

BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

1 of 52 → ANGELS

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

From Genesis to Revelation, the Scriptures are full of the work of the angels. The first and last books of the Bible, in particular, show us angels dealing with individuals and nations; but they are featured throughout the whole of Scripture because this is the way God has chosen to work with His creation and to fulfil His purpose. This world is under the direction of the angels, who now receive their authority and power from Christ; and this will remain so until the Kingdom is established, when Christ and the saints will rule.

The work of the angels can be divided into three sections:

- Representing God (Ex. 3:1-6)
- Directing the nations (Dan. 4:35)
- Ministering to the saints (Heb. 1:14)

These have been their responsibilities since the Garden of Eden.

The Hebrew word (*malak*) and the Greek word (*aggelos*) for ‘angel’ both mean ‘messenger’, ‘one sent’, and relate to the function and not the nature of the one involved. The context and event will identify whether Scripture is describing a messenger who is a Divine being or a human being. For example, Malachi 2:7; 3:1 and James 2:25 clearly use these words of human beings, and Judges 13:20 and Acts 12:7 clearly use them of Divine beings. Hence in the first case the translation ‘messenger’ is used, and in the second, ‘angel’.

Angels that excel in strength

These Divine beings that come from the presence of God and Christ have been involved with this earth since they created it on the instructions of God. They are immortal, not influenced by evil, and carry out the commands of God and Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit which has been given to them. They have the ability to appear and disappear at will, and can manifest themselves as human beings or glorious beings, as a burning bush or a hand that writes on a wall, or a pillar of cloud or fire. The Scripture shows us that they have names, for angels called Gabriel and Michael are mentioned, and that they have different ranks, for some are called archangels.

(Dan. 10:13,21; 12:1; 1 Thess. 4:16; Jude v. 9; Ex. 3:2; Judg. 13)

Representing God

In the Old Testament there is the Name-bearing angel that represents God. On occasions the angel is referred to as LORD (Yahweh), on other occasions as God. The word ‘God’ is often used of the angels; the plural Hebrew word *elohim* means ‘mighty ones’. It was the angels (‘God’; *elohim*) that said: “Let us make man in our image” (Gen. 1:26). It was an angel that spoke to Moses at the burning bush and said: “I am the God of thy father . . .”; and in the same passage we read: “And when the LORD [Yahweh] saw that he [Moses] turned aside . . .”, which teaches

us that God was being represented by this angel. Jesus has now become the one who represents his Father, and the angels go forth under his command and in his power.

(Ex. 3:1-6; 23:20-23; Heb. 1:1-5; 1 Pet. 3:22; Rev. 1:1)

Directing the affairs of the nations

It is very clear from Scripture that the angels had a direct influence on the events concerning the nation of Israel, and in so doing affected lives and events in many other nations. This was done by both direct and indirect action, such as slaying an army as it slept in tents around Jerusalem, or changing weather patterns to bring about droughts, famines or floods. Rulers and governments are removed or installed, or influenced to react in certain ways, to the end that ultimately God's will is fulfilled.

This has been the case since the beginning of time, and the book of Revelation emphasises that it will continue until God's Kingdom is established. The example of the scattering of Israel and then the regathering and subsequent establishment in the land is a clear witness to the work of the angels in this present day. Bible prophecy is dependent on angelic involvement.

(Isa. 37:36; Job 37:12,13; Ps. 148:7,8; Dan. 4:25,35; 10:13,21; Rev. 7:1-3; 8:2-6; 16:1)

Ministering to the saints

The care of the believer, and the moulding of the believer's character through the experiences and events of his or her life, are important parts of the work of the angels. To them is given the responsibility, under the direction of Christ and his heavenly Father, of preparing the saints for the Kingdom. The psalmist came to understand that all his thoughts, words and actions were observed by the angels, communicated to God, and the events in his life influenced by them. The same was true for men such as Jacob, Daniel and Paul.

Angels are acting on behalf of heaven with those called to be saints. Their function is to "minister" to us, to "encamp . . . round about" us, and to "keep [us] in all [our] ways". They do not remove our free will, but strive to influence us in the ways of God. They are involved with our prayers, while remaining unseen, so that our faith might be developed as required by our heavenly Father. They will chasten and prove us as necessary. In this present life the believer is brought into the presence of "an innumerable company of angels".

(Gen. 28:12; 45:7; 48:15,16; Ps. 34:6,7; 91:11; Dan. 6:22; Acts 10:1-8; 27:23; Heb. 1:14; 12:22)

Summary of the angels' work

This world is under the direction of the angels, and they are overseeing the work of drawing all nations to Jerusalem. Often in the New Testament their activities are described as the work of the Spirit—as in the case of Philip (Acts 8:26,29) and in the imparting of the Holy Spirit to the apostles (Ps. 104:4; Acts 2:2-4). They are involved in the lives of believers, exercising care over them. They will be involved in the judgement, with the raising of the dead and the gathering of the living saints to Christ. They rejoice in the purpose of God and in the fulfilment of His will, and joyfully praise His great and holy Name. They obey the Creator, and it will be the privilege of the faithful to be like them in the Kingdom age.

(Ps. 103:20; Mt. 16:27; 24:31; 25:31; 1 Thess. 4:16; Heb. 2:5)

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

BAPTISM — ESSENTIAL FOR SALVATION

“The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 3:21).

In the passage quoted above, the saving of Noah in the Ark of refuge which he built is likened to baptism. The water saved Noah and his family because it lifted them above the destruction that swept away the ungodly world in which he lived. The waters of baptism can save us from the judgements that Christ will shortly bring upon all the wickedness of the age we live in (1 Pet. 3:20; Mt. 24:37).

Baptism in Scripture

Baptism is first mentioned in Scripture in relation to John the Baptist's ministry (Mt. 3:5,6,11). His baptism was one of repentance (this means a change of heart, leading to a changed way of life). It anticipated the baptism of the Lord Jesus and was intended to prepare the Jewish people to believe in Christ (Acts 19:4,5). Israel had already been nationally baptized into Moses when they crossed the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:2), but now Christ commissioned the apostles to baptize individual believers of the gospel, both Jew and Gentile, into his name (Mt. 28:19,20; Mk. 16:16). Baptism into Christ identifies believers with the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ, which, having been accomplished, render this baptism of more significance than either Moses' or John's baptisms, which it replaced (Rom. 6:3-6; Acts 2:37,38).

The need for correct belief

Jesus said in Mark 16:16: “He that believeth [the gospel] and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned [condemned]”. Belief of the one gospel (Gal. 1:6-9; 3:7-9,26-29) and baptism are both necessary. The Acts of the Apostles gives us several impressive examples of correct belief preceding baptism:

- Acts 2:14-41 - Jerusalem Jews on the day of Pentecost
- Acts 8:12 - The Samaritans
- Acts 8:27-39 - The Ethiopian Eunuch
- Acts 10:1,2,34-48 - Cornelius and his companions
- Acts 16:14-34 - Lydia and the Philippian jailor and his family
- Acts 19:1-5 - The Ephesian disciples of John the Baptist

Are there any exceptions?

There is no record in Scripture of the repentant thief on the cross (Lk. 23:40-43) being baptized. Jesus promised he would be in the Kingdom. But he might have been baptized earlier by either John or the disciples of the Lord (Jno. 4:1,2).

But the example of Christ must be our guide. He said, on the occasion of his baptism: “thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness” (Mt. 3:15). There can be no exceptions; all who wish to be saved must believe and be baptized.

Christening, infant baptism and the Baptists

The Greek words for baptize and baptism mean being fully immersed. There is no suggestion in Scripture of baptism being a sprinkling with water. There are several passages that describe or imply bodily immersion; for instance, Matthew 3:16; John 3:23; Acts 8:38.

Infant baptism was first heard of in the days of Tertullian (A.D. 200), who vigorously opposed the practice. The rite of infant sprinkling dates back to pagan Roman customs, when babies were sprinkled with holy water and named. Like many other pagan ideas, this rite of infant baptism was gradually superimposed on Christian teaching (2 Tim. 4:3,4). Infant baptism belongs to the apostate church.

When the sect called the Baptists came into existence in the seventeenth century they believed the promises made to David, and looked forward to God's Kingdom on earth, immersing only adult believers. Today, many Baptist churches believe in such doctrines as heaven-going, the Trinity and a supernatural devil, having abandoned their earlier Scriptural beliefs, and some do not even insist on total immersion, but sprinkle with water.

