel him. A spirit does not have flesh and bones as he did. He further proved his bodily resurrection by eating with them (36-43). Jesus then reminded them of the teaching he had given when he was still with them. He opened their understanding to comprehend all that the Old Testament Scriptures taught concerning himself (44-45).

Jesus then told them that *"it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations"* (46-47). **Though Jesus died to save sinners, we must repent if we want to be forgiven and saved!** The apostles were witnesses of Christ's resurrection, but before they spread the good news they were to wait in Jerusalem to receive the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit, who would endue them with power from on high (48-49).

The Lord Jesus appeared to the apostles and to others and taught them over a period of forty days before he ascended into heaven (cp. Acts 1:3; 1 Corinthians 15:3-7). He then led the disciples out to Bethany which is on the eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives. As he lifted up his hands and blessed them, he ascended into heaven (50-51; see Acts 1:9-11). The disciples no longer had any doubts about the resurrection of their beloved Master! They also were quite clear in their understanding that Jesus is God! - *And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy* (52). It would have been blasphemous to worship Jesus if he were not God!

Day 26

Acts 2:1-42

The Promise of the Father and the preaching of the apostles

The Feast of Pentecost was celebrated seven weeks after the Passover (Leviticus 23:15-21) and God chose this time to pour out his Holy Spirit on those who waited for him in Jerusalem. They were enabled to speak the wonderful works of God in recognisable languages (1-11). Some were amazed and perplexed when they heard those early disciples speaking in languages they had never learned, but others mocked and accused them of drunkenness (13). They were not behaving like drunks with slurred speech, but spoke very clearly.

The benefit of the Lord's teaching over the forty days before his ascension was seen in the preaching of Peter. The apostle explained the significance of what was happening to his Jewish congregation. He demonstrated that the prophecy of Joel which promised the coming of the Holy Spirit was being fulfilled before their very eyes (14-21)! Peter also proved that the Old Testament prophesied of the death and resurrection of Christ (25-28). The crucifixion of Jesus was not an accident. God

planned if for our salvation! - "*Him, being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God*" (23; cp. 4:27-28).

Peter preached that the Lord Jesus had been *exalted to the right hand of God* and that it was he who had poured out the Holy Spirit (33). The apostle again quoted David (from Psalm 110) to demonstrate that Jesus is David's Lord. The people in the crowd were cut to the heart after Peter reminded them that Jesus, whom they had crucified was both Lord and Christ (34-37). They felt their guilt and they asked Peter, "*What shall we do?*" He told them that they must repent of their sin and be baptized. They would then receive remission of sins and the *gift of the Holy Spirit* (38).

Jesus and the apostles taught that there can be no forgiveness of sin without repentance. **Those who want to be saved, must turn away from their sin and trust in the Lord Jesus!** Baptism is a symbol of our identification with Christ, that we are his disciples, who have died to the old sinful way of life (Romans 6:3-5).

Day 27

Hebrews 1:1-14

The exalted Saviour worshipped in heaven

Hebrews chapter 1 shows the surpassing greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ, proving that he is greater than the prophets and the angels. God spoke through the prophets (1) but the Lord Jesus Christ is far greater than the prophets! He is the fulfillment of their prophecies (Luke 24:44). God is not silent! - *God ... has in these last days spoken to us by his Son* (1-2). The One who died and rose to purge our sins is the Creator of the universe (2,10) and he sustains all of his creation by his powerful word. He is the *brightness (radiance) of God's glory and the express image of his person* (3).

The Lord Jesus Christ is not only greater than the prophets (1-3), He is also greater than the angels (5-14)! Angels were highly esteemed by the Jews and they are prominent in the important events in Jewish history and in the giving of the law (2:2; cp. Deuteronomy 33:2; Acts 7:38, 53; Galatians 3:19). Most of Hebrews chapter 1 is in italic print which indicates that it is quoting from the Old Testament Scriptures. These Scriptures refer to the Lord Jesus Christ and they show that he is God. He is worshipped by the angels (6), and he is described as God, whose throne is everlasting (8). He cannot be toppled from his throne! Verses 8 and 9 are taken from Psalm 45:6-7. Read this Psalm which describes the beauty, the power, the majesty, and the grace of Christ.

