

# **Foundations of the Bible**

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## Introduction – “The Bible”

What is the Bible? The word actually means “Library of Books” because the Bible is actually a collection of 66 books written by 40 authors over a period of 1500 years.

Its history books show us the world’s history since Creation, particularly the history of God’s plan working with the nation of Israel and later the birth and growth of the Church. It has books of poetry, songs and wisdom. It also has extensive books on prophecy, which predict future events – incredibly these predictions have been 100% accurate and fulfilled.

Taken as a whole the Bible is a unique book, unrivalled by any other and it is so much more than just unique because it is the only book that can credibly claim to be God’s Word.

We will be going through its pages in these studies, but we need to begin by looking at where it came from and how we believe it can actually be the Word of God!

### **How the Bible came to be:**

As we’ve already said the Bible was written by around 40 different authors over 1500 years, and its actual historical coverage closer to 4500 years – which is unprecedented in all human literary history.

The Old Testament is made up of 39 books:

*Genesis – Deuteronomy:* the first five books of the law were authored mostly by Moses and many portions of the first book of Genesis must have come directly from God because only He was there at the beginning of all things to describe how He created the world. We’re given the early history of mankind from the Fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, through to the catastrophic judgement on the wicked world by the Flood. Afterwards we see the dispersion of the human race across the face of the globe in their different language and people groups. Moses then writes about his experiences of seeing God free the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt and their experiences of meeting with God as His people. God gives the people His law and eventually He brings them into the land of Canaan, which is the point Moses dies and his successor Joshua continues to record the history of conquering the land.

*Joshua – Esther:* we then get the history books which were recorded by various characters such as Joshua, Samuel and David among others. They record the establishment of the nation of Israel, its troubled history and ultimate judgement by being invaded by the empires of Assyria and Babylon. The books go on to describe the return and re-establishment of the nation after being freed from Babylonian captivity.

*Psalms – Song of Solomon:* following on from the history books there are a series of books of songs, poetry and wisdom. These were written at the high point of Israel’s history by great characters such as Moses, David and Solomon.

*Isaiah – Malachi:* this is where the Bible gets more complicated because while up until now the Bible has proceeded in more or less chronological order, the books of the prophets overlap in periods of history which are recorded in all the history books of 2 Samuel – 2 Chronicles. Also many of the prophets come during the period of Exile (e.g. Daniel, Ezekiel) and some after the return of Israel to the land. The common theme throughout them all is God’s perseverance with a disobedient and ungrateful people. They also importantly reveal much about the future of God’s plan for the world by predicting many of then future acts of the promised Messiah.

The New Testament is made up of 27 books. Why is there a separation at all, you may ask? Well the Old Testament was all pointing towards the coming of God's promised Messiah who would defeat the enemy, Satan, and deal with our problem of sin in the world which came about by the Fall. When the Messiah did come the nation of Israel, who had been given so many hundreds of prophecies about Him, rejected what He said and did. So the New Testament chronicles God's fulfilment of the Old Testament and His working to save the Gentiles who form part of the Church – although as later studies will show God's great plan involves Israel being brought into accepting the Messiah and all He did before the end:

*Matthew – John:* for a period of 200 years the prophets silent and Israel no longer heard from God until the birth of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah. The 4 gospels are the accounts of those who walked with Christ – with the exception of Luke which was a compiled account from eyewitnesses – and saw all the miraculous things He did and all the teachings He gave the people of Israel. They record His fulfilments of all the prophecies made about Him and ultimately His death and resurrection.

*Acts:* this is part 2 of Luke's gospel as he records his first hand experiences as he went about building the early church with Paul. It records what happened immediately after Jesus ascended back into Heaven 40 days after the resurrection and then the day of Pentecost when the promised Holy Spirit came to empower the early believers to go out and spread the Gospel message in the world. It shows the opposition in Israel to the early church, its first martyr (Stephen) and ultimately the spread of the Gospel all across the known world at that time.

*Romans – 2 Timothy:* these books are all letters written by the Apostle Paul to different churches and church leaders which give tremendous God inspired teaching on Christian living.

*Hebrews – Jude:* these are the general Epistles which were written by various other apostles and address other issues of Christian living and teaching.

*Revelation:* this is the final book of the Bible written by John - the only apostle never to be killed for the Gospel. It is a series of visions he experienced which describe the fulfilment of the prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the end times and Second Coming of Christ. As the last book of the Bible its understanding is dependent on understanding what has come before it. It depicts the final completion of God's plan for human history and shows us a little snapshot of what eternity will be like!

Why were these books chosen and put into our Bibles? There is sometimes talk about "missing books of the Bible/missing gospels" which the Church edited out of the canon of scripture. However intimidating it may be faced with such accusations the answer is really very simple and goes back to our belief that the Bible is the Word of God. There are other books which run alongside the Bible, for example the Jewish book of Maccabees which is a historical record of events in Israel after the Exile and it deals particularly with events around the Greek invasion led by Antiochus Epiphanies. It is not in the Bible because it is not divinely inspired!

The book of Acts describes one of the first Christian gatherings to discuss matters of doctrine and Christian living – notably if new Gentile believers had to be circumcised as under the old Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants. It was at a later church council (The Synod of Hippo) which agreed with decisions by earlier Christian leaders that the current 27 books of the New Testament were the established canon (literally "canon" means: standard). Their primary test was the apostolic authorship of the books which was consistently connected with the Lord's authority. Other tests for determining the canon of scripture looked at whether the book was written by a prophet of God; did it tell the truth of God and not be contradictory; was it accepted by the people of God; and was the writer confirmed by acts of God.

There were other books known at the time called the apocrypha which were rejected because they were not inspired, never had been given any recognition as being part of the Bible and they were filled with contradiction. There were also Gnostic Gospels too (e.g. the Gospel of Judas) which were attempts of Gnosticism to infiltrate into the church. These books claimed to contain secret knowledge but again were not divinely inspired and were very clearly Gnosticism in disguise.

After this time the New Testament was divided into chapters and later verses too. The Old Testament had already been divided up many hundreds of years before around the time of the Babylonian captivity into chapters which largely follow the Christian Bible today.

### **The Case for the Reliability of the Bible:**

Understanding where we get the Bible from is important, but it is a very big claim to say that it is the Word of God! While there were 40 writers, all of them wrote under the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit which is why we say it is God's Word. There are a few reasons I would like to advance for why we can have a credible faith in the Bible as God's Word:

The Bible is unique in its teachings because it gives us an entire picture of God's plan from Creation to Judgement and then on into eternity. Lewis Chafer once said "the Bible is not such a book a man would write if he could, or could write if he would". This touches upon the fact that the Bible being written over such a long period of time by so many different people from all sorts of backgrounds is incredibly internally consistent! While some people try to find problems between different passages, it is entirely consistent on matters of doctrine and truth. This guide aims to take you through the whole book and the themes and plan which is unfolded within its pages – however, the plan is so cohesive that it is impossible to have been written by so many different men over so long! Indeed, it even reveals matters which science was unable to discover for many thousands of years (e.g. that the Earth was a globe!). Not only this, but also even if such men could have written it they would not have wanted to because it is not flattering of our state as sinners. God's laws convict us of the wrongfulness of many basic human desires, and show us to be entirely depraved sinners. The Bible has a ring of truth because unlike all other claimed "holy" books, where if the prophet was a pervert the god he described was of very similar mind, the God of the Bible truly sets Himself apart as being Holy.

Some people worry about the accuracy of the Bible, but again there is good news here! In the Hebrew tradition of copying the Old Testament, if someone were to forget even the smallest written mark in Jewish writing (a "jot") then the entire parchment would be destroyed. They took very seriously that the Bible was God inspired and written down by men, so they had to preserve it as perfectly as they had received it. The discovery in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century of the Dead Sea Scrolls confirms that our Bible today is as accurately translated as it was many thousands of years ago, even before Christ was born! Indeed the Dead Sea Scrolls importantly have been dated to at least 100BC, which means that the portions of the latter part of the book of Isaiah (which importantly contains major prophecies about the future birth, life, death and ministry of Jesus) were not later invented by the church and used as a basis for re-invented Jesus as some Messianic figure. Instead it proves that the Bible contains very convincing predictive prophecies, which we will turn to shortly.

There are so many thousands of manuscripts of the OT and NT, and this is unheard of among any other ancient literature e.g. even great philosophical works from Plato have only a small number of manuscripts in comparison. We can reconstruct virtually the entire Bible from these manuscripts, which can be accurately dated to the time of writing. The New Testament we have today can be 98% reconstructed from just quotes from the early church leaders because they so extensively quoted from it. This shows that the Bible has not been tampered with by the church over time but

has been accurately preserved for us today!

What of the actual message of the Gospels, can we trust it? Well unlike most other historical literature of the time the gospels were written very shortly after the life of Jesus – Mark was written as early as 20 years after the ascension. This is significant because it means that later church leaders didn't re-invent Jesus as some Messiah figure. Instead the Gospels which were written by eye-witnesses were written at a time when everyone who had encountered Jesus during his ministry days would still have been live and able to discredit the writings had they lied about His ministry of miracles and teachings. Indeed the early church was made up of those who saw Jesus crucified at Calvary and then 3 days later up walking around appearing to multitudes of people; people who saw the nail and sword pierced hands and side! Myth and legend never had time to rise up in the church and enter into the Bible, and any mythical gospels that did arise were never accepted and included in the Bible (as already explained above!)

Finally, while we've looked at the technical aspects of why we can believe the Bible is God's Word there are some important things it contains which demonstrate its divine inspiration and character. One of these which I have studied at great length is predictive prophecy. 1/3 of the Bible is prophetic. The Old Testament contains nearly 200 prophecies about Jesus made hundreds of years in advance of His birth and life. Some of these are described in later studies. It has been calculated that for one man to fulfil just half of these prophecies is more than all the atoms in the universe, so for Jesus to be documented to have fulfilled them all is just impossible – if He were a man that is. However, Jesus was the Son of God incarnate and was fulfilling God's plan that has been revealed in the Bible long in advance. There are many important historical prophecies given, and even prophecies relevant to our lives today which we are seeing unfolding as we approach the end times and the Second Coming of Christ. These issues we will examine in detail later!

So in conclusion, we have looked at where the Bible comes from and why we can have a credible faith in its reliability as God's Word. The question is do you believe it? Ultimately faith is something you can't prove but it isn't a blind leap because we have a very credible basis for our hope in the Bible!

## **Lesson 1 – In the beginning...**

### **Genesis 1 and 2:**

On first glance it appears that the creation account contradicts itself because it suggests in Genesis 1 that God made men and women on day 6 (plural) and then in Genesis 2 makes only Adam and Eve. Rather to understand this passage Genesis 2 needs to be seen as a deeper and fuller explanation of what happened on the 6<sup>th</sup> day.

God made the whole universe and everything in it in 6 literal 24 hour days. There are many people today who contradict the Bible in saying that the word used for “day” originally in Hebrew actually means “period of time”, which they use to justify a belief in the universe being millions of years old. This is true – in respect of the word used for day. However, when reading anything you need to look at its context to determine the meaning of the word used. In Genesis 1 God makes very clear that there is “evening and morning” in each day. In this context, the word “day” literally means a solar day – not any period of time longer than 24 hours! The Bible is internally consistent, it is mankind with its scientific theories which seek to take God out of His role as Creator who have caused the problems with their theories. The Bible is clear the Earth was made in 6 days!

When the creation of man is described it’s made clear that God made the animals and mankind differently. Mankind was made in the image of God and had His breath breathed into it to make it come alive! People who believe in evolution believe that we have happened to evolve from small enzymes which over millions of years (which we already know to have never existed!) formed into animals and eventually into humans. Some Christians compromise saying that God could have used evolution, however, this again is based on a wrong understanding of the Creation account. Evolution requires there to have been countless generations of death and suffering on the Earth before Adam came on the scene, while God’s word is clear that all in creation was good (!)– death didn’t happen until after Adam and Eve sinned by disobeying God.

Genesis 2 explains that the Earth originally was very different to our world today. It would have been very warm because a thick layer of cloud and water vapour covered the whole atmosphere – called the firmament. This firmament stopped the harmful rays of the sun coming through to humans and animals, this partially explains the very long lifespans of people until the Flood, when the firmament came crashing down in the first and greatest rainfall in history!

### **Genesis 3:**

This is where things go totally wrong in Creation. God allowed Adam and Eve to do anything but eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It was a simple command and was intended to protect them from the knowledge of bad things that could hurt them. Satan came to them in the form of a snake and tricked Eve into disobeying God – this act was called “sin”. It’s important to realise where Satan came from. The Bible explains in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 that Satan was actually one of the highest angels created by God. He was exceedingly wise and beautiful. His problem was that he used his free will to become proud and attempt to overthrow God from His throne in Heaven. In this rebellion 1/3 of all the angels God had created allied with Satan and were cast out of Heaven, however, Satan to this day still has a right of audience before God’s throne to accuse those on Earth of their sin. This is a right which will one day be removed and He will be permanently barred from God’s presence until his judgement and eternal imprisonment in the Lake of Fire.