The symbolic meaning of baptism

Baptism is a symbol of sacrifice and of resurrection. Sacrifice always involves death. Baptism into Christ links us with his death, which destroyed "the body of sin" (Rom. 6:3,6). Baptism signifies death to the former way of life, enslaved to sin, and the commencement of a new life enslaved to Christ (vv. 4-13). Baptism also identifies us with Christ's death and resurrection (v. 5), that we might one day inherit eternal life in the Kingdom (v. 23; Isa. 26:19).

Baptism changes our position before God

When, after a good confession of the one faith (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:10; Eph. 4:5), a true baptism takes place, Scripture teaches that our past sins are forgiven us, for Christ's sake (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 22:16; 1 Cor. 6:11; Col. 2:11,12). We become "a new creature", as Paul teaches (2 Cor. 5:17). We become the children of God, and heirs of the life-saving promises made to Abraham (Gal. 3:26-29). We have access to God through Christ in prayer, being no longer "children of wrath" and alienated from God (Eph. 2:1-3,12,13).

At what age should baptism take place?

All the Scriptural examples are of persons capable of believing the gospel, defined as "the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ" (Mk. 16:16; Acts 8:12). Passages such as Colossians 3 set out the responsibility to lead godly, obedient lives which falls upon those who have "risen with Christ" (v. 1). The age a person is baptized will depend therefore on his or her maturity and understanding. All baptisms, of young or old, will be preceded by repentance (Mt. 4:17; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; 2 Pet. 3:9). Some crisis of the mind will trigger the realisation that we *must* be baptized, as this is the will of God, and that only *in Christ* can we be saved (Acts 4:12). All manner of circumstances, people or events can lead to this crisis of mind. If we have not already been baptized, may we respond to the call of Peter, as 3,000 did on the day of Pentecost, to "Save [ourselves] from this untoward generation" (Acts 2:40).

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

CREATION

God the Creator

The Bible opens with God describing His creation of the heaven and the earth, and throughout the rest of the Scriptures His supreme position as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe is set before us. God is from everlasting to everlasting, all-powerful and all-wise, a living God Who takes care of, and delights in, all that He has made:

- “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1)
- “When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained . . .” (Ps. 8:3)
- “He hath made the earth by His power, He hath established the world by His wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by His discretion” (Jer. 10:12)
- “Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them” (Mt. 6:26)
- “Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created” (Rev. 4:11).

Jesus and the apostles endorse the Genesis Creation account

Every major detail of the Genesis Creation is confirmed by the preaching of Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament. We cannot believe some things in Genesis but reject others. We must take our stand with Jesus and accept the Creation account given to us in Genesis.

- The seven days of Creation (Heb. 4:4)
- The creation of Adam and Eve (Mt. 19:4; Mk. 10:6; Lk. 3:38; 1 Cor. 15:45; Jude v. 14)
- Adam made in the Creator’s image (1 Cor. 11:7; Jas. 3:9)
- Adam made from the dust of the earth (1 Cor. 15:47)
- Adam first formed, then Eve (1 Cor. 11:8,9; 1 Tim. 2:13).

Adam was created about 6,000 years ago

A study of the Bible records of the ages of the men living before and after the Flood (Gen. 5 and 11), the 430 years of Exodus 12:40, the 480 years of 1 Kings 6:1, and the lengths of the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah, enables us to calculate how long ago Adam and Eve were created. Such a study leads to the conclusion that today (A.D. 1999) we are living approximately 6,000 years after.

Other studies lead to the same conclusion. Genealogies are given in Genesis, 1 Chronicles 1 and Luke 3. These enable us to trace the descendants of Adam, and in particular give us the pedigree of the Lord Jesus Christ. The unbroken line of descent from Adam to Christ places a limit on how far back Creation can be dated. The number of generations is compatible with Adam being created 6,000 years ago.

Thirdly, there is evidence that God’s overall plan and purpose with the earth spans 7,000 years, with 6,000 years of spiritual creation and development followed by 1,000 years of completion and rest in the Kingdom (Heb. 4:4,9; Rev. 20:2-7).

How old is the universe?

Scripture gives no clear answer to this question. Some believe the heaven and earth to be ancient, already in existence when the six days of Creation began. In this view the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters 6,000 years ago to fit the earth for living organisms to live in. Others believe that the entire universe was created in the six days, and that the universe, including the earth, is therefore young, only 6,000 years old.

Both views have fervent adherents who can set forth evidence to support their respective standpoints. In the absence of clear Scripture teaching there is liberty for difference of opinion, much as there was in the first century over keeping or not keeping special days, or eating meats or not. We must be prepared to be open-minded about the age of the heaven and earth, and have respect for those whose views differ from our own.

Creation, not evolution

Science can be rightly used to give glory to the Creator. Great scientists such as Isaac Newton, Michael Faraday and Ernst Chain believed the Genesis account and worshipped the Creator. The theory of evolution, however, introduces a denial of God as the Creator of life. The theory is plainly contrary to Bible teaching, and we must reject evolution on Scriptural grounds. But there are also several scientific objections to evolution.

The powerful witness of the creation to its Maker

Throughout Scripture we are encouraged to see the greatness and complexity of creation as a witness to the power and wisdom of God, in contrast to the puniness of man:

- “Where wast thou [Job] when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding” (Job 38:4; see also the whole of this chapter)
- “I will praise Thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are Thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well” (Ps. 139:14)
- “For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead” (Rom. 1:20).

Even in its present cursed condition creation silently witnesses to God’s power and wisdom, His love of variety and His great generosity. The evidence is there for all to see, particularly today when, by means of powerful microscopes, telescopes and other techniques, we are privileged to know more of the Creator’s handiwork than in any previous age.

The spiritual creation

The natural creation foreshadows God’s spiritual creation which takes place over a period of 7,000 years. The millennial Kingdom is described as a sabbath rest in Hebrews 4:9 (mg.), which lasts for the final thousand years of this 7,000-year period (Rev. 20:2-7). It is termed by Isaiah and Peter “new heavens and a new earth” (Isa. 65:17,18; 2 Pet. 3:13). God’s faithful servants undergo renewal (Ps. 51:10; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15) after the pattern of the man Jesus Christ, who is called the first-born of this new creation (Col. 1:15,16). This new creation will ultimately bring pleasure and glory to the great Creator.

May we remember our Creator and obey His Word, so that we become part of that blessed and glorious creation which the Almighty will once again pronounce “very good”.

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

FAITH

Scripture is clear—we are saved from sin and death because of our faith, not through any deeds that we do. Eternal life is God's gift, it cannot be earned.

“By grace [that is, an undeserved gift] are ye saved through faith” (Eph. 2:8);

“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom. 3:28).

What is faith?

Faith is synonymous in Scripture with belief; to have faith is to believe. It is therefore not a mysterious quality which people possess. The faith that saves is, however, not belief in just anything, but in what God has declared in the Scriptures—in particular, what He has said He will do.

Note how faith and belief are synonymous in the following passage: “But without faith it is impossible to please [God]; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6).

What must we believe?

The things God wants us to believe are what He has revealed in the Bible, summarised as “the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12). God not only purposes to set up His Kingdom on earth, He has made it possible for sinful humans to live for ever in it by the work of Jesus Christ. This is the essence of what we must believe.

How do we obtain faith?

Faith is not given to us by God, it is our response to God. We cannot, because of our weak natures, perfectly obey God, but we can at least believe what He has revealed to us in His Word.

We cannot believe what we do not know, however; hence “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). It was necessary first for God to give His Word; then we must hearken to it and believe it.

Developing faith

Faith does not come in an instant, however; it develops. We can think of three stages in developing faith:

- 1 The wonder and variety of the natural world should lead us to believe in the existence of a supreme Being Who created it.
- 2 Fulfilled prophecy should convince us that the Bible is uniquely the Word of this supreme Being so that we read it and believe it.
- 3 If we continue to read the Scriptures, we will recognise more and more their internal harmony and consistency, and the influence they have on us, and so grow in our faith. Also, our awareness of the hand of God at work in our lives and in the world will grow, and with this too our faith will grow.