Psalm 102 is a prayer to Jehovah (indicated by the name 'LORD'). Here in verses 10-12, the Psalm is quoted as referring to the Lord Jesus Christ - *But to the Son he says .. "You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, all the heavens are the work of your hands"* (8, 10). **These verses show that the Lord Jesus is Jehovah! He is the great Creator of the earth and the heavens! He is the eternal, unchanging God!** We see turmoil, change and decay all around us, and life is very uncertain, but Jesus is always the same (11-12). His power, his wisdom, his holiness and his love will never fade! Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and for ever (13:8). He reigns at the right hand of God the Father as our great high Priest where he prays for us and helps us from his throne (4:14-16; 7:24-27).

Day 28

2 Corinthians 5:1-21

What happens to us when we die

This wonderful chapter is full of encouragement for the Christian. When *we walk by faith, not by sight* (7) we see everything in its right perspective. Our bodies, described as *'our earthly house, this tent'* (1), will be destroyed by death unless we are alive at the second coming of Christ, (hence the *'if'* in verse 1). Our frailty should make us *groan* and desire to be with the Lord in heaven (2; cp. Romans 8:23).

We may fear the process of dying and the parting from our loved-ones, but death should hold no terror for the Christian. Notice Paul's certainty - *'we know'* (1) and *'we are confident, yes well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord'* (8). *'Absent'* carries the idea in the Greek of being away from one's own people, whereas *'present'* means being among our own people. Death does part us from our own here on earth, but we will immediately be at home with our own people in heaven. The Lord Jesus is preparing a home for us (John 14:2) and God is preparing us for heaven by giving us the Holy Spirit as a guarantee (5). The Christian is *'a new creation'* in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit (17) who works in our lives to prepare us for heaven.

If we are absent from the body in heaven, what do we make of the Scriptures that teach that we will have a new body like that of Christ? If we die before Jesus comes again, we don't immediately have these 'resurrection bodies'. They will be given to us at the return of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:51-57; Philippians 3:20-21).

The Bible offers no hope to those who reject Christ and refuse to follow him. They are condemned and will suffer the terror of God if they die without repenting of their sin and refuse to follow the Lord Jesus (John 3:18, 36). *We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ* (10). The fact of *the terror of the Lord* drove the apostles to preach the good news of Christ (11). **If you are not a Christian, please think seriously of your great need of Christ. If you come to him, asking him to forgive you, he will accept you.**

Day 29

1 Thessalonians 4:13 to 5:4

When Jesus comes again

Some in the Thessalonian church were grief-stricken over loved-ones who had died as believers. They were confused as to what would happen to them when Christ returned. Would they miss out on the great day of resurrection? To die without God is to die without hope (13; cp. Ephesians 2:12) but Christians who die are blessed (Revelation 14:13). The Christian does not sorrow as others who have no hope (13). Death cannot separate believers from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39). For the believer, death is likened to sleep (14; 5:10; John 11:11). This is the 'sleep' of the body not of the soul. We saw yesterday that when a Christian dies, he is absent from the body and present with the Lord in heaven (2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:21-23).

The second coming of Christ will be wonderful for all Christians, past and present. It will be a day of resurrection for God's people when our bodies will be raised. The Lord will come from heaven with a great shout and a trumpet blast (16; 1

Corinthians 15:51-55). When Jesus comes again, every eye will see him. He will not come in secret (Revelation 1:7)! - *The dead in Christ will rise first* and believers who are alive at this time will also have new bodies and shall be *caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord* (16-17). We will see our Lord in all his breathtaking splendour and glory (2 Thessalonians 1:10) and we will admire, adore and worship him!

The return of Christ is referred to as '*the day of the Lord*' (2,4). The Lord Jesus will return unexpectedly *as a thief in the night* (2; cp. 2 Peter 3:10). Though it will be wonderful for the Christians, it will be dreadful for the ungodly. Their bodies will also be raised and they will face Divine judgment (3; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; John 5:28-29). **We do not know when Christ will come again but it is important that we are prepared by knowing that we are right with God.** Jesus said, "*You also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect him*" (Matthew 24:44).