Satan's ploy was to get into a conversation with Eve, which is always the first mistake people make. Satan has 6000 years of experience of dealing with humanity and he's very clever at deceiving people because he knows exactly what to say. This is why you should never get into a conversation with him: if God says not to do something don't even question it because that's how Satan gets an opportunity to trick you. Satan first twisted God's words to Adam and Eve by asking Eve if God really said that they couldn't eat of any tree in the garden. He made Eve question God's word and he twisted what God had really said was that the Tree of Knowledge was the only tree. Eve then twisted what God said by saying that God had told them not even to touch it, which was wrong! God had not said this, so this only encouraged Satan further because clearly Eve didn't know what God had said. He tempted her with his own great desire: to become like God, and he lied to her telling her that she wouldn't die – he made God out to be a liar. Eve fell for this. Adam's sin was greater though, he knew God's command and he knew what was to become of his wife Eve now she had disobeyed. He had not been tempted or deceived, but of his own free will did what was wrong! This is why sin came into mankind through Adam's sin – he chose without Satanic deception to disobey God!

From that moment mankind was cursed because death entered into the human race. Immediately we became spiritually dead with our connection to God being severed. Now instead of meeting and walking with God, we had to hide in fear of Him. It would have saved God a lot of heart break and trouble over the following 6000 years of recorded history to have just annihilated Adam and Eve at that moment. However, He loved them because they were made in His image. So instead He put into place the great rescue plan of salvation by making a promise. He firstly promised Satan that there would be a child born of Eve who would defeat him. As God had made Adam and Eve rulers over the Earth, their disobedience had handed over the kingdom of the Earth to Satan, who is now the "Prince of this World". God promised that Satan's kingdom would be crushed in the future by this Saviour of Eve's seed. He also said that Eve would suffer tremendous pain in childbirth while Adam would suffer immensely while trying to work to provide for his family. The snake itself lost its legs for its part in the deception.

#### **Chapter 4:**

The consequences of sin were promised to be death, and we see these effects very suddenly when Adam and Eve have their children Cain and Abel. Their sons brought sacrifices to God: Cain's was the fruit he had harvested from his own labour in the field; while Abel brought a sacrifice of a lamb from his flock of sheep. God disapproved of Cain's offering because it was him trying to earn God's favour by his works. Abel's offering was accepted though because it involved the sacrifice of an innocent lamb and the shedding of blood. This form of sacrifice foreshadows the Cross where again an innocent lamb (Jesus Christ) had to have His sinless blood shed in order to deal with sin. Man who is fallen and sinful cannot earn God's forgiveness by his own labours! Cain was angry about this (sin) and jealous of his brother (sin) and these sins caused him to kill Abel. This was the first murder in human history and shows that the wages of sin are death: someone always will die because of sin!

#### **Chapters 5-8:**

Adam and Eve went on to have a third son called Seth, as well as many other children who were the first human society. It was of the line of Seth that Jesus would eventually come many thousands of years later. Satan however was determined to stop God's plan ever happening so some of the 1/3 of the angels who had fallen with him – called "demons" – attempted to corrupt the human bloodline. They procreated with some of the daughters of men to create the giant people, called the Nephilim.

The results were the almost complete corruption of humanity and the world was filled with violence. God was very angry about this and there was only one family left which was pure and still following Him: Noah. So God determined to stop Satan's plan in its tracks by destroying the whole Earth and the corrupt human race that had been born of the demonic intervention. He commanded Noah to build a boat. People laughed at this because they had never seen rain before, but when the rains began to fall they weren't laughing any more as they locked up inside with 2 of every kind of animal, and more of some other kinds. The rain fell for 40 days and nights and the ark still floated on water for over 100 days after this while the waters again fell. The entire Earth had changed, and it was an entirely different environment. The ultra violet rays hit the surface and it was no longer the tropical temperature. Many of the animals inside the ark when outside would become extinct, e.g. the dinosaurs, because they could not easily adapt to the new world. It is remarkable also how human lifespans suddenly dropped from 900-odd years to just over 100 in a very short space of time.

Today many people deny the Flood was a global event. However, every people group in the world has legends of a great Flood. Also they deny that the Earth is only 6000 years by looking at the depths of sediment in the Earth's crust. However, what they refuse to see is that all these many layers of sediment have built up because of the catastrophic Flood! The Bible makes total sense given the scientific picture we have today, just the scientists deny that it happened the Bible's way.

An interesting character prior to the Flood is Enoch who is only given a few verses mention in chapter 5, but he is an important character. He was such a man of God that one day God took him away into heaven in the first instance of the rapture. Later Elijah would be taken in a similar manner. Both of these men are the only people in human history never to have died, and they will return to Earth in the near future to be used in ministry in Israel during the reign of the Antichrist.

## **Chapter 11**

Noah and his family were commanded to go fill the entire Earth, however, their descendents decided to join together in a single world government centred in the Shinar region, which is today Iraq. They decided to build a tower there which was to be a temple to worship their own made up gods and their own impressiveness. They did not worship God. Their wicked ruler at this time was called Nimrod. God was very angry at their idolatry so He confounded all their different languages and spread the different groups across the face of the Earth. From this we get all the different races and languages of the Earth. There is only one race: the human race. Different skin colours have happened over time due to environment and the amounts of chemicals present in cells. A single human cell contains more information than the 30 volumes of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, so it can easily store all the information for the different races we see today. Indeed this is one of the most interesting arguments against evolution and the Big Bang. It is impossible to create that sort of information out of dead matter, it had to be designed and placed there by God. The evolutionists cannot account for it at all!

## **Chapter 12:**

Many years after the Tower of Babel project had to be abandoned as no one could understand each other to co-operate, God continued His plan to redeem mankind. He spoke to a man called Abram, who he would later rename Abraham. He was an old man with no children and his wife Sarai was old too, beyond the age of giving birth to children. However, God spoke to him and made a covenant (or agreement) with him. God said that If Abram was obedient and went to live in a far away land called Canaan then he would be blessed with descendents who would become a great nation and that through that nation all the nations of the world would be blessed. This was God's

plan for the Messiah, who would come of the nation of Israel to bring salvation to all the world.

### **Chapters 15-19:**

God made a further promise to Abram later on when he had moved to Canaan promising that the land would be given to his descendants. God promised that while the people of Israel would be taken into a foreign land as slaves that they would be returned to the land later on as a great nation to take possession of the land.

Abram still doubted God's promise about having any children at their age, so he slept with a servant called Hagar. Sarai, his wife, got jealous of the subsequently born child Ishmael so had Hagar sent away in disgrace. From this God made a promise to Hagar about Ishmael too becoming a great nation (because God had promised to Abram that his descendants would become a great nation – just now there would be two separate lines of descendants), however that the two nations would continually have enmity between them. This is why Israel has always fought with its Arab neighbours and why there is still such terrible trouble in the Middle East together! It all stems back to Abram's lack of faith and disobedience!

God later reconfirmed His covenant with Abraham and initiated the rite of circumcision as a symbol of that covenant. It is later said in scripture that it was to be as a reminder on his right hand and forehead of the covenant. Satan will use this premise in the near future to initiate the Mark of the Beast as the symbol of mankind's covenant with him through the Antichrist. However, Satan twists things – he cannot create – so he will make a literal symbol on the right hand and forehead of all his followers in the Tribulation period.

All this time Abraham's relative had gone to live in a valley in the city of Sodom. There was great wickedness in this city and God sent judgement upon it. However, Abraham negotiated with God so that He'd spare Lot in the city. God sent 2 angels who appeared as normal humans to rescue him, but they were instructed not to look back at the city as they left. However, Lot's wife did this and she was turned into a pillar of salt for her disobedience. God rained down fire and brimstone upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah as judgement for their depravity and wickedness, this area is now called the Dead Sea because of all the salt left over from the destruction of these cities!

### **Chapters 21-22:**

Abraham and Sarah had God's promise fulfilled as intended by her giving birth to their son Isaac. He was called Isaac, which means laughter because she laughed at the thought of having children at such a late time in life. God then called upon Abraham to sacrifice his new son Isaac on top of Mount Moriah. This was a test of Abraham's faith and whether he would be trusting to God (who had promised to make a great nation of his son) and obedient to His commandments. Mount Moriah, the place where Abraham led Isaac is the place which Jerusalem is built around and where the Temple Mount is today, where Israel's Temples originally stood before being destroyed by the Babylonians and Romans much later in Bible history. It is also sometimes called Mount Zion because it where God's throne will sit in the Millennial Kingdom after the Antichrist's kingdom is overthrown. The Psalms sometimes talk about God's throne sitting on the "parts of the north" which are mount Zion, and you may recall that Satan's ambition was to sit on the sides of the North, which is why he is so interested in holding onto the Temple Mount, because he knows that is where God's throne is destined to be! It is a place very familiar with sacrifice and it all began with Abraham. Abraham was obedient and took his son up the mountain, bound him and was about to stab him to death, when God intervened and provided a sacrifice. This is a very important event which foreshadows everything about Jesus. God provided a sacrifice in His only Son whose blood

would have to be shed as a sin offering to take away the sins of the world. This shows the whole plan of God at such an early part in the Bible, over 2000 years before Christ was born.

### **Chapters 37, 39-45:**

After Isaac there was born Jacob who God renamed Israel, the name of the nation which would come through him. He had 12 sons, who would become the heads of the 12 tribes of Israel. He had a son called Joseph who had dreams about his family bowing down to worship him. His brothers hated him for this and also hated that he was their father's favourite. Their father foolishly favoured him so much that he had a magnificent multicoloured coat made for him. This only infuriated his brothers further and one day when he came to find them in the fields he was thrown into a well. His brothers considered killing him but instead sold him into slavery. They brought back his coat and made it look like a wild animal had killed them, much to the great upset of their father! Meanwhile Joseph ended up in Egypt where he was bought by Potiphar, one of the important people in the Pharaoh's government. Joseph proved himself to be a capable organiser of his master's affairs, so he was appointed as an overseer over all his property. Joseph also found himself on the receiving end of the unwelcome advances of Potiphar's wicked wife but resisted the temptation of adultery with her. This displeased her and she made it look like Joseph had attempted to rape her. Potiphar was very angry and had Joseph thrown into prison with a baker and cup bearer. They both had displeased Pharaoh so were cast into prison, where they had dreams, which Joseph was able to interpret. These dreams showed how the cupbearer would return to serving the king, while the baker would be executed. When the cupbearer returned to Pharaoh Joseph asked him to remember him. It was a long time before the cupbearer did this after the king had strange dreams which no one else could interpret. Joseph explained to Pharaoh that God had sent the dream and that He would interpret the dream through himself. He explained how there would be 7 good years of harvest in the land, and then 7 years of terrible famine, so they should make preparations to store up lots of food for the coming famine. Joseph was made in charge of this important operation and ultimately Egypt became the breadbasket for the entire region.

The famine reached as far as Canaan, causing his estranged brothers to come down to Egypt looking for food. They didn't recognise Joseph but he did them. Eventually they did bow down to worship him just as Joseph had dreamed years before. After some playing games with them involving their youngest brother Benjamin, he revealed his true identity to them. The entire family of Jacob moved down into Egypt.

In closing of Genesis, Jacob their father dies and the brothers are worried that Joseph will take revenge on them. Rather Joseph says that what they intended for evil, God intended for good, which is a statement of God's supreme plan in operation in the world. The family of Israel grew into a great nation in the land of Goshen in Egypt and in Exodus a new Pharaoh rises into power who never had heard of Joseph and worried about the strength of the Israelites makes them slaves to build the pyramids.

This is where God's promise to Abraham to bring the people of Israel back into the land of Canaan will resume in lesson 2.

## **Lesson 2: Beginning of Israel**

### **Exodus 1-2:**

We left Genesis with Jacob's (renamed Israel) children moving to live in Egypt during the great famine which beset the region. Over the following generations the descendants of Israel became a mighty nation in the area of Goshen, until they became a concern to the new Pharaoh who knew nothing of Joseph's contribution to Egyptian society. He believed they might ally themselves with Egypt's enemies causing the land to be overrun from within. To avoid this he forced them into slavery to work for the Egyptian industrial machine; he also commanded that all the midwives, who delivered Hebrew babies, had to kill any male children born. They disobeyed this, and the Hebrew people continued to grow in number, causing Pharaoh to command that all male children to be drowned in the River Nile.