Faith and works

Though we are saved by faith, not by works, true faith does not exist apart from works: “faith without works is dead” (Jas. 2:20). This means no more than that if we really believe something to be true then we act on it.

Abraham believed that God had the power to bring the dead to life, so he was prepared to sacrifice Isaac when God asked him to; Rahab believed that God was with Israel, and was prepared to help the Israelite spies (Jas. 2:21-26). Hebrews 11 is full of examples of people whose faith caused them to act; read carefully this chapter and note such words as ‘offered’, ‘prepared’, ‘went’, ‘blessed’, and so on.

We cannot say we have faith yet take no action. Declaring our belief in Christ is insufficient; association with him in baptism is required. Declaring our belief in God’s Kingdom is insufficient; we must try to live as would-be citizens of it now.

Abraham and faith

Abraham is presented in Scripture as the great example of faith. “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness”, was declared of Abraham when he believed God’s promises, and is quoted of him three times in the New Testament (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; Jas. 2:23).

The life of Abraham shows that he constantly believed God’s promises, and based his life on them: leaving his home to go to Canaan in the belief that he would inherit it for ever; believing that God would give him and Sarah a son, even when it was humanly impossible; even being prepared to sacrifice that son at God’s command.

The life of Abraham also illustrates the development of faith. When God counted Abraham as righteous because of his faith he was about eighty (*cf.* Gen. 16:16). James says that when Abraham was prepared to offer up Isaac he was showing that his faith was perfect (mature, or complete), and Genesis 15:6 was fulfilled (Jas. 2:22,23). By this time he was well over 100. His faith had developed to maturity over the years.

Justification by faith

Justification means ‘counting as righteous’. God says that, though we are sinners, He will count us as being righteous if we truly have faith, just as he counted Abraham as righteous through his faith (Rom. 4:3-5). Note the constant recurrence of ‘count’, ‘reckon’ and ‘impute’ in Romans 4—all the same Greek word.

Trust and faithfulness

Though faith Biblically is synonymous with belief, ‘belief’ in normal English usage is perhaps too weak a term to convey fully the Biblical idea of faith. Perhaps we might like to think of faith as believing what God has said and trusting in Him to carry it out; or as not only initially believing in what God has said, but remaining basically faithful to that belief all our lives, in the face of difficulties, and despite times of doubt and sinfulness. Such ideas give a deeper meaning to this vital concept of faith.

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

FELLOWSHIP

We are told in Acts 2 that the 3,000 who were baptized on the Day of Pentecost “continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and *fellowship*, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (v. 42). From the beginning of the first-century ecclesia there was such a thing as fellowship amongst believers; but what was it? The original Greek comes from a word meaning ‘common’, and fellowship therefore refers to believers having things in common, sharing together.

But what do believers have in common? It is, of course, the things that they believe. Notice that doctrine precedes fellowship in the above statement; believers have fellowship with each other on the basis of agreed doctrines. These doctrines are not originated by man; it is the apostles’ doctrine which unites believers together, that is, the things the apostles taught, as revealed to them by the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Fellowship with God and Christ

1 John 1 adds another dimension to the idea of fellowship, speaking of believers having fellowship with God and Christ. The Apostle John says, referring to his apostolic ministry to declare the truth concerning Jesus Christ: “that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have *fellowship* with us: and truly our *fellowship* is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ” (v. 3). In this chapter the fellowship that a believer has is depicted as being fourfold:

- “with the Father”
- “with His Son Jesus”
- “with us [the apostles]”
- “one with another” (v. 7).

Fellowship here comes from acceptance of the teaching of the apostles. Those who accept that teaching enter a special relationship with God through Jesus Christ. All who do this are in fellowship with each other.

Entry into fellowship

How does a person come to have fellowship in these ways? At Pentecost it was those who believed the teaching of Peter, and responded to his appeal to repent and be baptized, who were in the apostles’ fellowship. By baptism a person becomes associated with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is consequently forgiven his or her sins, and stands in a new relationship with God and Christ (Col. 2:13,14).

This relationship with Christ through belief and baptism is central to the idea of fellowship. There is a unity between Christ and his believers which is expressed in a number of different ways in Scripture; for example:

- Believers are “one in Christ”, and thus part of the seed of Abraham and inheritors of the promises made to him (Gal. 3:26-29)
- Christ and the believers are collectively considered as one person, with Christ as the head and believers as the body (Eph. 1:22,23)
- Christ is “the true vine” and believers are “branches” (Jno. 15:1-6)

Keeping in fellowship

Baptized believers continue in fellowship by regularly partaking of bread and wine as a continued act of association with Christ’s work of salvation. Those baptized on the Day of

Pentecost “continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers”, “breaking bread from house to house” (Acts 2:42,46).

The Apostle Paul writes: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread” (1 Cor. 10:16,17). The word translated ‘communion’ is also translated ‘fellowship’; believers renew their fellowship with Christ and with one another by partaking of the emblems together.

Believers also retain fellowship by holding fast to the apostolic teaching they believed at their baptism, and behaving in ways appropriate for those who are Christ’s. Those who cease to do these things are no longer truly in fellowship: “If we say that we have fellowship with Him [God], and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth” (1 Jno. 1:6). Doing the truth implies both believing the true doctrines taught by the apostles and following a way of life in accordance with them. Nevertheless, through weakness all sin, and for those who “walk in the light . . . the blood of Jesus Christ [God’s] Son cleanseth [them] from all sin” (v. 7).

Keeping in fellowship also involves keeping separate from those who are in darkness. In 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 Paul, writing to those who had come away from idol worship, sets down principles of separation based upon baptized believers being God’s people, saying, “what communion hath light with darkness?”, where ‘communion’ is the word for ‘fellowship’.

Maintaining true fellowship

Certain practical steps are needed in order to maintain true fellowship. The main ones are:

- Ensuring that those who are baptized know and believe the doctrines taught by the apostles. This involves careful instruction from the Scriptures, and an interview to confirm that these doctrines, and the way of life which should follow, are known and understood.
- Having a common understanding of what the doctrines taught by the apostles actually are, the document containing this understanding being called ‘The Statement of Faith’.
- Agreeing that certain things are incompatible with being in true fellowship, for example involvement in military service or politics, or wrong behaviour towards others.
- Expecting that those who are baptized become members of an ecclesia which accepts the above principles before they can break bread.
- Ensuring that those who cease to “walk in the light” because of wrong beliefs or behaviour are no longer permitted to break bread with the ecclesia.

The above things represent our best attempts to maintain true fellowship, but do not always operate perfectly due to human weakness.

The responsibilities of fellowship

The fellowship which brethren and sisters have together is truly a wonderful thing, uniting believers from all parts of the world, from all walks of life and of all ages and both sexes. This special relationship of believers one with another brings with it responsibilities towards each other. The Greek word translated ‘fellowship’ and connected words are translated in a number of other ways, some of which illustrate these responsibilities. Here are some examples:

“ye [the Philippian ecclesia] have well done, that ye did *communicate* with my [Paul’s] affliction” (Phil. 4:14);

“But to do good and to *communicate* forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Heb. 13:16);

“. . . *distributing* to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality” (Rom. 12:13);

“. . . your [the Corinthian ecclesia’s] liberal *distribution* unto them [the needy Jerusalem ecclesia], and unto all men” (2 Cor. 9:13).

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

FREE WILL AND PREDESTINATION

The Bible says that we are all mortal because of sin, but that God has provided a way to obtain eternal life through Jesus Christ. Is this way open to all who choose to take advantage of it, or does God select only certain people to follow that way? The former is what is meant by free will, the latter is what is usually understood by the term 'predestination'. Which does the Bible teach? There is much in the Bible to support the idea that we have free will. Although the word 'predestinate' does occur in the Bible, it is a misunderstanding to suppose that it means that God has determined already who will receive eternal life.

Man's free will and God's foreknowledge

The following is a selection of passages which speak of man's free will:

Moses said to Israel: "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore *choose* life, that both thou and thy seed may live" (Deut. 30:19);

"By faith Moses . . . refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; *choosing* rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb. 11:24,25);

"And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And *whosoever will*, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17).

There is no doubt, however, that God has foreknowledge, as the following passages show:

"I am God . . . there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure" (Isa. 46:9,10);

"But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled" (Acts 3:18).