Day 30

Revelation 21:1-21

A new heaven and a new earth

The book of Revelation is full of symbolism which conveys wonderful and solemn truths. This chapter tells us what heaven will be like and what we will be like in heaven. Our home will be a new heaven and a new earth for the old order will pass away (1; cp. Isaiah 65:17-19; 2 Peter 3:10,12). The Lord told John, "*Behold, I make all things new*" (5). The Greek word translated '*new*' does not mean brand-new, but speaks of renewal and transformation. All will be transformed!

God is with us now, but in heaven we will be much more aware of his presence, with no sin or suffering to disturb our fellowship with him (3). Look at the 'no mores' in verses 1 to 4.

- *No more sea.* The sea is a symbol of turmoil and unrest in Revelation. The beast rose out of the sea (13:1) and wicked Babylon sat *on many waters* (17:1). No more sea - All our enemies and troubles will be gone!
- "*There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away*" (4).

Heaven, happy home of indescribable joy! Heaven is not a vain hope! God said to John, "*Write, for these words are true and faithful*" (5). Are you looking forward to heaven, to glory? The alternative is too dreadful to contemplate! The unbelieving will have their part in the lake of fire as well as murderers (8). Are you thirsting to know God? You too can know him and enjoy him! He promises, "*I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts*" (6). Do you want to know peace with God and to possess eternal life? Come to the Lord and drink!

What will the church be like in heaven? - The church is described as *New Jerusalem* (2), as *holy Jerusalem* (10) and as *the bride, the Lamb's wife* (2,9). John saw the church in great splendour, having the glory of God (11). He uses the language of precious stones to describe the radiant and glorified church (18-21). **Every true Christian belongs to that church. Are you a Christian? Will you be there in heaven?**

An invitation to come to the Lord Jesus Christ

God created Adam and Eve and put them in a garden called 'Eden' which was watered by a river. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden (Genesis 2:8-10). Adam's sin brought a curse upon himself and all his descendants (Genesis 3:17-19); he was driven out of Eden and kept from the tree of life (Genesis 3:24). In Christ all this will be restored! - *there shall be no more curse* (3). John now sees a pure, clear, sparkling river of the water of life, proceeding from the throne of God and the Lamb, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life (1-2). The tree of life and the water of life speak of our eternal life in Christ which comes from knowing him and the Father (John 17:3). To know God is to have fellowship with him.

Heaven is a place of eternal rest from sin and suffering but it is not a place of idleness! The people in heaven shall serve the Lord Jesus (3) and what joyful, satisfying service that will be! Heaven is a place of life and light - *there shall be no night there* (5). We shall see the Lord Jesus in all his matchless splendour in heaven - *They shall see his face ... and they shall reign for ever and ever* (4-5).

The glorious prospect of heaven may seem too good to be true, but it is no illusion! *These words are faithful and true* (6; cp. 21:5). John was so overwhelmed with all that he had seen that he again repeated his earlier mistake of attempting to worship the angel who showed him these things (8; cp. 19:10). There is a frightening finality about the words of verse 11 with no second chance to be cleansed from sin after we die. The unrighteous and the filthy will remain that way for ever!

The Lord Jesus states three times in this chapter, "*Behold, I am coming quickly!*" (7,12,20). John, having had a glimpse of glory and all that awaits the children of God, prays, "*Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*" (20) **These words of encouragement are here for any who desire to know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.** The Holy Spirit says, "*Come!*" The bride (the church) says, "*Come!*" Are you thirsting for God? - "*Come ... take the water of life freely*" (17).

If you want to know more about the Christian faith or if you would like to continue to read the Bible, please speak to the person who gave you this booklet.

Regular Daily Bible reading notes for each day of the year may be available from those who gave you this booklet. If this is not possible, please contact Alec Taylor at the address below. A year's subscription (January to December 2000) is £8, including postage.

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