At this time a child called Moses was born, and hidden away for 3 months by his family from the genocide against the Hebrew male children. After this they tried to save him by sending him down the river in a special basket coated with tar so it floated. He was discovered by Pharaoh's daughter caught in the bulrushes, from which his name Moses came from. The New Testament reveals that Moses was 40 years old when he went out to visit his Hebrew countrymen, only to discover one of them being beaten by an Egyptian. In his anger at this treatment he killed the Egyptian and hid away the body. The news of this spread among the Hebrews and when one day confronted about it by fellow Hebrews Moses fled in fear of Egypt's retribution. He went into the desert of Midian, where he lived for another 40 years and married the daughter of a priest, Jethro. God did not forget His promises to the forefathers of Israel (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) to give them the land of Canaan as their own for the nation of Israel to dwell in, so He heard and responded to their suffering in Egypt.

### **Exodus 3-4:**

One day when Moses was tending the sheep at Mount Horeb (also called Mount Sinai) he found a burning bush, which despite the inferno was not being burnt up. God spoke to Moses, warning that he was on holy ground. He revealed Himself to Moses as the God of his fathers, and that He had appointed Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. He also revealed His name: "I am that I am", which the closest translation from the Hebrew makes God's name: "Yahweh". This is a statement of God's self-existence: he does not need humanity, nor the nation of Israel but rather chooses to have a people who worship Him. The reason why God needs nothing else is because there is perfect relationship within the Trinity. God sets out His plan for the rescue clearly: the Pharaoh will not allow the people to go without compulsion, so God would use miracles to force Pharaoh's hand. When they eventually were to leave God promised they would plunder Egypt to bring out great riches.

Despite this incredible sight of the unconsumed burning bush and hearing the voice of the Lord, Moses still didn't trust God's plan and tried to get out of going. He made a series of excuses to try and get God to use someone else. Particularly notice how Moses makes clear his absolute inadequacy to do the job. I have often taught that God chooses to work through the weak and humble because then He will be given all the glory, rather than using the strong who will only be made proud and take the glory themselves. God was angry with Moses for his excuses for not going Egypt so disapprovingly allowed him to bring along his brother Aaron. They made their way into Egypt where they won the trust of the Israelites by performing the miracles God had shown them, so they knew God was finally rescuing them and honouring His promise that they would be delivered from the land of Egypt.

## **Exodus 5 – 10:**

Moses and Aaron appeared before Pharaoh and asked him to let the people of Israel go into the Sinai wilderness to make sacrifices to God. However, he refused and instead made the work of the Israelites all the harder by making them have to get their own materials for making bricks while expecting them to produce the same quantity of bricks as previously – this was in the hope that they would reject Moses and Aaron for making their lives worse. God didn't relent from His plan to bring the people out of Egypt into Canaan, and commanded Moses and Aaron to return to Pharaoh a second time. They performed the miracles God had shown them with their staffs becoming serpents, however, Satan was able to work counterfeit miracles which rivalled those of Moses. Yet still Satan's power was far weaker to God's, whose miraculous serpents swallowed up the serpents of the Egyptian magicians. This is a warning to always be aware of the need to test miracles which may appear to be from God, because the enemy works in skilful lying ways.

God had warned Moses and Aaron that He would harden Pharaoh's heart so that He could demonstrate His mighty glory amongst the Egyptians and also as a sign to the nation of Israel of the power of their God. He soon confirmed Moses' message through sending a series of 10 plagues against Egypt, which increased in inconvenience and severity each time Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go. The amazing thing was the Lord spared the land of Goshen from many of the plagues so that the Israelites could see that their God was on their side, while punishing the Egyptians. Many times Pharaoh relented from his refusal to allow the Israelites to go free, but would soon find his heart hardening against the idea again.

## **Chapter 11-14:**

It eventually came down to one final, tenth, plague which would be the most severe of all that had preceded it. The angel of death would go through Egypt killing all the first born sons. God made Moses institute a special ceremony which would give protection to the Israelites and their first born, though. They were to slay a lamb, smear some of its blood along the doorposts and lintel, and eat it as the Passover Meal – called Passover because the Angel of Death would pass over their house when it saw the sign of the blood. This is again a symbol and foreshadowing for the need of the shedding of the innocent blood of a lamb, which would cause God's wrath to pass over those upon whom it would otherwise fall! That night the Angel of Death killed even the Pharaoh's son and the nation of Egypt was filled with crying as every home had someone who died. It was only then that Pharaoh demanded that the Israelites leave and they took with them great riches and flocks, just as God had promised. God appeared to them as a pillar of cloud during the day to guide them, and as a pillar of fire at night to light their camp. He led them across the Red Sea, which He parted and closed again on the pursuing Egyptian army. Seeing these mighty displays of God's power they rightly feared Him.

## **Chapter 19-20:**

God brought the Israelites back to Mount Horeb (remember also called Sinai) where He called Moses up to meet with Him. A mighty cloud descended upon the mountain out of which God spoke, so the people could see God's presence before them. It was then that God proposed a covenant that if they obeyed Him and kept the covenant then He would make them a holy nation of priests and His own possession of all the nations of the Earth. He then proceeded to give them The Law. God, as Creator, has the authority to be able to tell us how to live. Indeed He knows how best to live our lives because He created everything good. God didn't create anything bad, however He gave us the free will to decide to do as He commanded, or to turn away and pervert what He had created. The Tree of the KNOWLEDGE of Good and Evil contained simply that: knowledge.

Arguably, we gained the knowledge of how to corrupt God's good creation and because of the original sin (disobedience of God's command not to gain that dangerous knowledge) we now find ourselves on a default setting to often do the opposite of what God intends for us as His creation.

God gave Israel the Ten Commandments, and many other laws – many indeed which our legal system today is built upon, so law actually has some divine inspiration and can't be all that evil a profession... (not that I'm biased here). The first 4 commandments were related to the worship of God alone, while the remaining 6 dealt with man's relations with one another. This pattern was again repeated by Jesus Christ many thousands of years later. It is the way God wants us to live, but none of us can fulfil it because of our natural predisposition to sin! We can never please God all of the time because we sin. Thus that is why we needed Christ to come do what we couldn't do and satisfy God's demand for justice. God is love – yes – but God is also holy and cannot abide with sin: it must be punished. That punishment and the fulfilment of the law came through Christ and now we live in grace, because we are not reliant on the law for justification – because it cannot do this – but we rest in the completed redemptive work of Christ on the Cross and we are justified by His blood! (Justified simply means: “declared not guilty”). We simply seek to obey God's commands here today because that is how we show we love Him and that is what pleases Him – we cannot be saved by following the law, following the law on our own strength is absolutely impossible. As it was impossible that is why the promised Messiah was needed!

### **Chapter 32:**

Despite the incredible scene in front of them of God's presence descending on top of Sinai for 40 days, the people grew anxious. They seemed to forget all that had happened just weeks before in God's miraculous deliverance of them from the plagues of Egypt and the advancing Egyptian army as they crossed the Red Sea. Aaron very foolishly called the people to form a golden calf as an idol and they actually bowed down to worship it proclaiming that this idol was their god who had delivered them from Egypt. God has a sense of humour and rarely will you find a more example of His irony in action than in Isaiah where He paints this picture: a man goes out and cuts down a tree, he uses half of it to start a fire and cook his dinner and warm his house; the other half he carves into an idol with his own hands, and then gets down and worships it as his god and creator – this is the same piece of wood he made his dinner with... God has a sense of humour at us stupid sinners whenever we are so blind as to what we're really doing. While today we don't make golden calves, our idols are what we spend our time on and what we give our hearts to!

Moses was sent back down the mountain by God, who was angry at what the people were doing to the extent that He threatened to destroy them all and continue His promise through Moses. Moses had to intercede on Israel's behalf and remind God of His promise to his forefathers about having descendents who would number the stars in space. So angry was Moses at all this that he threw down the two tablets of stone which God had written with His own hand so that they smashed! He destroyed the golden calf with Joshua's help and scattered its ashes over the water, before forcing the Israelites to drink it. Even after this God passed lethal judgement against those who had sinned in this way. This shows the severity of God's reaction to idolatry and the solemnity of the First Commandment

### **Numbers 13-14:**

After the Law had been given and Israel had returned on their journey towards the promised land they did continue to grumble against God. They grumbled about the miracle of manna which came from Heaven to feed them, among other things. Their greatest sin occurred on the edge of Canaan when 12 spies were sent into the land to conduct reconnaissance. Only Joshua and Caleb returned

as faithful witnesses to the camp of Israel of the true state of affairs in Canaan. The other 10 wicked spies returned his scare mongering stories about the cities being too heavily fortified and the Nephilim (giants) having returned. They totally lacked faith in the power of God to fulfil His promise to deliver the land into their hands – even after all they had seen Him do up until this point.

Their doubting of God angered Him greatly and He was prepared again to destroy Israel for their sin, however, Moses again interceded on their behalf to remind God that Egypt and the other nations would only hear of this and laugh that God had done all this in vain to just destroy His people. God decided to punish the generation which had been unfaithful and said that they would never enter into the Promised Land. Instead they would have to wander the Wilderness for 40 years until they all had died. Only Joshua and Caleb were spared because they had been faithful witnesses of God. Some of the Israelites tried to disobey God by entering Canaan, where they were killed by the inhabitants of the Land because God was not with them. This says a lot about doing anything which God is not supporting or involved in – it is going to fail.

Later Moses would disobey God by instead of speaking at a rock to make it bring forth water – to satisfy an again disgruntled Israel – he struck it with his cane. This was disobedience of God's command and He decreed that Moses would not enter into the Promised Land either, but would be allowed to see it before dying. It would be Joshua who would lead the new generation of Israel into Canaan across the River Jordan, to conquer it as the Lord had always promised. However, Israel had already shown it's greatest problem was being faithful and obedient to God, a requirement of the covenant!

### **Lesson 3: The Place of Israel in God's Plan**

It's important to recap God's covenants with mankind up until the point where Joshua leads the Israelites into the land of Canaan.

Immediately after The Fall in the Garden of Eden God had made a promise that He would cause a Saviour to be born of Eve's descendants who would destroy the kingdom of Satan, which had been formed on Earth, and bless all the peoples' of the world. Many centuries later God made an everlasting promise to Abraham that He would give him countless descendants who would form a great nation in the land of Canaan, and through them the whole world would be blessed. This covenant was confirmed again with his son Isaac and then his son Jacob, whom God renamed Israel.

God remembered this covenant when His people suffered under the yoke of slavery in Egypt and sent Moses to bring them into the land of Canaan. While assembled around Mount Sinai, the presence of God descended upon the mountain and He made a covenant with the people that they would be His people in the Earth, on the condition that they obeyed His voice. He then proceeded to lay out the law, which would show them how to live a life that was pleasing to God and set them apart from the nations around them, to be a light in their darkness. God has done a similar thing with making those in the Church set apart and living lives in stark contra-distinction with those in the world. He commanded the Israelites to go into Canaan to destroy the inhabitants and their idolatrous society. They were forbidden to make alliances neither with them, nor to intermarry, because He knew that this would only cause His people to fall away into idol worship.

On the edge of Canaan God made a new covenant with the Israelites through Moses on the conditions for their entering and taking possession of the Promised Land (**Deuteronomy 29-30**). They were explicitly warned that unless they obeyed God and kept the covenant with Him that they would be driven out of the land, through God using the surrounding nations as judgement. However, it was similarly promised that since God's covenant with Abraham was everlasting that God would have mercy on the people when they repented and returned to worshipping Him, so that He'd return them to the land. This promise has been fulfilled a number of times with the return from captivity in Babylon, restoration after the Greek invasion under Antiochus Epiphanies, and finally 2000 years after the Roman conquest and destruction of Jerusalem by the refounding of Israel in a single day – as prophesied by Isaiah, Ezekiel and Jeremiah – in 1948.

#### **Joshua 2, 6:**

After Moses ascended Mount Nebo to die, Joshua led the people across the River Jordan into Canaan. The City of Jericho was spied out to determine its fortifications and strength ahead of the Israelite advance. News spread in the city that the Israelites had infiltrated so a search was initiated to find them before they could escape with the vital intelligence. However, a prostitute named Rahab took pity on the spies, allowing them to hide in her house. She then helped them escape through the city wall, to which she was promised that God would spare her household if she tied a cord of scarlet out of her window because of her kindness towards them. Scarlet is the colour best associated with blood, and again this was to be the symbol of her redemption and salvation from the destruction which would befall the rest of Jericho. Some days later God told the Israelites to begin a week long march around the city, and on the final day to blow trumpets which would cause the immense wall defences of the city fall down. They obeyed this and exactly as promised on the seventh day when they blew the trumpets the great walls of Jericho came tumbling down! This was

an important initial victory in the conquest of Canaan.

God went before the Israelites and caused them to find great victory in the land, as He had promised Abraham. Unlike the nations around Israel did not have a king, instead God instituted the position of Judges, whose job was to oversee the spiritual condition of the people. This was because Israel was only to be loyal and obedient to God as their head of state. Due to Israel's disobedience during the conquest God allowed the Philistine people to remain in the land as a thorn in Israel's side – literally, as the Gaza peninsula was a gaping thorn in Israel's Mediterranean coast.