Moreover, God does not just declare what will happen, He causes it to happen, as the following passages show:

"fear thou not, O My servant Jacob, saith the LORD; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid" (Jer. 30:10);

"against Thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:27,28).

The question is, Does God do this on an individual basis?

What does the word 'predestination' mean in the Bible?

The word 'predestinate' occurs four times in the Authorised Version translation of the New Testament. Although according to *Collins English Dictionary* 'predestinate' means "to decree from eternity (any event, esp. the final salvation of individuals)", this is the general understanding of the word. It does not accurately represent what the original Greek word means in the Bible, where it occurs six times and is translated in the AV as follows:

"predestinate" (Rom. 8:29,30; Eph. 1:5,11)

"ordain" (1 Cor. 2:7)

"determine before" (Acts 4:28).

The original word is derived from two Greek words meaning 'mark out' or 'determine', and 'beforehand', respectively. As we have seen above, God has determined beforehand His purpose with the earth, particularly in relation to His Son. Two of the above references are

consistent with this. In Acts 4:28, already quoted, the word is used of foreordaining His Son Jesus to his death upon the cross. 1 Corinthians 2:7 reads: "we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory". In context this is talking about the wisdom of God which is foolishness with men, the achieving of man's salvation through the crucifixion of Christ. There is no difficulty with the idea of predestination in this context.

Are individuals predestined to salvation?

The two passages in which the word 'predestinate' occurs in the AV, Romans 8 and Ephesians 1, are often taken to be referring to the salvation of individuals, and it is true that the word is used of the salvation of people, rather than of Jesus Christ as the means of that salvation. However, a careful look at these passages shows that Paul is speaking collectively of those who are saved.

In Romans 8:29,30 he uses the word twice: "For whom [God] did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified". God's plan is to develop a class of people to become like His Son. He determined beforehand that they should be called, made righteous and eventually glorified.

The word also occurs in Ephesians 1:5,11, where we read, "In Christ [God] chose us before the world was founded, to be dedicated, to be without blemish in His sight, to be full of love; and He *destined* us—such was His will and pleasure—to be accepted as His sons through Jesus Christ . . . In Christ indeed we have been given our share in the heritage, as was *decreed* in His design" (vv. 4,5,11, NEB). Here the AV "predestinate" is represented by "destined" and "decreed". Here again Paul is referring to God's plan being fulfilled in the saints of his day, not the selecting of individual saints; it is "us", not "each of us".

A simple analogy will illustrate the difference between God's predetermined purpose and man's free will. We are in a railway station and a train is scheduled to leave for London; this is predestination. Each individual can choose whether or not to get on the train and whether or not to leave the train before it reaches London; this is free will.

God's calling

The idea that individuals are predestined to receive eternal life involves the idea of a call, by which is meant the action of God upon the mind of a person to make them respond to the gospel. Such an idea is contrary to Scripture. God does call, but it is by His Word, to which people respond by either accepting or rejecting it. We are saved by faith, and "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

This does not, however, mean that people accept the gospel simply because they happen to have had the good fortune to hear it preached. God can and does arrange that individuals who will be responsive to the gospel have it preached to them. However, they still have to respond to it in faith and then hold fast to it if they are to receive eternal life.

Final thought

Scripture teaches that God has foreknowledge and man has free will. It is difficult for finite human minds to understand how both can be true, and ultimately all we can do is accept that it is so. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8,9).

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

GOD-MANIFESTATION

*“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory”
(1 Tim. 3:16).*

“For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us” (1 Jno. 1:2).

God-manifestation

is the display of the glory of God within His creation, His fundamental purpose in all creation (Num. 14:21). It is particularly seen in the display of His character and attributes.

When Adam fell he no longer displayed the image of his Creator as previously, and became estranged (Gen. 1:27; 3:24). God’s purpose is that men and women should become even greater manifestations of Himself than Adam and Eve were originally.

God—source of all

No man can see God and live (Ex. 33:20; 1 Tim. 6:16; Jno. 1:18). So He has shown Himself by intermediaries, by God-in-manifestation.

God is revealed in the meaning of His Name, Yahweh. The angel in the burning bush spoke to Moses (Ex. 3:2) as God: “I am . . .” (v. 6). He explained His Name as signifying “I am That I am” (v. 14), or “I will be Who I will be” (RSV), emphasising that He is a God of the future as well as the present and past (6:2-8). His Name is a memorial to all future generations (3:15), most especially to those whom He is creating as manifestations of Himself, and who will become part of the glorified Israel symbolised by the bush which continued burning unconsumed (Ps. 22:30; Hos. 12:5,6; Isa. 53:10; 2 Pet. 1:4).

He is the Source and Sustainer of all things, and they are created for His glory (1 Cor. 8:6; Acts 17:28; Rom. 11:36).

Revealed in the angels

- Angels displayed the joy of God (Job 38:7; Lk. 2:10-14), carried the Name of God (Gen. 16:13; 18:1; Ex. 23:20,21), and at the Exodus and at Sinai showed the power and glory of God (Ex. 14:19,20; Acts 7:38).
- Yahweh’s angel proclaimed His Name and character to Moses, “abundant in goodness and truth”, merciful and forgiving (Ex. 34:6,7).

Revealed in Christ

- “The Word [or Logos] was God”; that is, the thought, mind and purpose of God was expressed in speech and later personally in Adam’s flesh as the Son of God, “the only begotten of the Father” by the overshadowing power of the Holy Spirit (Jno.1:1,14,18; 2 Sam. 7:14; Lk. 1:35). As a result he was called Emmanuel, “God with us” (Mt. 1:23; Isa. 7:14).
- One purpose of his manifestation as the Son of God was to destroy the works of the devil (1 Jno. 3:8; Heb. 2:14). It is essential to recognise that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh (1 Jno. 4:2,3; 2 Jno. v. 7).

- Made “in the form of God” by his birth, he is “the image of the invisible God”, “the express image of His person” (Phil. 2:6; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3). He has “declared” the Father, and manifested His Name (Jno. 1:18; 17:6,26). In him the Father was seen (12:45).
- He brought life for the human race and was thus “the light of men” (Jno. 1:4,9; 12:46; 2 Cor. 4:4). This light is not of himself but of the Father, shining “in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6; Jno. 1:14-17).
- By service and suffering he was made perfect, a full manifestation of his Father (Phil. 2:7,8; Heb. 2:10; 5:8,9). He has therefore been raised to the manifestation of God in Divine nature, inheriting a name greater than angels, and glorifying God in the process (Heb. 5:5; 1:4; Phil. 2:9-11). He is now the anointed Son of the Father in a greater sense (Acts 13:33; Heb.1:9). He carries the name Yahweh our Righteousness and, particularly when he returns, men will bow to the Father through him, and his glory will be revealed (Isa. 45:23; Jer. 23:5,6).

“Christadelphians are neither Arians, Socinians, nor Trinitarians; but believers in the ‘great mystery of godliness, Deity manifested in Flesh’, as set forth in ‘the Revelation of the Mystery’, preached by the apostles” (*Eureka*, vol. 2, p. 336).

Revealed in the faithful down the ages

- Reception of the Word of God is made the mark of a member of the Elohim, as in the case of the judges of Israel (Jno. 10:34-36; Ps. 82:1,6; Ex. 21:6; 22:8,28).
- Immersion into “the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28:19) involves understanding, believing and obeying a body of truth defined in the Word of God. By this we become children of God—that is, we are “born from above” (Jno. 3:3, mg.). God-manifestation should be part of the daily living of the man or woman of God (1 Tim. 6:6,11; 2:10). Abiding in the doctrine of Christ is essential, and by it we ‘have’ or manifest both the Father and the Son (2 Jno. v. 9; 1 Jno. 5:12).
- Even now we are the sons of God (1 Jno. 3:2), but are being changed into or conformed to the image of God’s Son (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:6,7; Rom. 8:29; 1 Jno. 3:10).
- The ecclesia, the one body of Christ, is spiritually one with Christ (1 Cor. 10:16,17; 12:12,13; Gal. 3:27,28; Eph. 4:12). He is its head and through him its members enter the Name to the glory of God (Eph. 5:23,27; Jno. 17:22,23).