A painfully repetitive history then ensued within Israel. The people would turn away from God to worship the idols of the nations around them and suffer greatly as a result. God would then raise up a Judge, who would restore the monotheistic worship of Yahweh and win great victories for Israel during the course of their lifetime. However, upon their death the nation would slowly decay again. Three of the significant Judges were Deborah, Gideon and Samson, however we will only look at Samson here to see that even these people of God did have their failings and weaknesses.

### **Joshua 13-16:**

God sent an angel to Samson's mother and prophesied that despite her being infertile that God would give her a son, who would have to be set apart for God – through being in a lifelong Nazarite vow, which in part required his hair never to be cut – and would be used by Him to deliver the nation of Israel from the 40 year occupation by the Philistines who God allowed to overrun the nation due to its disobedience. Samson was subsequently born according to the word of God, conveyed by the angel. He was someone with incredible strength which was due to the powerful filling of the Holy Spirit, which was demonstrated when he once killed a wild lion with his bare hands. He then went into the Gaza peninsula and killed thirty Philistines in Ashkelon. Another time he tied 300 foxes together and set flaming torches in the joint of the tails so they would go through the fields of the Philistines to punish them. He also killed 1000 men with the jaw bone of a donkey. Another time he ripped the gates off a city and carried them up a mountain.

These exploits make Samson one of the most interesting Judges of the time, however, he had a great fall due to his wicked wife Delilah. On a number of occasions she betrayed her husband Samson to the Philistines in order to get money in return for revealing the secret of his great strength. Ultimately Samson gave into his wife and told her that if his hair was cut then the Holy Spirit would leave him and he would lose his strength, because he would be in breach of the Nazarite vow. His wife did this one night while he slept and he was carried off by the Philistines to Gaza, where they plucked out his eyes and made him a slave. They eventually decided to hold a great celebration to their pagan god Dagon, and made Samson a spectacular in the temple of Gaza. However, his hair had begun to grow again and he prayed that God would give him strength one last time to be able to destroy these Philistines. God answered this prayer by giving him the strength to pull down the central support pillars of the Temple while he was chained to them. The death and destruction from this act was greater than the cumulative number of Philistines he'd killed during the rest of his life!

So continued the period of the Judges until the nation of Israel did whatever it felt was best in its own eyes. This was a great mistake because there is only one way to ensure that we are living properly, and that is according to God's word. We must remember that we are fallen, sinful beings who are naturally predisposed to sin. There is not any sort of relativistic truth, and not everyone can be right. There is a right and a wrong! What God says is what is right, and anything in contradiction with His will is wrong.

## **1 Samuel 1-8:**

There was a woman, named Hannah, who longed to have a child because she was barren and was teased about this by her husband's second wife. She prayed and asked God to bless her with a child, whom she would give into His service. This child was named Samuel and given over the Temple priest Eli. Eli was a bad father and allowed his son to greatly anger God, so God declared that He would cut Eli's house off. At the same time He appeared to Samuel one night calling him 3 nights, until Samuel realised that it was God calling him. This was Samuel's calling to be a judge and prophet of the Lord.

Israel had greatly displeased God at this time because it worshipped foreign gods and when the Ark of the Covenant – the golden box in which the two tablets of the law given to Moses was carried as a symbol of God's presence – was carried into battle against the Philistines Israel was defeated and lost the Ark. This was a national disaster and news of it caused Eli to fall backwards and break his neck, this was the consummation of God's judgement against him. The Ark was taken into the Temple of Dagon in Ashdod on the Gaza peninsula. This is an amazing story because at night the statute idol of Dagon had fallen face down on the ground before the Ark, they restored the statute and that same night it fell again but this time its arms and head were decapitated off as divine judgement against the idol. God also judged the city causing death and tumours on the people; the same thing happened when they moved it to Ekron and other cities. They had to eventually return it to Israel in order to save themselves from God's judgement.

After this Samuel called the people to return to worshipping God and remove the idols which they had bowed down to worship in the land. He also had to make a sacrifice of a lamb to atone for the sins of the people. He continued in this office until his old age, and his children were also appointed into similar offices, but they did not walk faithfully with God. So the people came to Samuel demanding that he appoint a king, so that they were like the nations around them. They associated a king with strength and unity. God saw this demand as a rejection of His sovereign leadership over Israel, but He nevertheless allowed them a king reminding the people through Samuel that a king would have its disadvantages too because he would take the best of what was the peoples'

Israel's first king was a mighty man called Saul, however he did not always fully walk with God and obey. On the eve of battle, and with no sign of Samuel's promised coming to make a sacrifice and enquire of God for His support in the battle, Saul took the initiative on his own to make the sacrifice. Immediately after this Samuel came and sternly warned Saul that God had been greatly angered by his disobedience. This caused God to reject Him as king and called Samuel to go to the house of Jesse to anoint one of his sons as the next king. Samuel went through the family but God continually rejected each of the male children, until young David was called in from the fields. He was anointed to become the next king at the Lord's timing. God turned from Saul, which included the removal of the filling of the Holy Spirit and he became under the attack of demonic spirits.

## **1 Samuel 16-20:**

David won favour in Israel at this time through his victory over the giant Goliath. The army of the Philistines had come out and camped out against the army of Israel, while Goliath went out calling for someone to challenge him for the battle's victory. None of those would go out to fight Goliath – who was clearly one of the few remaining Anakim (descendants of the post-deluvian Nephilim). It came down to young David who rejected the finest king's armour and instead went out in the strength and confidence of the Lord to face this evil giant. He took only 3 stones from a brook and with a slingshot knocked out Goliath and decapitated him. This victory resulted in the mass

slaughter of the fleeing Philistine army. This brought David to the attention of King Saul, who grew increasingly jealous of how the people made David out to be a greater warrior than himself. The evil spirits that troubled Saul caused him to attempt to murder David on a number of occasions but God always delivered him. Part of this was David's friendship with Saul's son Jonathan, who made a vow to protect David. This was an important event because it showed that the king's son and heir was obedient to God's chosen course for the accession to the throne. God takes pleasure when people are obedient, even when called to make such a great sacrifice!

Eventually David was forced to flee completely from the King's court and was pursued by Saul's army. However, God was with David and protected Him. On two occasions Saul unwittingly came into David's hand. David was able to come into Saul's camp one night and a second time was present with Saul in a cave going to the toilet. However, David did not take the king's life and was content to wait on God's timing to become king.

### **1 Samuel 28, 31:**

Samuel had died by this time in Saul's reign and God had totally turned His face from Saul, so he could not enquire of His counsel on the eve of battle against the Philistines. Instead Saul committed a grave sin in disobedience of the law by consulting with the Witch of Endor, who was a necromancer who communicated with the spirits of the dead. What this person really did was speak with familiar spirits, which are demons familiar with certain people and who impersonate the dead to get the trust of living people. God understandably is strictly against such communication with demons and declared that all such people should be put to death in Israel! Any form of divination or fortune telling was strictly punishable by death! Yet Saul consulted this witch, which demonstrates how far from God he had fallen. The witch herself was very shocked whenever Samuel appeared to them and told Saul that God was so angry now that Saul and his son and army would be annihilated by the Philistines in the forthcoming battle. Following this the Israelite army was massacred on Mount Gilboa with both Saul and Jonathan killed. God's judgement against Saul's disobedience was complete and the kingdom was handed to David.

**2 Samuel** tells the story of David's life as King. It records how he established the central government of Israel in Jerusalem for the first time but an attempt to bring the Ark of the Covenant – the symbol of God's covenant with Israel – into his house had to be abandoned after it was improperly carried on a cart and someone was struck down dead.

David hoped to build a house for the Lord, but God did not allow this because of all the blood that was on David's hands from his warrior life. Instead God promised that he would have a son that would continue to sit on his throne, who would build God's temple in Jerusalem. God's covenant with David was that Israel would be permanently established in the land and no longer be disturbed by the wicked nations. God promised to David's son that He would discipline him but never depart from him, as He had done to Saul. Instead God would establish David's house and throne forever, because it was of David's descendents that Christ would come and sit upon the throne in Jerusalem in the Millennial Kingdom! This covenant was communicated to David through the prophet Nathan.

David was a man after God's own heart but he was just as weak as so many of the other great men in scripture. David's great sin was to commit adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah. She fell pregnant and David, to cover his sin, orchestrated the death of her husband on the front lines of a battle. Nathan the prophet came to David and called him to account for his sin and prophesied that

the conceived child would die and much trouble would befall David's kingdom on account of his sin. After this David was caused much heartbreak by his children. He would later conceive another child with Bathsheba called Solomon, through whom the kingdom would continue and the line of Christ would descend. It is interesting how God's plan for the redemption of the world, would still turn around the sin of David into good.

David would inflame God's anger one last time by conducting a census throughout the nation to see how strong the Israelite army was. This displeased God because David was not trusting Him to protect and win Israel's battles! God gave David 3 choices of discipline: 7 years of famine; 3 months of having to flee from enemy attacks; or 3 days pestilence in Israel. David wisely decided it was better to be dealt with by the Lord's hand than by man, so God sent a great pestilence of the land and also an angel to destroy Jerusalem. David however made a petition to God on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite to spare the angel's sword from falling on Jerusalem. God was merciful and on that place David erected an altar. This is the same place of Mount Moriah where Abraham was called to sacrifice Isaac, and the place where David's son Solomon would build the Temple. It is also the place that Satan seeks to hold onto – the sides of the north, where Christ's throne will sit during the Millennial Kingdom.

David died an old man and his son Solomon took over. He was the wisest man in history and had great wealth. He built the Temple on the threshing floor bought by his father as a place to offer sacrifices to God. It was here that the sacrifice system instituted by God back in Exodus while the Israelites camped around Mount Sinai was to be continued by the priests of the tribe of Levi. However, after Solomon his sons were exceedingly silly and caused such a great division in Israel that it separated into two kingdoms, the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The books of Kings and Chronicles record the history of these kings who on the whole failed to obey God and allowed the people to sin by offering sacrifices to the pagan Gods of the surrounding nations. There were some important reformers who restored God's law to the nation and destroyed the temples and altars of the idols, particularly young King Josiah.

### **1 Kings 17-19, 2 Kings 2:**

During this time of apostasy some notable prophets were raised up by God, in particular Elijah who God used to call the people away from idolatry. He was raised up during the reign of the evil king Ahab and his even more wicked pagan wife Jezebel. He stopped the rain in Israel for 3 years which caused him to have to flee from the armies of Ahab. Eventually he confronted Ahab and the prophets of the idol Baal on Mount Carmel. The prophets of Baal attempted to call down fire upon a sacrifice, but were unable to do so even after an exhaustingly long effort. Elijah however built an altar and made a trench around it, over which large barrels of water were poured until the trench was completely filled and the sacrifice drenched. He then made a simple prayer to God, who sent down fire from Heaven to consume the sacrifice and all the water in the trench. Then all the prophets of Baal were put to death. This infuriated Jezebel who worshipped the idol Baal. She was determined to kill Elijah and forced him to flee to Mount Horeb (Sinah), where he had an amazing encounter with God. God did not appear to him in a great fire, earthquake or strong wind, rather He was a still quiet voice to encourage and guide his next steps. This is a demonstration of how God speaks to us, often not necessarily in great big signs but a simple still voice that comes to us in the quietness of our hearts. We should be open and receptive to listen for God's voice so we know His will and commands for our lives!

After this Elijah commissioned Elisha to aid him in the prophetic ministry and they both have many miracles recorded in the Bible. However, one day Elijah was called by God up into Heaven in a

whirlwind and chariot of fire without ever dying. It is believed that Elijah will bodily return in the future reign of the Antichrist to minister with Enoch (from back in Genesis, so was similarly taken into Heaven alive) to the nation of Israel in the final days.

### **2 Chronicles 33-36:**

However, God's anger was continually stirred up by future bad kings until He decreed judgement against Israel by an invasion of the Assyrian Empire. Then against Judah the Babylonian Empire came and ransacked Jerusalem, taking away many people into captivity. God prophesied through Jeremiah that this captivity would last 70 years, until He honoured His promise through Moses to restore the people to the land. It was during this time of exile that the prophets spoke God's word to Israel. What they had to say will be looked at in lesson 4.

## **Lesson 4 – Exile and Prophecy Concerning the Future of the Plan**

The prophet Jeremiah had received prophecy from God that the nation of Judah was going to be taken into captivity by the Babylonians for seventy years on account of her sin against God. God had previously promised in the Mosaic covenant that if Israel obeyed Him that He would give them possession of the land of Canaan, but otherwise He would use the nations around to judge her, until finally restoring them upon revival and repentance.

The Davidic Covenant had seen God promise that David's throne would be established forever through the coming of the Messiah, who would reign from Jerusalem over all the Earth in fulfilment of the previous Adamic promise at the instance of The Fall. So it was known that God would restore them to the land, it was just a question of waiting during which God told His prophets many details of His future plan for the world and the Messiah. While a substantial number of these have already been fulfilled, there is still a sizeable number that await fulfilment still before the Day of the Lord, an event that will when Christ returns to establish the Millennial Kingdom after vanquishing the Antichrist.

### **Isaiah 53:**

Firstly it's important to look at what the prophets had foretold about the first coming of the Messiah. To the Jewish people His coming was the most important long expected event in history! It was particularly believed that He would restore the nation's sovereignty and independence, which greatly coloured their exile and post-exile interpretations of the scriptures concerning the Messiah.

Mathematicians have taken the 100+ prophecies concerning the Messiah and worked out that it is an impossibility that any one man could have fulfilled them all – the number is greater than the total number of atoms believed to exist in the universe! Yet the Bible in the New Testament records that Jesus Christ fulfilled each of the prophecies concerning His birth, life, death and resurrection.

One of the most striking prophecies concerning the Messiah is found in this passage of scripture and it alone has been singled out because it continues the great theme of the Adamic promise of salvation coming into the world. Interestingly enough if you were to read this passage to a Jew today, they may well accuse you of merely spouting Christian writings, but rather this was written by their own prophets under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They would accuse it of being written by Christians because it so accurately describes the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross at Calvary, and it describes how the salvation of the world would be purchased by the incredible death and suffering of Christ on the Cross as God's judgement was poured out on Him for the sin of the world! Such is the undeniable fulfilment by Christ of this prophecy that readings of the Torah in Jewish synagogues have removed this passage from public reading, because the only conclusion from this is that the Messiah has already come and they missed Him! This is not the only passage that the Jewish religious authorities have worked to prevent connections being made with Christ based on prophecies, as will soon be seen when looking at Daniel's 70 Weeks Prophecy.

One thing should be noticed here though is that Christ's death on the Cross was part of God's plan all along – it is not that He came to Israel and then the plan went wrong with them rejecting Him. Rather His rejection was always part of God's plan and His death a requirement for the sins of the world to be dealt with once and forever. God's plan still involves Israel coming into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, despite their initial rejection. Indeed the entire plan for world history seems to focus in the end upon God restoring Israel to obedience and worship of Him and His Son Jesus Christ.

## **Daniel 2:**

The prophet Daniel was a young man taken into captivity in Babylon after the invasion of Judah following the wickedness of her kings. To Daniel was revealed incredible prophecies which are some of the most spectacular and relevant to us today, because their fulfilment is imminent. Daniel was chosen out of the captives for being one of the most intelligent. His real recognition comes when He was able to interpret the King's strange dream one day. The King had sent out a decree that all the prophets and magicians in the kingdom should be put to death because they couldn't tell him what his dream was, and then interpret it. However, Daniel stopped his massacre by going before the King and informing him that just as God gave the dream that He would provide the information and interpretation. Daniel then amazed the king by exactly recounting a dream about a large statue, which represented the 5 great human empires of history. It is interesting to note that man sees such things as being a great symbol of power and respect, in the form of a statue (God sees things very differently later in Daniel where these same empires are depicted as wild beasts!). The five different parts of the statute represented five kingdoms: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome and finally some reincarnation of Rome with the same material representing Rome being mixed together with clay. Then a great stone cut out without hands is thrown at the base of the statue causing it to be destroyed. This represents the Millennial Kingdom of God which will destroy the existing world empire at the time of the Second Coming and instead have Christ as ruler from Jerusalem.

This dream demonstrates God's great plan for His kingdom on Earth, and also shows where it fits into world history. The 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> chapters of Daniel provide much more information on the final world empire which is destroyed by the coming of the Kingdom, but it will not be gone into detail here. However, this will be the kingdom of the Antichrist who Daniel also foretells in his book.

## **Daniel 3 and 6:**

Two interesting stories of faith in Babylon are in firstly the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace; and secondly Daniel in the lion's den. They both demonstrate how God will protect His people against the wicked plots of the enemy and will bless them for obedience even in the face of contrary laws. It is a challenge to everyone to be like these characters in these stories in standing up for God and worshipping Him alone, rather than compromising with the world. Notice how these characters also publicly stood up for God, even though it meant certain death: that is the sort of people God wants!

## **Daniel 9:**

Daniel here petitions God to forgive Israel for its sin and restore His favour to them, allowing them to return to the land, as prophesied by Jeremiah. While we often don't think about God sending a real answer to prayer in the form of an angel, this is what happened to Daniel when the angel Gabriel appeared to him. Gabriel has brought two of the most significant prophecies to humanity, here he brought the 70 weeks prophecy which declares God's plan for dealing with Israel and bringing salvation to them and the whole world, while he later appears to Mary and declares the virgin conception of Jesus Christ to bring that redemption to the world.

The word in Hebrew for "week" simply means a set of seven, so this prophecy does not mean that in a literal 70 weeks God will accomplish His plan and usher in His Kingdom. Rather it means in 70 sets of 7 years He will accomplish this end. The following break down of the prophecy has been verified by both Jewish and Christian research as being accurate with recorded history, which makes it incredible! As with Isaiah 53, such are the implications of this prophecy that a curse was

pronounced in the Torah by later Rabbi's against anyone who attempted to calculate the dates from the 70 Weeks Prophecy to determine when the Messiah would come.

Gabriel told Daniel that 490 years (70 sets of 7 years) had been declared for Israel and Jerusalem, to end sin, to bring in redemption, and to fulfil all of God's prophecies. God had quite the ambitious deadline! The countdown to this all happening would commence at the issuing of the decree of Artaxerxes to rebuild Jerusalem, which was prompted by Nehemiah who went on to rebuild the walls surrounding the city and sanctuary. From this event until the coming of the Messiah there would be 7 and 62 weeks (or 483 years). After 49 years (7 weeks) the public places in Jerusalem would be fully reconstructed by the workers who left Babylon, and after that there would be another 434 years until the Messiah came. After this time He would be cut off and killed, while the Temple and city would be destroyed by "the people of the prince who is to come". (See the appendix at the end of this section which sets out a timeline for the 70 weeks prophecy and shows its fulfillment because it can be very confusing just to read this!)

We need to stop here because there is a major problem here! Jesus died around AD30 however the Romans did not come to destroy the Temple and ransack Jerusalem until AD70 and didn't totally drive the Jews out of the region of Israel in the great Diaspora until many decades after even this event. Clearly there is a problem when the prophecy says there is only meant to be 7 more years left after the Messiah is killed until God's prophetic plan is completed, but history shows that it would be around 40 years between Christ's death and the destruction of the Temple as prophesied here. Up until this point people have shown that the prophecy is accurate to the extent that the numbers and dates it proposes based on historical records match up with the Passover when Christ was put to death on the Cross, as the lamb whose blood would save Israel and the entire world of its sin. The reason for this is that God had stopped temporarily dealing with Israel and instead turned His attention to fulfilling the second part of the Abrahamic covenant of blessing the whole world through the seed of Eve – God was going to bring salvation to the Gentiles too! His great plan for humanity would not be complete until the Gospel message was preached in the entire world to the Gentiles, only then would He resume His plan with Israel and cause them to accept Christ and salvation through His death and resurrection alone rather than through the continued Temple sacrifice system.

Let us return to that strange phrase "the people of the prince who is to come", this character – in short – is the Antichrist whose kingdom will be the final one before Christ's Second Coming with the Millennial Kingdom. The rest of the 70 weeks prophecy concerns this man and what He will do concerning Israel. In the final 7 years He will make an alliance with Israel but after three and a half years will break it by setting up an idol in the Temple and initiating the greatest holocaust against the Jews ever known. His aim is to accomplish Satan's plan of preventing the Lord's return. It is declared in the Psalms that the Lord will not return until Israel says "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord", and if Satan can destroy the Jews then that will never happen. Jesus Himself will deal with this man of Satan! In this one verse at the end of this chapter we get a picture of what is still to happen in our world. The book of Revelation at the end of the New Testament goes into significantly more detail on the Antichrist and what He will do in the final 7 years of human history, so an understanding of Daniel is fundamental to even attempting to understand Revelation. Indeed Jesus Christ Himself pointed back to this very passage in Daniel when His disciples enquired of when the Kingdom would come, so we should follow His direction!

So after this happens Israel will be incorporated into the Church – the body of believers in Jesus Christ in which there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile. The reason why Israel is still

important today is that God has outstanding promises to them that must be fulfilled, and the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel's prophecy has not yet been fulfilled. God's plan for Israel is incomplete but His word quite clearly says that He will faithfully complete it – and it increasingly appears that it will happen in our life times, but for details on this you must wait until lesson 5 when we consider what Jesus said about these times.

### **Ezekiel 37-39:**

Until that particular study it is important to see that God has a plan for Israel still today. It has already been explained in lesson 3 that Jeremiah and Isaiah talked about Israel being restored as a nation in a single day, which happened in 1948. Well concerning this rebirth the prophet Ezekiel also wrote, describing this event as a valley of dry bones receiving flesh again and becoming alive again. The dead dry land of Israel was barren until the Jewish aliyah began and they cultivated the land, and since then the desert has bloomed – the dead land has become alive again just as prophesied!

The rebirth of Israel is crucial to the fulfilment of Daniels' prophecy and even Jesus notes this, as will be seen later.

Ezekiel then goes onto describe how this latter day nation of Israel will be attacked by the nations of Russia and Iran among other Islamic nations today. This is an event we still await to see happen today and will happen when Israel is in a time of supposed peace, so it can let down its defences and live in unwallled villages. Such will be the force of the attack that the tiny nation stands no chance of survival, so God must intervene to maintain His covenant promises. He will utterly destroy the attackers and cause His name to be feared and glorified in the world and Israel. It is my belief that such a deliverance by God's hand could be what causes a secular Israel today to rediscover the worship of God and recommence the Temple sacrifice, which is needed for the 70<sup>th</sup> week to be fulfilled.

So quite clearly it can be seen that God's plan for Israel does not end in the Old Testament as many people would today believe. Rather our faithful God will fulfil His words and promises to Israel to the very letter recorded in scripture.

We will now move onto the New Testament with the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ and consummation of the Adamic promise, in lesson 5.

**Appendix to Lesson 4 - Timeline of Biblical Contextual and Prophetic History**

<b><u>Dates</u></b>	<b><u>Historical Events</u></b>	<b><u>Major Prophetic Events</u></b>
930BC	Division of kingdoms into Northern kingdom of Israel and Southern kingdom of Judah	
740BC		Isaiah begins prophetic ministry
722BC	Israel captured by Sargon II of Assyria	
701BC	Sennacherib of Assyria surrounds Jerusalem (Judah ruled by Hezekiah) and defeated by divine intervention	
696BC	Manasseh becomes king of Judah and is very wicked by reinstating idol worship	
680BC		Isaiah executed by King Manasseh by being sawn in 2 inside a log
627BC		Jeremiah begins his prophetic ministry
609BC	King Josiah killed by Egyptian king Neco (allied to Assyria)	
609BC	King Jehohaz taken to Egypt after ruling 3 months; King Jehoiakim ruled as Egyptian vassal	
605BC	King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon defeats Egypt and invades Judah; King Jehoiakim rejects Jeremiah's warning about siding with Egypt	Beginning of captivity prophesied by Jeremiah, which was to last 70 years; Daniel taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar
597BC	Nebuchadnezzar captures Jerusalem and sets up King Zedekiah as puppet ruler	
592BC		Ezekiel begins prophetic ministry while in captivity in Babylon
586BC	Nebuchadnezzar again besieges and then occupies Jerusalem due to King Zedekiah's rebellion against him; the Temple is ransacked and the walls are destroyed, with a mass deportation of the inhabitants.	Jeremiah is taken to Egypt by surviving Jews, where he dies
538BC	Cyrus defeats Babylon and issues an edict allowing the return of the Jews.	Cyrus's victory was exactly prophesied by Isaiah 200 years before; Daniel receives 70 weeks prophecy*
536BC	50,000 Jews return to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple after Cyrus returns the articles stolen by Nebuchadnezzar (but the work stops after 1 year). Daniel dies.	Completion of 70 years of captivity, as prophesied by Jeremiah. Return prophesied by Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel
515BC	Temple reconstruction completed	
464BC	King Artaxerxes takes the Persian throne	
458BC	Artaxerxes allows Ezra the priest to return with more people to Jerusalem to revive the spiritual condition of the city	
444BC	Artaxerxes grants Nehemiah's petition to allow the rebuilding of Jerusalem and issues the decree	Commencement of 70 weeks prophecy*

443BC	Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem and has the walls rebuilt	
396BC	Jerusalem's walls, moat and plaza rebuilt	Completion of 7 <sup>th</sup> week of Daniel's Prophecy fulfilled*
333BC	Alexander the Great, leader of Grecian Empire, invaded Israel but allowed the Jews to continue Temple worship	
323BC	Alexander dies and his Empire is divided between his 4 generals	This 4 way division was prophesied by Daniel over 100 years previously
320BC	Alexander's General Ptolemy I seized control of Jerusalem, having already controlled Egypt	
198BC	Antiochus III of Syria (General Seleucus founded kingdom of Syria/Seleucid on ruins of Alexander's Empire) defeats Egypt to take control of Israel	
167BC	Antiochus IV Epiphanes attacks Jerusalem and the defiles the Temple	Abomination in the Temple prophesied by Daniel almost over 350 years before
164BC	Jews retake Jerusalem and cleanse the Temple under Judas Maccabees	
63BC	Jerusalem conquered by Rome under General Pompey	Prophesied by Daniel
~4BC	Jesus Christ born in Bethlehem	Prophesied by Isaiah
33AD	Jesus Christ Crucified in Jerusalem	Prophesied by Isaiah and Daniel. Completion of the 69 <sup>th</sup> week of Daniel's Prophecy*, with its suspension to allow for the destruction of the Temple and conversion of the Gentiles during the Church Age
70AD	Jerusalem invaded and Temple destroyed by Rome under General Titus	Prophesied by Daniel 500 years before and Jesus 40 years before
1948AD	Israel reborn as a nation in a single day	Prophesied by Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Jesus – demonstrated the beginning of the Final Days before the 70 <sup>th</sup> Week commences

\* A very important point to grasp about the 70 Weeks Prophecy is that it is given to Daniel, a Jew, who observed the Jewish lunar calendar (not our Gregorian solar calendar!).