To be revealed in the saints

The future manifestation of God in the saints will fulfil promises and prophecies:

- To partake of the Divine Nature, incorruptible and immortal (2 Pet. 1:4; 1 Cor. 15:53,54; Jas. 1:12).
- To reign in glory with Christ in the earth (Dan. 7:27; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 5:10).
- Sons of God are being brought to future glory, and by sanctification through Jesus are of the one Father with him (Heb. 2:10,11). The full significance of this glory cannot be appreciated by mortal man (1 Jno. 3:2).
- God’s title “Father of glory” will take on an extended meaning through “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (Eph. 1:17,18; Col. 1:27).
- We wait for “the glory which shall be revealed in us”, “the manifestation of the sons of God”, “the glorious liberty of the children of God”, “the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:18,19,21,23).

Today we are either prospective manifestations of God as saints, already bearing some Divine likeness, or manifestations of the natural man, the adversary of God (1 Jno. 4:4).

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

GOD

“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created” (Rev. 4:11).

“God That made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though He needed any thing, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us: for in Him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:24-28).

How can we know God?

Although the order and design of the world can encourage belief in a Creator, we can only know God through His revelation of Himself and His ways. This revelation is in the Bible, which clearly claims to have been authored by Him through faithful men (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21; Heb. 1:1,2). In it we find His revelation of His nature, His character, His mind and His purpose. The superiority of all His ways and thoughts over those of men is to be expected and is stated: “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8,9; see too 1 Cor. 1:25-29).

His nature

God reveals Himself as the Supreme Being, Who has always existed, immortal, of infinite power, wisdom and understanding (1 Tim. 1:17; 6:15; Ps. 90:1-3; 145:3; 147:5; Isa. 45:5,18). He is declared to be the Creator of the heavens and the earth and the giver of life to all that lives (Gen. 1:1; Jer. 10:7,10-12; Acts 14:15; 17:24). Not only does He create life, but He sustains it, and when He deems fit He will take life away (Ps. 104; Deut. 32:39; Acts 17:25,28).

His character

God declared His character particularly to Moses: “The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty . . .” (Ex. 34:6,7). His character is seen in His dealings with mankind, particularly with the nation of Israel.

God’s work with the nation of Israel illustrates His kindness and longsuffering, but also His intolerance of sin and rebellion against His ways (Ps. 103:8-13; Hab. 1:13; Deut. 4:24). Paul describes these two aspects of the Almighty’s character as “the goodness and severity of God” (Rom. 11:22).

God's character is fully revealed in the birth, life, death, resurrection and ministry of His Son Jesus, the Christ. His longsuffering, His love and His righteousness are displayed in the provision of Jesus as the perfect sacrifice for sin and the example of the kind of life that men and women should lead: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them . . ." (2 Cor. 5:19; cf. Jno. 3:16; 1 Jno. 4:7,8,16). However, His righteous judgements will also be carried out on those who reject His ways (2 Thess. 1:6-10; Rev. 11:18; Heb. 10:30,31).

His mind and purpose

He has made all things for His pleasure (Rev. 4:11). This pleasure is realised in the outworking of His purpose, which is that "as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD" (Num. 14:21; cf. Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14). This will be achieved through people who have believed His promises and obeyed His commandments. Such will allow the Word of God to influence their lives so that they are "conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29).

As the Creator, God is, in a sense, the Father of all mankind (Acts 17:29), but the position of the children of God is reserved for those who have believed Him. He has from the time of Adam, when His righteousness condemned Adam to death for sin, made His laws and commandments available. Those who obeyed them were counted as 'sons of God' who looked for a day when they should be raised from the dead, share the promised Divine nature and have fellowship with God (Jno. 8:56; Heb. 11:19).

God's selection of Abraham led to the choice of Israel as His people, from which nation He raised His Son Jesus, in fulfilment of promises about the seed who was coming. Jesus, born by the action of the power of God, the Holy Spirit, on the virgin Mary, is the "only begotten of the Father . . . full of grace and truth" (Jno. 1:14). Through Him God has provided redemption from sin, and brought into being a new creation of His children, who are being redeemed from this present world to be revealed as the sons of God when Jesus returns to establish His Kingdom upon the earth. God's judgements have been committed to the Son, who will "put down all rule and all authority and power . . . that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:24-28; cf. Ps. 8:6; Ps. 2).

The One to Whom all glory is due

The wisdom and graciousness of God are evident in the arrangements He has made to fill the earth with His glory manifested in believers "delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21). Understanding this great work of salvation evokes praise and wonder.

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor? or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto Him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to Whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. 11:33-36).

". . . to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen" (Jude v. 25).

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

GOD'S PROMISES TO ABRAHAM

Abram, whose name God changed to Abraham, is, after Jesus, the most important man in history. To him God made promises that are the basis of salvation to eternal life for all people. The Bible record of Abraham's life shows that his attitude to God's Word pleased God. He is the spiritual father of all who respond to God in faith as he did.

What promises did God make to Abraham?

The promises are detailed in Genesis chapters 12 to 22. They include four key points:

- a land—whose location and extent is clearly defined
- Abraham's descendants
- one special descendant
- blessing for all mankind.

We look at each in more detail.

The land

Abraham was called by God from Ur of the Chaldees to go to a land that God would show him (Gen. 12:1-3). When Abraham arrived in the land of Canaan God said, "Unto thy seed will I give this land" (vv. 5,7). That land is defined: "all the land which thou seest [from Bethel], to thee will I give it . . ." (13:15). It is further detailed as "this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (15:18). Genesis 15:19-21 lists the nations that inhabited "all the land of Canaan" (17:8).

Abraham's descendants

Abraham had two children. Ishmael is the ancestor of the Arab nations and Isaac is the ancestor of the Jewish nation. God promised blessing to both these children, but chose to make the inheritance of his covenant with Abraham through Isaac and his descendants (17:20,21). Indeed, when God changed his name from Abram to Abraham He described him as "a father of many nations" and promised him and his descendants through Isaac everlasting possession of the land of Canaan (17:4-8).

The Jews of Jesus' day valued their descent from Abraham: "We be Abraham's seed" (Jno. 8:33), they claimed. However, Jesus points out that true descent from Abraham depends on character: "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham" (v. 39). Paul states in Romans 4:13-17:

"For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith . . . Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, (as it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations) . . .".

Abraham's special descendant

When Abraham was called to offer Isaac as a sacrifice he obeyed. God's angel stopped the actual sacrifice and pronounced God's verdict on Abraham's actions:

"By Myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in

multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed My voice" (Gen. 22:16-18).

This final promise to Abraham confirms that Abraham would be a father of many nations. It suggests two kinds of descendants. Natural descendants are those "as the sand which is on the sea shore", and spiritual descendants are those "as the stars of the heaven". The spiritual descendants are those who show the faith of Abraham and receive the destiny promised him (Gal. 3:7; cf. also Dan. 12:2,3).

The promise also refers to a descendant who would "possess the gate of his enemies", that is, conquer them. The New Testament identifies this person as Jesus, "the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Mt. 1:1). Paul teaches, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16).

Blessing for all mankind

Abraham was also promised that "in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22:18). The seed (descendant) that makes this possible is Jesus. The primary way in which Jesus brings blessing is through forgiveness of sins. The Apostle Peter, speaking to Jews, said,

"Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:25,26).

Following this, the Gentiles were offered salvation through belief in Jesus. This gives them access to the promises made to Abraham:

"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:13,14).

The promise of the Spirit is that through belief and baptism into Jesus Christ we share in God's promises to Abraham:

"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (vv. 26-29).

An opportunity for us

Abraham is described as "the heir of the world" (Rom. 4:13) and "the Friend of God" (Jas. 2:23). God's promises to him require that he will be raised from the dead at Jesus' return and inherit the Land of Promise. Those who have believed in Jesus, obeyed the gospel and displayed faith like Abraham will also inherit with him, as Jesus said:

"And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 8:11).

BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mk. 16:15,16).

“But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12).

“For I [Paul] am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16).

“And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed” (Gal. 3:8).

The word ‘gospel’ means ‘good news or tidings’. It comes from the Greek word *euangelion*, which occurs 101 times in the New Testament. Although the word ‘gospel’ is a New Testament word, its roots are firmly fixed in the Old Testament. As Galatians 3:8 (see above) shows, the gospel was preached thousands of years before Jesus was born. To understand the good news preached by Jesus and his disciples, the good news taken by Paul out into the Roman Empire, the good news we receive today, we must appreciate that its origins are to be found at the beginning of time. Indeed, the Apostle Peter states that the gospel he preached had been preached “since the world began” (Acts 3:21). The four references above set out clearly the importance of the gospel and give a framework for understanding it:

- to believe the gospel brings salvation
- to disregard the gospel brings damnation
- if the gospel is believed then baptism must follow
- the gospel message is information about the Kingdom of God and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ
- the hope of salvation is available to all men and women of all nationalities
- faith (belief) that God will accomplish His purpose of bringing salvation through Jesus comes through hearing the gospel message
- the gospel we receive today is the same gospel that Abraham believed 4,000 years ago.

The gospel in both Old and New Testaments

The writings of the Apostle Paul show clearly that the gospel message existed before he began his ministry. Before the Lord Jesus Christ was born it was spoken of by the prophets of the Old Testament, preached to Israel in the wilderness and believed and acted on by Abraham (Rom. 1:1,2; 2 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 4:2; Gal. 3:6-9).

The New Testament describes the gospel as “the hope of Israel”, and Paul and all those who accepted and believed this gospel identified their faith with that of Abraham and faithful men and women in Israel of old (Acts 26:6,7; 28:20; Rom. 4:11; Gal. 3:29).

The work of Jesus was “to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy” (Rom. 15:8,9). The gospel/good news is that God through Christ fulfils the promises to Abraham and Israel, and thus opens up a way of salvation, that all men and women might have eternal life in His Kingdom on this earth (Acts 13:32-39).

Resurrection from the dead, a physical experience, is the great hope enshrined in the promises of God, and faith in this is at the heart of the true gospel (1 Cor. 15:20-26; Ps. 71:20,21; Isa. 26:19; Jno. 11:21-27). Abraham had faith in the resurrection from the dead, as Hebrews 11:13-19 shows. Two incidents in his life especially demonstrate this. Genesis 15 shows

Abraham asking, “whereby shall I know that I shall inherit [the land]?” (v. 8), and he is reassured that, even though he will die “in a good old age”, God has made a covenant with him to give him his eternal inheritance (vv. 15,18). Genesis 22 contains the story of Abraham being prepared to offer his son Isaac, and in so doing demonstrating his faith in resurrection from the dead (Heb. 11:19).

The things concerning the Kingdom

When Philip preached the gospel to the people in Samaria, “the things concerning the kingdom of God” were an important part (Acts 8:12). It was necessary for people to know and understand about the Kingdom prior to being baptized. This Kingdom was the one that Abraham believed in and looked forward to, being described in the promises made by God to him (Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-17; ch. 15). Abraham expected the Kingdom to be on the earth, as can be seen from Romans 4:13: “For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith”. Stephen, the first martyr, points out that Abraham still awaits the fulfilment of the promises made by God concerning the earthly Kingdom: “He [God] gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet He promised that He would give it to him for a possession” (Acts 7:5). Hebrews 11:39,40 confirms that Abraham will inherit this earthly Kingdom along with faithful believers at a future time.

Jesus “went about . . . preaching the gospel of the kingdom”, as did his disciples (Mt. 4:23; Lk. 9:2,6,11). When he was born, the message of the angel was, “the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Lk. 1:32,33). Here is the link to the descendants of Abraham, showing that the Kingdom will be an everlasting Kingdom reigned over by Christ. Jesus taught his followers to pray, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Mt. 6:10), having the same expectation as that of Abraham. Along with his teaching, Jesus performed miracles, which gave a cameo of what the Kingdom will be like. The blind received sight, the deaf heard, the lame walked, disease was cured; he even raised the dead. The poor were justly treated and the hungry fed. Even the wind and waves obeyed his voice. His teaching showed men and women how to live and worship. This was a foretaste of the Kingdom spoken of by the prophets (Isa. 35; Ps. 37:11; 72; Mic. 4:1-4).

The things concerning the name of Jesus Christ

To live for ever in this wonderful Kingdom it will be necessary for death to be overcome. Death is a punishment for sin, and every one save Christ deserves to die (Gen. 3:17-19; Rom. 5:12). As Paul says, “the wages of sin is death”; but he goes on to say, “. . . but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). That is why Christ says, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad” (Jno. 8:56). Abraham looked forward to the time when the Son of God would make it possible for death to be overcome through his sinless life. Hebrews confirms that Jesus came to put away sin, and in his sacrifice our sins are forgiven (Heb. 9:11,12,26; 10:10). Jesus did not die instead of us, but his sacrifice is the means by which our sins are forgiven and we can be made immortal (1 Cor. 15:3,4,20-23). Paul teaches that it is belief in the things of the Kingdom and the work of Jesus that leads to baptism into the saving name of Jesus (Rom. 6:1-6), and in baptism we are linked to Abraham and his faith (Gal. 3:26-29).

So the gospel that has been preached for thousands of years holds out to all men and women the hope of eternal life in God’s Kingdom on the earth reigned over by Jesus Christ.

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

GRACE

The word *grace* occurs first in Genesis 6, where it is used of Noah: "But Noah found *grace* in the eyes of the LORD" (v. 8). The *grace*, or 'favour' as the original is sometimes translated, which God showed towards him, was manifested by God saving him and his family from the Flood. In Genesis 39, the Egyptian prisonkeeper is providentially caused to show *grace* towards Joseph, which in turn was a manifestation of the *grace* of God: "But the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him *favour* in the sight of the keeper of the prison" (v. 21). Christ had favour shown to him by both God and man: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in *favour* with God and man" (Lk. 2:52). Graciousness is an attribute of God: "I am *gracious*" (Ex. 22:27); "The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and *gracious*, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (34:6); "But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and *gracious*, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth" (Ps. 86:15).

A gift

When *grace* is shown towards a person, it is not because they are owed anything, it is a gift. Hence Paul spoke to the Ephesians of "the gift of the *grace* of God" (3:7).

When speaking of Abraham, Paul contrasted *grace* with a debt: "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of *grace*, but of debt" (Rom. 4:4). *Grace* is more akin to giving a gift than paying a wage. As Paul wrote later in the epistle: "And if by *grace*, then is it no more of works: otherwise *grace* is no more *grace*. But if it be of works, then is it no more *grace*: otherwise work is no more work" (11:6). *Grace* was shown towards Abraham in that his faith was "counted unto him for righteousness" (4:3). It is through the *grace* of God that man can be justified: "being justified freely by His *grace* through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (3:24).

The full outworking of *grace* will be seen when Christ returns: "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the *grace* that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:13). Then, *grace* will be seen to reign and eternal life will be the consequence: "that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might *grace* reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:21). Even before eternal life is given, we can even now approach God through the Lord Jesus Christ that we might be helped both through His Word and through the angels working in the circumstances of our lives. This help is provided as an act of *grace* by God: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of *grace*, that we may obtain mercy, and find *grace* to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16).

Requirements for receiving grace

Although *grace* is not earned like a wage, God only shows *grace* to those who are worthy. Moses spoke of how *grace* comes as a consequence of knowing God: ". . . shew me now Thy way, that I may know Thee, that I may find *grace* in Thy sight" (Ex. 33:13). Solomon wrote of how mercy and truth lead to *grace*: "Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: so shalt thou find *favour* [*grace*] and good understanding in the sight of God and man" (Prov. 3:3,4). To obtain *grace* from God, faith is a key requirement: "by whom [Jesus] also we have access by faith into this *grace* wherein we stand" (Rom. 5:2); "For by *grace* are ye saved through faith" (Eph. 2:8). Humility is another reason why God shows *grace* towards a person: "God resisteth the proud, but giveth *grace* unto the humble" (Jas. 4:6).

Once we have been shown *grace* by God it is possible to lose that *grace*, as Paul wrote of those who sought to return to the Law: "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of

you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from *grace*" (Gal. 5:4). And the Hebrews were exhorted to look "diligently lest any man fail of the *grace* of God" (12:15).

The example of the Macedonians and Corinthians

In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul writes of the Jerusalem poor fund, using *charis*, the Greek word for 'grace', in a variety of ways:

- The *grace* of God manifest in the gift of the Macedonians (v. 1)
- The *gift* (*charis*) of money given by the Macedonians (v. 4)
- The *grace* of God Paul hoped would be manifest in the gift of the Corinthians (vv. 6,7)
- The *grace* shown by Christ in rejecting the riches of the world (v. 9)
- The money ("*this grace*") being taken to Jerusalem by Titus and Paul (v. 19).