The Jewish year is 360 days long (not our 365.242 days – remembering the .242 is why we have a leap year every 4 years!) so when calculating the dates of the 70 weeks prophecy's fulfillment some mathematical calculation is needed to convert the dates! Since there would be 69 weeks (7 weeks + 62 weeks) between Artaxerxes decree and the Messiah being cut off there were 173,880 days (483 years multiplied by 360 days in Jewish calendar). Divide 173,880 by 365 to convert to the number of years in the Gregorian calendar giving ~476.07 years; when taken from 444BC goes to 33AD.

We know from history that Artaxerxes made his decree in early March so our calculation would place the end of the 69<sup>th</sup> week at the end of March/beginning of April in 33AD. This is also the time of Passover in the Jewish calendar, which you will recall is when Jesus was crucified. Therefore to virtually the exact day Daniel's prophecy predicted the crucifixion!

## **Lesson 5 – The First Coming of the Messiah and the Consummation of the Plan**

### **Luke 1-4:**

There are two births dealt with here: firstly the birth of John the Baptist, who was a relative of the second child Jesus Christ. Both children were born by the miraculous intervention of God, which shows their importance (although one far more significant than the other!), and this was heralded by the angel Gabriel's appearance to the parents of the children. Also interestingly enough the two families involved were closely related. John the Baptist would be used by God to go ahead of Christ in ministry to declare the need of the people to repent of their sins. He would baptise them in water as a symbol of their repentance and washing away of their sins, however he made clear that he was only the forerunner for the real character of importance who would save them of their sins and baptise them in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ, on the other hand was no mere man: He was God incarnate! If you remember since we are all descended of ultimately Adam then we have received the problem of sin transmitted down through the generations. We are conceived and born in iniquity because of the original sin committed in the Garden of Eden. Had Jesus been born of Joseph and Mary coming together to have a child naturally then He would have inherited the sin nature of His father Adam. However, by God supernaturally conceiving a child in the womb of a virgin He was born entirely sinless. He was, as the Apostle Paul would later say, the second Adam. He was created by God and had the free will – unencumbered by a natural default predisposition to sin that we have today – to choose to obey God or not. Only a sinless innocent lamb of God could atone for the sins of the world and be the sacrifice to take away the curse of death brought by sin – Jesus Christ was that innocent lamb.

He was the promised one in Eden, He was the heir of the throne of David, and the one who was prophesied to establish His kingdom in Jerusalem after the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel was completed. He was here to deal with sin and defeat Satan – however he was not going to make this an easy task! Even as the Lord Jesus lay in a humble stable in Bethlehem – as prophesied – Satan stirred up wicked King Herod to commit a massacre in the town to prevent any threat to his throne.

Even at a young age Jesus was noticed by many people. Both Simeon and Anna marvelled that the promised Christ had come, as it had been promised to them that they would see Him before they died. Then when He was older Jesus was to be found in the Temple teaching people.

John the Baptist's ministry of preaching repentance continued at this time and even Jesus came to be baptised. As He was raised out of the water the Holy Spirit descended upon Him and the voice of God the Father spoke audibly from Heaven – this is one of the few moments we see the relationship of the three aspects of the Triune God in operation simultaneously. This was the moment that Christ's public ministry was to begin and the Holy Spirit came in power upon Him. He was then taken out into the Wilderness for 40 days of fasting and tempting by Satan. Unlike the first Adam, Christ – the second Adam – did not fall when tempted. Satan was determined to do two things, He firstly wanted to cause Jesus to sin, which would completely prevent salvation ever coming into the world. He also determined to tempt Jesus to avoid the Cross. Jesus was God, and He knew in His omnipotence what was ahead of Him in life and what He would suffer for the world's sin! Satan, as ruler of this world had the authority to offer all the kingdoms to Christ, who would then escape the need to suffer the death on the Cross. However, Jesus knew that only His death could bring about redemption for mankind, and He also knew that God's plan ultimately was

more important than escaping the suffering of the Cross. So He continued to resist every single temptation of Satan, and always corrected Satan's abuse of the scriptures when he quoted out of context. So having resisted Satan and proving Himself to be obedient to the will of God the Father, Christ left the wilderness and began public ministry.

This public ministry about the truth of God was complimented by an incredible display of signs and wonders wherever He went. He had power to heal, to cast out demons which had possessed people (which shows His authority as God over the demonic fallen angels, who only several occasions showed their fear and knowledge of who Christ really was!), and to feed vast multitudes of people with only the scarcest amount of food. His power extended to control over the elements through calming storms on the sea and walking on water. By these things He demonstrated that He was no mere prophet and He did not claim to be a mere prophet; He confessed that He and God the Father were one. The conclusion can only be one of the following:

- 1) Jesus was mad
- 2) Jesus was a liar
- 3) Or Jesus Christ was the Son of the Living God made flesh and walking among us!

This is the decision that every person who hears the Gospel must make, will they place their trust and belief in Christ as the promised Messiah? You cannot just accept that He was a good and wise teacher, because He did more than just give good teachings! He proclaimed that there was only one way to go to Heaven and it was through Himself as God the Son and His blood which would atone for the world's sin.

Jesus had many followers but He chose 12 men to be His disciples into whom He would pour His life and teaching. Out of these He would choose 3 to particularly work with. They would accompany Him on His life in public ministry and see things we cannot even begin to imagine, indeed John in His gospel says that if all things were written down then it would be impossible to fit them into the world – he was not being literal but making the point that Jesus did an incredible amount of incredible things during His earthly ministry. From these disciples Jesus would organise the creation of the church – the body of believers. He gave them power in their ministry so that they could work miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit, and these things would continue to abound in their ministry for Christ after His death, resurrection and ascension.

It is crucial to undertake a personal study of Christ's life and teaching because this was God in the form of man showing us how we were to live. If we have received the gift of salvation then we are meant to be striving to be more Christ like – not because in doing so we will be saved, but rather that because we have been saved that we seek to worship and glorify God through our living and He's shown us how to do that through His Son. No we are not perfect and will never be able to walk perfectly and innocently as Christ did, but that is not an excuse for us not to work hard, relying on the power and inworking of the Holy Spirit, to live lives which reflect the pattern set by Christ. Jesus also did not come to abolish the Old Testament law, rather He came to fulfil it to the very letter. His teachings indeed patterned the original division of the 10 commandments into those concerning man's relationship with God and man's relationship with one another. All the law depended on mankind loving God with all their heart, mind and soul, and loving their neighbour as themselves. Jesus commanded that this was the proper way to live! He taught the need for repentance from sin, and for forgiveness among so many other things. Entire books have been written on Christ's life and even they will not have done justice to everything about Him, so this lesson will not attempt to do it either. Rather you are encouraged to undertake a study of these things Himself. Jesus said: if you love me, keep my commandments. You can't even begin to do that unless you learn what those commands are!

Throughout His ministry Christ came up against the religious authorities of the time: the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Often they vigorously opposed what He did and hated how popular He was becoming. They were on the whole hypocrites who were only interested in self-servingly glorifying themselves at the expense of others; Jesus referred to them as white washed tombs because while they appeared good on the outside, inside there was just death and decay! They would challenge Him many times and each time be surprised by the compelling answers Christ would give them. These men knew the scriptures and prophecies about the Messiah so well, but yet they couldn't see Him standing there in front of them. Indeed they would become part of the fulfilment of the prophecies concerning His death, because they plotted to bring Him to death upon His final visit to Jerusalem preceding Passover Week.

### **Luke 21:**

During this visit to Jerusalem He prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, which would occur in AD70. His disciples were interested in learning when the kingdom of God would come to Earth and the fulfilment of all things happen, as the Old Testament prophets had foretold. Jesus gave them a number of generic signs of what would happen in the days before the coming of the kingdom. He also referred back to the 70 weeks prophecy of Daniel in describing the event in the middle of the week called the Abomination of Desolation where the coming Antichrist of the people who would destroy Jerusalem, would set up an idol within the future rebuilt Temple. The people being addressed here were the Jews in Israel, because they would definitely be present on Earth during the 70<sup>th</sup> week to see the Abomination of Desolation (as will later be discussed, the church may arguably not be here for that event). Jesus then continued in teaching that the defining sign in amongst so many other generic signs which have been present throughout history was the image of the fig tree bearing leaves. The fig tree throughout Christ's ministry was a symbol for the nation of Israel, and Christ had already said that there would be great trouble ahead in the near future with the destruction of Jerusalem. So clearly here He was speaking of the regathering of Israel, again according to the promise to Moses, in the end times which we now live in. This is why the day of the rebirth of Israel in 1948 is so important, because Jesus Christ, the Son of God, said this was the defining event which marked us moving into the final stage before the kingdom came to Earth.

It is quite clear in God's plan as revealed through the prophets and articulated by Jesus that the nation of Israel is still important because of the unfilled promises to be fulfilled through Israel, not least the final week of Daniel's prophecy. Jesus merely built upon the foundations laid in the Old Testament in teaching these things, yet so many people today dismiss the very clear theme throughout scripture concerning God's plan for Israel. Yes we have already said that God has stopped working with Israel at this time to work through the church, but before He returns the nation of Israel will be again the major prophetic character. Today we see this happening right in front of us in newspapers and on the news every single day. It is only a matter of time until the Lord commences the 70<sup>th</sup> week by allowing the Antichrist to rise into power and form the agreement with Israel that was foretold by Daniel. Without an understanding of these prophecies and the words of Jesus it is not possible to attempt to understand the final book of the Bible Revelation, which acts as a capstone to complete the story of God's plan for the world and Israel, which will by that time have been brought into the New Covenant which Christ brought about by dying on the Cross.

### **Luke 22-24:**

It is that event to which we now turn. All the old testament prophecies we have looked at in Isaiah 53 were fulfilled as Christ went disgraced but humbly and quietly to His death on the Cross.

Despite all the lying accusations against Him, He did not try to defend Himself, rather He surrendered Himself to God's will. He prayed so fervently in the Garden of Gethsemane that he sweated blood and despite asking God if there was any other way His plan could be accomplished that He would willingly submit to God's will and plan for redemption – even at the cost of His life!

He died, not at the hands of men but instead gave up His spirit to God. He did not merely faint or something else ridiculous: the Roman soldier who thrust the spear into His side showed that His heart had stopped working to mix water and blood, for they flowed freely and separately from the wound. He was taken away to be buried and then 3 days later – remembering that the Jewish way of looking at a day was that it began in the evening, so looking at it in that way the prophecy about being in the grave 3 days was fulfilled, it just wasn't 3 days as in 72 hours. Jesus descended into the world of the dead and defeated the power of death by rising from the dead. He had defeated sin because by His innocent blood He became the lamb sacrifice which took away the sins of the world! He demonstrated that He truly was God by His overcoming death. The Apostle Paul makes clear later that unless Christ is risen then our faith as Christians is in vain because we are still in our sin and under the curse of death. However, because we know that Christ is risen we have full confidence in our salvation and that we have eternal life now!

How do we know that Christ arose from the grave? Well not even all the disciples believed until they physically saw Him and until they saw the nail prints in His hands and the wound in His side. It has been said that the only man made thing in Heaven are those wounds He suffered on the Cross for our sakes! Jesus not only appeared to the disciples but also before great numbers of people in public, many of whom had been in Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover and watched Him be crucified. This is why the early Church was strong, because people saw with their own eyes that Jesus Christ truly was raised again from the dead, something only someone claiming to be the Son of God could actually do! The Pharisees and Romans could never produce a body to discount the resurrection, and they would have if they could. The simple fact is that that body was brought back to life and today resides in Heaven.

After 40 days of ministry here on Earth Jesus went up the Mount of Olives where He ascended back into Heaven. An angel then appeared telling the disciples that He would return to this same spot in His Second Coming. Christ left His disciples with the simple command that it was their job to go into all the world and preach the gospel, telling of peoples' need for repentance through sin and the gift of salvation purchased by Christ on the Cross which would be freely given to all who believed and called upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus promised that when He returned to the Father that He would send the Holy Spirit to indwell the believers so they would constantly be filled with God's almighty power to continue the ministry He had begun. Also the working of the Holy Spirit would transform them into the likeness of Christ and make them more holy in their lives – this is something that man could not achieve on his own by attempting to follow the law as before! This is then how the early church began and we will be looking a little more at this in the final lesson 6.

Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, through Him all things were created in the beginning and by His blood the price for sin was paid and the ransom of Satan was paid. Satan's power was broken, His defeat was now secured, it was merely a waiting upon God's timing to bring about the end of all things and usher in His millennial kingdom and then the final judgement which would imprison Satan in Hell for eternity. The long awaited promise given to Adam and Eve was assured!

Let there be no mistake: Jesus Christ said that He was the only way to receive eternal life! Man

could not earn his salvation, and man cannot get there by doing anything other than receiving the gift of salvation as bought by Christ's blood! In a post-modern age, we constantly are under pressure to concede this ground and say that everyone is right and all ways lead to God somehow. However, this is not what Jesus taught and since He was God, as evidenced throughout His ministry and in His bodily resurrection, and as creator He knew what the real truth of the matter is. Everyone must make a decision to follow Him, or receive just punishment for their sin which has not been forgiven because they have not received the gift of salvation into their lives. This punishment is eternal separation from God and torment in the Lake of Fire for eternity with Satan and the demons. There is one way and only way, one door and only one, I'm on the inside but which side are you? If you die today you should know where you're going and if there's any doubt then you need to get yourself sorted with God!

## **Lesson 6 – The Church and the Second Coming**

We now come to the end of this study through the whole of scripture and have seen the major themes running throughout it involve God's plan for redemption of the world through the Messiah, who would come of the nation of Israel. God's promises to Israel are everlasting but following the crucifixion when the Jews rejected Christ and the kingdom God's plan involving Israel was put on pause. Instead God concentrated on the evangelism of the Gentiles throughout the rest of the world through the new church, comprised of the 11 disciples and all those who had believed in Jesus following His resurrection. The Apostle Paul, who we will soon learn about, writes in Romans 11 that while God has stopped working with Israel for now, that He has not written them out of His plan indeed as we have already seen the Old Testament prophecies and promises are clear that God is going to bring Israel into a relationship with Jesus Christ as Messiah, it is just a question of when. As already shown, Jesus said the timing would be near when Israel was reborn as a nation and this event has already happened today, in which case the day of reconciliation between God and Israel is near indeed!

### **Acts 1-9:**

The early church were rather timid and afraid of the religious authorities in Jerusalem, yet they were told to remain and wait for the Holy Spirit to come and empower them for their ministry in the name of the newly ascended Christ. On the day of Pentecost the power of the Holy Spirit descended upon the church and they went out into the streets speaking in tongues, which meant that the Holy Spirit was speaking through in them different languages which they did not know in their own minds. Through this all the different people who were in Jerusalem from the surrounding nations heard the gospel and through Peter's teaching under the power of the Holy Spirit around 3000 people were saved that day! Literally the church exploded in Jerusalem and those empowered by the Holy Spirit were able to perform miracles to compliment their ministry about Jesus, just as He had done too.

This brought the church to the attention of the religious authorities who were very angry to hear that Jesus was still being preached, even after they thought they had successfully got rid of Him. They began a campaign of persecution against the church but it continued to grow and the people rejoiced when they received punishment for teaching the gospel because it was their joy to suffer in the cause of the gospel. They continued to teach even in the face of even severer penalties. There was division within the religious authorities on how to deal with this problem, with those who wanted to silence the church and those who believed that they would just die out of their own accord. Wisely Gamaliel said that if they were like many of those who had come previously claiming to be the way then they would die out shortly, while if they really were acting on God's will then the religious authorities should be careful lest they be working against God.

The persecution continued and after a fierce confrontation with the apostle Stephen the Jews stoned him to death, making him the first Christian martyr to die for the cause of the gospel. They were greatly angered by his challenge that the people were rebellious and had for a very long time rejected God's words through the prophets, through the Messiah Himself and now through His church. Watching the death of Stephen was the Pharisee Saul who then launched into a viscous campaign of persecution against the church in Jerusalem forcing many of them to flee, and then he sought to imprison the church in Damascus. However, on the road to the city a light from Heaven shone all around him and he saw Jesus Christ who asked him why Saul was persecuting Him – for the church is the body of Christ on Earth. After this encounter Saul was blinded and had to take refuge in Damascus until a man of God, Ananias, came to speak to him concerning the way of

Christ. God removed Saul's blindness and he then was saved and to show his conversion changed his name to Paul. God commissioned Paul to be His witness to the Gentile nations and he arguably is the greatest missionary in the Christian faith, although in the subsequent centuries there have been many equally great men of God who have sought to bring the gospel to the world.

Saul's conversion shows that God can change even the hardest heart against Him and use them then to do tremendous works for His glory! This merely continues the pattern of so many of the great men of scripture who have been profoundly human and sinful, yet used so much for God's kingdom and glory. The spread of Christianity and the growth of the church outside of Jerusalem was largely as a result of God's work through Paul and other such missionaries. The Jewish believers did not quite understand the place of the Gentiles in the church, but God revealed that since the coming of the New Covenant in Christ's blood there was no distinction between Jew and Gentile within the church. There was no need for Gentiles to be circumcised and subject to the law, other than that articulated by Christ, because no longer was there ceremonial uncleanness. This was all revealed to Peter in a dream, and he was kept as the main evangelist to the Jews within Israel at the time. Over time all but one of the disciples who had walked with Jesus, and including Paul who had met Christ subsequently on the road to Damascus, were martyred for their faith. It was only John who lived on to die an old man and through Him God revealed the final chapter of God's plan for history, which really was only an expansion and detail adding exercise based upon the prophecies already contained in the Old Testament and things revealed through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament writings of the apostles.

### **Hebrews 11:**

This is a wonderful chapter of scripture on faith which revises many of the Old Testament characters who displayed faith in God. It is something worth looking over and most the stories in it have been studied throughout these lessons. It is good to remember that God has shown His faithfulness to us for all time and so we can totally trust and rely on Him today.

Due to His faithfulness we can then turn to consider the last portion of history which is yet to be fulfilled, but we live in the faith and confidence that our faithful God will fulfil it exactly as He has revealed in the scriptures!

### **Revelation:**

Many people seem to be fascinated with the end of the world but this phrase in itself is not correct. The end of the world, is actually the beginning of all things. You see when Christ returns to usher in the Millennial Kingdom He will crush the kingdom of Satan on Earth and usher in justice. He will destroy sin forever and there shall be the New Heaven and Earth, recreated in the perfect paradise they were intended to be in the beginning before the Fall! This is what eternity is, life forever without death or end in this paradise which God originally created and always intended for us to enjoy Him in. C.S. Lewis describes it as this world being only the cover page of a never ending story, where the next page is always greater than what has come before it. It is something to be looked forward to, not feared, unless of course you have a reason to fear Jesus Christ and what He will say to you when He comes, for He will judge all those whose names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life and have not received the free gift of salvation He has offered and advertised to the world through the ministry of the church.

It is pointless to attempt to read and understand Revelation without a basic understanding of the prophetic plan of God throughout all of history and revealed in the scriptures, and we have

endeavoured to cover the major points and themes of that plan. Revelation is the last chapter of a book containing 65 previous chapters, if you don't understand Revelation it's probably because you don't know what is contained in the rest of the book! Many people say that we needn't worry about Revelation at all, but that is not what the Word itself says because it promises a blessing to all who read and understand the words of prophecy contained in it! Yes the Lord has tarried so far, as revealed in Peter's epistles, so that more might be saved but a knowledge and understanding of the end of things is just as important as understanding the beginning, and indeed more relevant because it should compel us to be busy about the work of spreading the gospel in the short time we have left until the Day of the Lord.

### **Chapters 1-3**

We have already looked at how God has temporarily stopped working with Israel for the last 2000 years while using the church to reach the world with the gospel message. However, He still intends to have the Jews accept the gospel too! The book of Revelation begins with John writing to 7 churches which are believed to represent the 7 different periods of the church age which has occupied the dispensation of grace these last 2000 years. The final church is that of Laodicea which was a weak and lukewarm church, which had compromised on scriptural truth and lacked love. This is the final age of the church which we are now living through and many other of the New Testament prophecies confirm that in these days the church will fall away from the solid truth contained in scripture and become lukewarm. God says that He will deal with Laodicea by bringing her through the fire that is to come, so that she is purified like silver. This process involves putting the impure metal into a blazing fire to burn off the impurities leaving the pure silver to be collected – not a pleasant or easy experience at all but necessary in God's eyes to deal with this liberal, lukewarm generation!

Immediately after this John is called up into Heaven in an event that many refer to as the Rapture, which it is believed based upon reading many scriptures, including the book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians, will be God taking His church out of the world to avoid the wrath He is about to pour out on it for its sin. It is believed that since during this time He will be returning His focus to the restoration of Israel and its conversion into a saving knowledge of Christ that He will take the church out of the way. While highly debated, I find myself in the camp of believing that God will remove the church from the Earth for the 7 years of the Tribulation (the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel, or also called the Time of Jacob's trouble in other prophecies) that will ensue with the rise of the Antichrist into power and his covenant with Israel which mark the beginning of this period until the return of Christ to the Mount of Olives in the Second Coming. Regardless of Rapture timing, the process is the same that Elijah and Enoch experienced as they were caught up into the air and translated into Heaven. We who experience the Rapture will not die but instead will be caught up into the air and in an instance transformed from this carnal sinful body into an eternal, imperishable new body and so we will go to be with the Lord forever. Those left on Earth will be subject to God's judgement, during a time which Jesus said would need to be cut short by God lest no flesh survive it. It is the last chance that humanity has to accept or reject Christ, and it will be marked by the reign of the Antichrist.

### **Revelation 11:**

This is a character we have pointed ahead to throughout these studies because scripture throughout foreshadows this character at the end of time who will be Satan's puppet to lead the final deception of the world. He will establish a world government founded upon a single world economy and religion. During the first 3.5 years that he makes the agreement with Israel, which the prophet Daniel foretold, Elijah and Enoch will be returned to Earth by God for ministry in Israel. They will preach repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and to aid them 144,000 Jews will become evangelists

for the same cause of seeing Israel and the world converted to Christ. This begs the question of why they would be needed if the church was present during this time. This commissioning demonstrates God's plan for Israel continuing to bring about the promised ends set out by Gabriel in the 70 Weeks prophecy and the various covenants made with Israel throughout history. Many believe that Israel will accept the Antichrist as their long awaited Messiah, particularly if he is the one who initiates the rebuilding of the Temple on Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

### **Revelation 12-13:**

Yet after 3.5 years of seeming peace with the Antichrist, he will turn against Israel. If you recall Satan has had access to the throne of God to accuse the saints ever since his fall. However, at this time a war shall break out in Heaven which will see Satan permanently barred from access to the throne and presence of God. He will be cast down onto Earth where he then knows his time and defeat are imminent, it then becomes his priority to thwart the final fulfillments of prophecy by destroying the nation of Israel. This is because Christ cannot return until Israel repents, receives and declares: "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord". Through the Antichrist, Satan will initiate a holocaust against the Jews in Israel which the Old Testament prophets seem to indicate will destroy all but a third of the nation. At the same time, those who have been saved during the Tribulation will also become the subjects of terrible persecution and martyrdom.

Like God showed His covenant with Israel through the rite of circumcision, the Antichrist will require that all men and women receive the Mark of the Beast (the Beast being the name for the Antichrist in Revelation) on their right hands and foreheads as a symbol of their Satanic covenant. Those who receive the Mark will be beyond the power of redemption for they will have voluntarily turned their backs totally on God and their destiny at that moment will be eternal punishment in the Lake of Fire. How could people make such a mistake? Well the False Prophet who will aide the Antichrist is going to be able to perform counterfeit miracles by the power of Satan, which will rival those performed by Elijah on Mount Carmel by calling down fire from Heaven, and a great deception will fall on those on the Earth. Those who refuse to receive the Mark will be prevented from partaking in the world economy of the Antichrist and will also be put to death by decapitation, as indicated in some of the later visions of John in Heaven. This war against the church and Israel will continue until the Second Coming when Christ must intervene to save the day and vanquish the Antichrist.

### **Revelation 6, 8, 9, 16:**

Throughout this time, however, things will not have been going well in the world generally. God will have been executing judgement on the world for its unbelief and demonstrating His almighty power through a series of 7 Scroll and 7 Trumpet judgements. After the Abomination of Desolation when the Antichrist will break the covenant with Israel and commence the final war against the church and Israel, God will pour out even more severe judgement on the world, and those who have received the Mark of the Beast will suffer even greater during these times. All this is God pleading with mankind to repent but many hearts will remain hard against Him and enter the covenant with Satan.

### **Revelation 19-20:**

As the 70<sup>th</sup> week draws to a close and the Antichrist's reign strengthens and the persecution against Israel and the church continues Christ will return in the Second Coming. Satan will have gathered the nations of the world together to a place called Armageddon, which in Hebrew simply means Mount Megiddo in the Valley of Jezreel on the plains of Esdraelon. This is one of them most

strategic places in Israel to assemble an army, which Satan through the Antichrist will direct to march against Jerusalem. Jesus will then return in the air with the raptured church and destroy the armies of the Antichrist with the Words of His mouth – because the Word of the Lord is sharper than a double edged sword! He will set foot again on the Mount of Olives, from whence He left some 2000 years before, and then will proceed down into Jerusalem. He will fulfil the prophecy regarding the sealing of the Eastern Gate by being the first person to open it, and He will then set up His throne in Jerusalem for the Millennial Kingdom. He will judge the Antichrist and False Prophet and cast them alive into the Lake of Fire, and also will bind Satan in the Bottomless Pit so he cannot tempt the nations any longer until his final end comes at the end of the millennium. At that time he will be released for a time and will again deceive some nations into a final rebellion against the throne of God in Jerusalem, however God will cause fire to descend upon the rebellion and all will be sent to the Lake of Fire, including Satan and be imprisoned there for eternity.

So the kingdom of God will be ushered into physical reign on Earth. The prophecies throughout the Old Testament will be fulfilled in the ultimate consummation of the promises given to Adam, Israel and the Church. This will be eternity in the New Heavens and New Earth. There will be no more pain, suffering, sadness, or death. There will be no more sin and no chance of it again because the enemy and great liar responsible for all the bad things in the world will finally have received the judgement due to him. However, he will have taken far too many into Hell with him throughout history.

It is our job today, understanding God's revelation throughout scripture, to bring this incredible message of salvation to the world. If we do not then we are responsible for allowing Satan to steal many souls and cause them eternal destruction in Hell, a place created originally to deal with him and the demons.

God's word is consistent for a book written over 1600 years by 40 different authors, that is because it was inspired by the Holy Spirit and given to man. God's great rescue plan for humanity is coherent and understanding how all its different parts fit together into the great picture of the plan of salvation is important for us all. Appreciating it through these studies is only the surface of what is the equivalent of many lifetimes of possible study through scripture. It is my hope and prayer that you who use this will be strengthened in your walk with the Lord through this humble instrument, and that He will use it for His glory! I'll no doubt see you when the great plan is finished in the near future!

## **Appendix: The Church of Acts to the Reformation and onto Today**

### **The Church of Acts (33AD – 70AD):**

After Christ's ascension - 40 days after the resurrection - the apostles remained in Jerusalem, as Christ had commanded them to wait for the Holy Spirit to come empower them. This event happened on the Day of Pentecost when they were gathered in the upper room and the Holy Spirit came and filled them. The outpouring of this was demonstrated in them going out into the streets speaking in tongues, which were the languages of those around them from all the surrounding regions.

The apostles went around proclaiming the gospel to those in Jerusalem with great boldness now that they were empowered by the Holy Spirit. This caused a great stir among the Jewish religious leaders in the Sanhedrin. After a confrontation with the apostle Stephen they dragged him out of the city and stoned him to death. A man called Saul of Tarsus stood by watching this event with great approval, he himself was an advancing Pharisee. He began his own crusade of persecution against the early church, until he met Jesus Christ one day on the road to Damascus, where he planned to imprison the local church leaders. A bright light shone down from Heaven on Saul's company and Jesus spoke to him asking why he (Saul) was persecuting Him (Jesus). This encounter left Saul blind, and after spending many days in Damascus he was visited by Ananias, whom God had told to visit Saul to restore his sight. After this Saul was a changed man; a follower of Christ and to demonstrate this he changed his name to Paul.

Paul went around the region of Asia Minor in the following years planting and building up local churches among the Gentiles. He would spend much time teaching them the truth of the Gospel and guiding them spiritually through letters, even during his times of imprisonment until he was ultimately killed. At this same time Peter was working with the Jewish believers but he too was killed around the same time as Paul. While the Bible doesn't record their deaths, tradition teaches that Paul was beheaded in Rome under the orders of Roman Emperor Nero, while Peter was crucified upside down. A few years after these events the Jewish rebellion in Jerusalem forced Rome's hand to send in General Titus to destroy the Temple in 70AD. This was one of the final acts that forced the early church in Jerusalem to spread abroad further.

### **Development of the Church (70AD – 1500AD):**

Throughout the reign of the Roman Empire Christians were persecuted. Peter and Paul were killed by Rome and a succession of emperors after Nero sought to destroy the church. The Coliseum, where people watched gladiators fight wild animals and each other was a place where many Christians met their death being thrown before lions for entertainment.

Things changed after the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine in 312AD, who within a few years changed Christianity from the persecuted religion of the empire to being the state religion. Suddenly it was paganism which was banned and persecuted! By the time of the Council of Nicea in 325 (a gathering of the early church leaders to discuss important areas of doctrine that were not agreed on, which resulted in the publication of the Nicene Creed – a statement of the fundamentals of Christian belief), Christianity had gained legitimacy in the Empire. Later in the 4<sup>th</sup> century Augustine would greatly influence Christian thought and much of the theological writings he produced would influence the post-reformation reformers.

At this early stage the church recognised a special office of patriarch, and the greatest of the patriarch's was the Bishop of Rome (aka The Pope) because it was believed his office was descended from St. Peter (this was based on the mistaken interpretation that Peter was the rock on which the church would be built, rather than on Christ!). The primacy of the Pope survived the move of the Empire's capital from Rome to Constantinople in 330, and the split of the Empire into the Eastern and Western halves under their own Emperors in 395.

The Roman Catholic Church was properly born in an event called the Great Schism in 1054 when the Eastern and Western Patriarch's excommunicated each other. This meant that the Pope presided over the Western Church from Rome (thus the Roman Catholic Church), while the Eastern Orthodox Churches were governed by the eastern patriarchs. Shortly thereafter the Pope instituted the Crusades, which were initially wars to recapture Jerusalem and the Holy Land from the Muslims. Later they would be used against the Eastern European nations by capturing Constantinople, which only further reinforced the Great Schism. After the collapse of the Roman Empire a confederacy of states joined together to form the grouping of the Holy Roman Empire, which saw its Emperors appointed by the Pope and whose job it was to protect the Roman Catholic Church.

### **The Reformation (1530):**

The Papacy was filled with moral corruption and the church was rife with great theological errors. During the Middle Ages the Greek and Hebrew texts of the Bible were forgotten and instead the Latin Vulgate translation was used in church services. The priests would conduct their services and rituals wholly in Latin so the people on the whole had no idea what was going on; and since they couldn't read Latin neither could they learn for themselves what the Bible was teaching. Indeed, even if they could have read Latin it would not have been a great help because the Latin translation of the Bible was filled with errors and mistranslations that changed entire doctrines.

The church had begun to teach the wrong doctrine of Purgatory, that those who were in the church and destined for Heaven would have to go this place to spend millions of years being cleansed of all their unconfessed sin before being allowed into Heaven. There were books produced by the church which listed how many days a person would spend suffering in Purgatory for each sin. The only way to avoid Purgatory was through committing enough good works to please God and to confess your sins to your priest who would absolve you of them. Part of this tied into the practice of relic and Saint worship, where people would pay indulgences to the Church to receive some of the surplus holiness of dead Saints to reduce their stay or the stay of their loved ones in Purgatory. This is just one example of the heretical teachings of the church at this time. Another important example is the belief that at the celebration of the Lord's Supper (Communion) the bread and wine became the actual flesh and blood of Christ (transubstantiation). At each Mass Christ was being put back onto the Cross and offered anew to forgive the sins of the congregation, which totally sidelined the completed work of redemption at Calvary. Worse still was the idolatry of worship of the Virgin Mary, who through various extra-biblical writings had been elevated to the status of being immaculately conceived herself and been taken into Heaven just like her Son Jesus. The church taught that she and the priests could intercede with Christ on their behalf! Jesus however, clearly taught that none would intercede except Christ Himself as would be rediscovered in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

At that time, Martin Luther became an Augustinian Monk and he was a man very oppressed with the guilt of his sin. He was terrified of death and of purgatory, so would spend hours confessing sin

and trying to do enough good works to please God – a process he found to be impossible. He took up studying and teaching theology, and began to use the Greek text of the New Testament which had been reintroduced in the last few years by the scholar Erasmus. The result of his studies showed him that the church had been teaching wrong doctrines about salvation and many other issues for years. Instead of doing good works and confession as part of penance for sin, the sinner had to repent and place their faith only in the completed work of Christ and His grace, which meant they couldn't earn their salvation.

He advertised a public debate on indulgences by nailing 95 theses to the door of Castle Church in Saxony, Germany on All Saints Day (31<sup>st</sup> October) 1517. His problem was that the church had sent a man called Tetzel around Germany raising money to deal with the financial problem they had by selling indulgences to the people (saying that if they paid money then they and their relatives could get time off in purgatory). Luther understood that the church's teaching on indulgences was wrong and was exploiting the fears of the poor people in his parish who knew no better. Quickly his writings and challenges spread across Germany and brought him into conflict with the highest levels of the church.

He was called to a trial in the German town of Worms in 1521, where he was told to recant his writings or be excommunicated from the church (effectively sentenced to eternity in Hell). He refused to recant and had to flee from Worms lest he be killed as a previous reformer 100 years had been. Interestingly that reformer was called Huss and at his execution prophesied that 100 years later he would be followed by another who the church would not be able to silence – Luther fulfilled that prophecy!

Over the following years Luther would seek to reform the theology of the church of Rome, even writing to the Pope at one time trying to show him the truth of the scriptures. However, the church refused to listen and sought to destroy Luther's work. They were greatly infuriated when Luther translated the New Testament of the Bible from Greek into German in 1522 so the common people could read it for the first time (by 1534 he also published the Hebrew bible in German). His Bible did not include certain writings found in the Greek Septuagint – called the Apocryphal – because they were not found in the original Hebrew texts. This was a very important move because much of the Roman Church's theological errors came from embracing the contradictions and heresies found in these books! This German bible was very important in the translation work of William Tyndale in 1525, who made great use of the invention of the printing press and translated the Bible into English. He had to do this in Germany because he was hated in England, and his copies of the Bible had to be smuggled into the country in sacks of grain to avoid being destroyed by the Crown, which was loyal to the Papacy still. He was killed in 1536 on the orders of King Henry VIII. When the Crown finally turned and authorised a Bible (the King James Version) much of Tyndale's translation found its way into it.

Finally, it became clear that reforming the Catholic Church was not possible against the opposition so instead the Protestant Church was formed of those who were committed to believing in Christ alone for salvation and believing solely what the Bible taught.

### **Reformation to the Modern Day (1540-Present):**

Christendom was now splintered between the Protestant and Catholic Churches. The Roman Catholic Church began its own counter reformation which culminated in the Council of Trent in

1545. They did initiate some reform but on the whole reaffirmed most of the doctrines which Luther explicitly criticised, including justification not by faith and grace alone (as Luther had discovered from the Bible) but instead based on works.

The Protestant Church continued to grow and spread but theological disagreements eventually led to the establishment of different denominations e.g. Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, etc. They were still united around Christ alone but on other areas of doctrine, for example predestination, they radically differed.

The growth of the church was aided by a series of revivals when many people repented and came to know Christ as their Saviour. In 1906 the Azusa Street Revival saw the birth of the Pentecostal movement which emphasised the continuance of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as demonstrated on the Day of Pentecost, particularly the gift of tongues as a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit. This led to some radical proponents arguing that those without experiencing the gift of tongues were not truly saved. Later in the 1970's the charismatic movement (taken from the Greek word "charis" which means gifts, and is closely connected with the word for grace) abandoned this emphasis on tongues as a sign for salvation but still placed strong emphasis on the gifts in their worship services. They remain a very strong denomination in the Church today.

The church has struggled in recent times in a postmodern world based on relativism, which believes that there is no absolute right or wrong but just that everyone is entitled to believe whatever they want so long as they don't try to impose it on others! Many churches have compromised with the world and given up on important areas of theology and doctrine to make their message more appealing to people. At the same time church attendance has dropped dramatically in the western world with Christianity becoming ostracised in the eyes of the world. This is a fulfilment of the prophecies at the beginning of Revelation, which most modern theologians believe speak of the final church age, represented by the church of Laodicea, which is liberal and lukewarm about the truth of the Gospel.

We now await the Lord's return for His bride as He promised!