Spirit gifts

Sometimes *grace* refers to the Spirit gifts. These were originally given at Pentecost, with each gift having a clearly defined function. These gifts died out by the end of the first century.

Peter wrote: "As every man hath received the gift [literally 'a gift'], even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold *grace* of God" (1 Pet. 4:10). (The Greek word for "gift" here is *charisma*, and is related to the word *charis*.) "Gift" refers here to the gifts of the Spirit. Paul says: "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:4). This diversity included things such as healing and prophecy (see vv. 8-10). This variety of gifts is referred to as "*manifold grace*" in 1 Peter 4:10. 'Manifold' means varied, and the Greek word in this verse is usually rendered 'divers' in the AV. Thus "*the manifold grace*" speaks of a variety of specific gifts which had a specific role in the growth of the early ecclesias.

Paul speaks of these gifts again, in Romans 12: "Having then gifts [*charisma*] differing according to the *grace* [*charis*] that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching" (vv. 6,7). The "*grace* that is given" is not vague and abstract, but relates to particular and identifiable gifts. In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul said: "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the *grace* of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge" (vv. 4,5). Here, the "*grace*" led to "utterance" and "knowledge", examples of the work of the Spirit gifts.

John wrote of Christ: "And of his fulness have all we received, and *grace* for *grace*. For the law was given by Moses, but *grace* and truth came by Jesus Christ" (Jno. 1:16,17). "*Grace* . . . came" as a contrast to the works of the Law, where the reward is "not reckoned of *grace*, but of debt" (Rom. 4:5). But "*grace* for *grace*" relates to "fulness", and this "fulness" refers to the Spirit of God which Christ had. Christ had this "fulness", for God gave "not the Spirit by measure unto him" (Jno. 3:34) and thus he was filled with the Spirit, even as "the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy [Spirit]" (Acts 13:52). Paul too wrote of how the Spirit gifts led to "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-13).

Grace today

As in the first century, the believer today has been given "good hope through *grace*" (2 Thess. 2:16), this hope having been revealed in God's Word. The believer is "justified by His *grace*" (Tit. 3:7) and has "forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His *grace*" (Eph. 1:7). However, he should not "continue in sin, that *grace* may abound" (Rom. 6:1), but should rather "walk in newness of life" (v. 4). In the meantime, God's *grace* is shown on a daily basis through the comfort of the Scriptures and the providential guidance of the angels. The believer should strive to show *grace*, not least in all his words, ensuring his "speech be alway with *grace*" (Col. 4:6).

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

HELL

Hell in the Old Testament

In the Authorised Version of the Old Testament the word 'hell' appears thirty-one times (Deut. 32:22; 2 Sam. 22:6; Job 11:8; 26:6; Ps. 9:17; 16:10; 18:5; 55:15; 86:13; 116:3; 139:8; Prov. 5:5; 7:27; 9:18; 15:11,24; 23:14; 27:20; Isa. 5:14; 14:9,15; 28:15,18; 57:9; Ezek. 31:16,17; 32:21,27; Amos 9:2; Jon. 2:2; Hab. 2:5).

In the Revised Standard Version of the Old Testament the word 'hell' does not appear in any of these verses. Instead the word 'Sheol' appears. What does Sheol mean? *Sheol* is a Hebrew word which means "a hollow and subterranean place, full of thick darkness" (Gesenius). The New International Version of the Old Testament does not use 'Sheol' or 'hell' in any of these verses but rather 'grave', 'death' or 'the depths'.

In none of the verses where *sheol* appears is there any association with the idea that this is a place of torment or punishment. The verses which do comment on what is experienced in *sheol* indicate that there is a complete lack of conscious thought or deliberate action there. For example:

"For in death there is no remembrance of Thee: in the grave [*sheol*] who shall give Thee thanks?" (Ps. 6:5);

"there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave [*sheol*]" (Eccl. 9:10);

"the grave [*sheol*] cannot praise Thee, death cannot celebrate Thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for Thy truth" (Isa. 38:18).

'Hell' in the AV of the Old Testament is, therefore, to be understood as referring to that place to which *all* are gathered at death.

Hell in the New Testament

In the Authorised Version of the New Testament the word 'hell' appears twenty-three times. This may cause confusion because in the original Greek three different words are to be found. These are *gehenna* (Mt. 5:22,29,30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15,33; Mk. 9:43,45,47; Lk. 12:5; Jas. 3:6), *hadēs* (Mt. 11:23; 16:18; Lk. 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27,31; Rev. 1:18; 6:8; 20:13,14), and *tartaroō* (2 Pet. 2:4).

The confusion is compounded in the New International Version, which renders *hadēs* as 'hell' in Luke 16:23, as 'grave' in Acts 2:27 and as 'Hades' in Revelation 1:18. In the Revised Standard Version there is less confusion and more consistency because *gehenna* is always translated 'hell', and *hadēs* is left as 'Hades' (Matthew 16:18 uses 'death', but the margin indicates 'Hades').

What do these Greek words mean?

Gehenna means 'the valley of (the sons of) Hinnom'. In the Old Testament it is associated with idolatry, fire rituals and child sacrifices (2 Kgs. 23:10; Jer. 7:31,32; 19:1-6; 32:35).

In New Testament times it was still associated with fire and death. It was the place where the bodies of convicted criminals were thrown and where waste materials were

deposited to be destroyed by the ever-burning fires. With the exception of James 3:6 it is used only by Jesus, and in passages in which he is stressing the certainty of annihilation at death if behaviour and attitudes are not changed. "Hell fire" is not, therefore, speaking of the nature of the punishment for those adjudged as wicked but is a picture of what will happen to the unworthy. As the hot and corrosive conditions in the valley of Hinnom utterly destroyed anything left there, so the unworthy will cease to exist.

Hadēs is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *sheol* and generally refers to that which the dead occupy: the grave. It is translated as 'grave' in the AV in this passage: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave [*hadēs*], where is thy victory?" (1 Cor. 15:55). This appears to be quoting Hosea 13:14, where, interestingly, *sheol* is translated 'grave': "O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave [*sheol*], I will be thy destruction".

In Luke 16, however, in the parable of the rich man and the beggar, Jesus uses this word (*hadēs*) in conjunction with a statement about the bosom of Abraham. Referring to the rich man, Jesus says: "and in hell [*hadēs*] he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom" (v. 23).

Josephus, the Jewish historian, wrote a Discourse to the Greeks concerning Hades. In this he refers to a place called "The Bosom of Abraham", which appears to be a temporary abode of the just, having died, as they await "that rest and eternal new life in heaven, which is to succeed this region". These ideas discussed by Josephus have no support in Scripture, but describe a scenario of man's devising of what happens to the righteous and the unrighteous after death. Jesus brings attention to the inconsistencies of these mistaken beliefs through his parable, which is designed to alert them to the fact that they were following the teaching neither of Moses nor of himself.

Tartaroō means 'to cast down to Tartarus'. Tartarus was "regarded by the ancient Greeks as the abode of the wicked dead" (Thayer). The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* informs us that it was "the infernal regions of ancient Greek mythology . . . where the gods locked up their enemies".

It is, therefore, an imaginary, mythological place, and Peter, like Jesus in the parable referred to above, was using an idea from the culture of the day. He combined this then current idea with historical incidents from the Scriptures to emphasise his message—the certainty of God's eventual judgement and punishment of the "unjust" (2 Pet. 2:4-9).

Conclusion

All go to hell when death comes. Even Jesus was no exception (see Acts 2:25-31). It is not, however, a fearful place where those who have not satisfied God's requirements suffer eternal torment by fire.

Its meaning must be derived from the original Hebrew and Greek words used and be in harmony with overall Scriptural teaching. This teaching is that the bodies of the responsible dead wait to be regenerated and brought to life again at the return of Jesus so that all might receive the decision of the righteous judge. Those accounted worthy will be made immortal and inherit the earth (they do not go to heaven). Those accounted as not worthy of immortality will perish (they do not suffer eternal torment in the raging fires of an imaginary hell).

BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

HOPE

The hope of Israel

Zechariah wrote: "As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water. Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope: even to day do I declare that I will render double unto thee" (9:11,12). We are all born as prisoners of sin and death. Yet, through the blood of Christ, the blood of the new covenant, we can have hope of being released from this prison.

The Hebrew in Zechariah 9:12 is literally, "the hope". There is only "one hope" (Eph. 4:4). It is "the hope of the gospel" (Col. 1:23). Paul called it "the hope of Israel" (Acts 28:20). For this hope, he says, he was bound by a chain. He truly was a prisoner of the hope. Paul said to Agrippa, "And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers" (26:6). The promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob formed the basis for his hope. Abraham provides a prime example of a man who hoped for that time when the promises would be fulfilled: "Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be" (Rom. 4:18).

Unlike the blessings of the Law, these promises are based on justification by faith and not perfect obedience to the works of the Law. Also, they will last for ever. They are therefore "better promises" (Heb. 8:6). The "hope of the promise" is therefore a "better hope" (7:19).

Hope of eternal life

The "one hope" is described in various other ways:

- the hope of righteousness (Gal. 5:5)
- the hope of glory (Col. 1:27)
- the hope of salvation (1 Thess. 5:8)
- the hope of eternal life (Tit. 3:7; cf. 1:2).

All these different descriptions relate to the time when the Kingdom will be restored to Israel. The hope of true believers is that they will one day share in that time when the earth will be full of righteousness and the glory of God, and when they will have salvation from sin and death through the gift of eternal life. Hope is therefore vital for salvation. As Paul says: "For we are saved by hope" (Rom. 8:24). The hope is a living hope made possible by the resurrection of Christ: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3).

David wrote, "my flesh also shall rest in hope" (Ps. 16:9). Peter quoted this and showed that it applied to Christ: "moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope" (Acts 2:26). In the psalm the Hebrew for "hope" has the sense of 'confidently' (see AV margin) or 'safely'. Christ's hope was based on the confidence that God would resurrect him from the dead. He had this hope and trust in God even as a child: "But Thou art He That took me out of the womb: Thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts" (Ps. 22:9).

The God of hope

The importance of hope is shown by Paul when he says that God is "the God of hope" (Rom. 15:13). We should "have hope toward God" (Acts 24:15) and our "hope" should be "in God" (1 Pet. 1:21).

How we can have hope

By definition, hope involves things we cannot yet see: "but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it" (Rom. 8:24,25). We therefore need patience, or endurance, if hope is to develop. This endurance of hope must continue at all times, and requires effort on our part: "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:13). And so hope will come with experience: "patience [worketh] experience; and experience, hope" (Rom. 5:4).

Proverbs 13:12 sums up what it is like for believers as they wait for the hope of eternal life to come to pass: "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life".

Yet hope comes not just from experience. Our hope is based on the Word of God: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). The hope is from heaven, and we can only find out about it from God's revealed Word: "the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel" (Col. 1:5). When we hear the Word of God we should have faith (Rom. 10:17). This faith provides a firm underlying basis for hope: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1).

The effect of hope

The hope of Israel should cause us to rejoice:

- "rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:2)
- "rejoicing in hope" (12:12)
- "the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end" (Heb. 3:6).

The hope has a purifying effect upon the believer: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 Jno. 3:2,3).

We should preach the hope of Israel to others and we should be prepared to explain to others the reasons why we have this hope: "sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15).

Hope is an important part of the love of God, for love "hopeth all things" (1 Cor. 13:7). That is, all the things that God has promised, we should hope for. Yet, although hope is vital, it is not as important as love: "And now abideth faith, hope, charity [love], these three; but the greatest of these is charity [love]" (v. 13).

Israel and their hope

When the invasion of Israel by Gog takes place, the nation of Israel will think all hope is lost: "Then He [God] said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts" (Ezek. 37:11). Yet, in the mercy of God, the Lord Jesus Christ will deliver them, and then, with Paul, they will say that God and the Lord Jesus Christ are "our hope" (1 Tim. 1:1).

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

— IDOLATRY —

“You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them” (Ex. 20:3-5).

“When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:4,5).

The children of Israel and idols

The Scriptures teach us that the God of the Bible is very aware of the ability of men and women to invent false gods—idols—and to ascribe to them powers that He and He alone possesses. God’s solemn instruction to Israel through Moses in the quotation from Exodus 20 above shows that nothing was to divert an Israelite from worshipping the true God. Nothing in the creation around them was to be used as a substitute for, or to replace, the God Who had delivered them from bondage in Israel.

The nation of Israel had been released from Egypt, a country with many false gods and idols, by the mighty power of an invisible God. Israel were to go the land of Canaan, a land occupied by nations who were idol worshippers, and surrounded by other nations who were also idol worshippers. God’s people were instructed not to follow such practices (Ex. 23:23-33; 34:10-17; Lev. 26:1; Deut. 7:1-6; 16:22).

The worship of idols was not something that was confined to religious activity. Belief in such false gods affected every aspect of life: commerce, agriculture, education and family life. And such influences and dangers were not restricted to Old Testament times: they did not disappear with the passing of the centuries.

Idolatry: New Testament times and today

In the New Testament period, many centuries later, the world was still dominated by idolatry. The gospel went out into the Roman Empire, into nations and cities filled with idolatry. The Acts of the Apostles records the way in which the preaching of the gospel dramatically impacted on idol worship. Such worship was ingrained into the very fabric of public and private life (Acts 14:8-18; 16:16-23; 19:23-28). For the first-century Christian it was not just a question of staying away from the pagan temples and the worship of false gods. The quotation from Colossians 3 shows that a wrong attitude of mind could also lead people into a form of idolatry. Paul equates covetousness—a greed for earthly possessions, a desire for material gain—with worshipping idols. The antidote for the early Christian believers was that they should have in their minds a picture of the return of Christ and the promise of the Kingdom and should use this as the motivation to discipline their natural desires (see also Ephesians 5:5). It is these natural desires that have driven men and women to invent false gods—idols—down through the centuries.

In the modern world of the twenty-first century that problem still exists. The world is full of false gods as well as false religions that divert attention away from the one true God and cause people to concentrate their time, energy and activities on fulfilling their own desires. The list of modern ‘idols’ is enormous, but some are easily recognised. Sport, entertainment,

wealth, evolution, humanism, scientific achievement and, even today, established religions have literal idols as part of their worship. Spending a life in pursuit of such things, whilst ignoring the true God and Christ as revealed in the Scriptures, is a modern form of idolatry.

Lessons from the past for the present

Two references in Jeremiah highlight for us important principles relating to the subject of idolatry. First, in Jeremiah 1:16, God shows how idolatry takes hold and what it leads to: “. . . concerning all their wickedness, because they have forsaken Me, burned incense to other gods, [they have] worshipped the works of their own hands.” Turning away from God inevitably leads men and women to invent their own false gods to worship; it is then a natural consequence for them to take pride in themselves.

Then, in Jeremiah 13:10, the message from God says that failing to hear His words leads to idolatry and pride. The world today is deaf to the Word of God, and most people “follow the dictates of their hearts,” creating false gods and then taking pride in them. It was for this reason that the northern kingdom of Israel was taken away into captivity never to return (Amos 5:25-27; on the southern kingdom of Judah see Jeremiah 7:17,18,24-26; 24:5). A faithful remnant was preserved and eventually returned in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, after which the problem of idolatry as practised earlier does not seem to have reappeared in the restored nation.

The one true Image

In Old Testament and New Testament times, nations and people built idols and engaged in idolatry to provide a visible image or representation of their invisible gods. They looked to the natural world about them, or copied the practices of the nations around them, or used their own imaginations to produce a tangible object to worship.

Genesis 1 and some words of Jesus in Matthew 22 help us to understand God’s abhorrence of idolatry. At Creation it is recorded that God said: “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness . . . in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:26,27). Yet only part of this was fulfilled, since it was not possible, because of sin, for men and women to show the true likeness (or character) of God. To be godlike or godly, to display godliness, is a responsibility placed on all men and women. This is why God forbade any other images—idols—to be made or copied, because we are meant to be His image here on earth. Jesus teaches this in the well-known quotation: “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mt. 22:21). The coin bore Caesar’s image, but mankind is supposed to bear God’s.

Paul says that Christ is “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15); and Hebrews 1:3 says that Christ is “the brightness of [God’s] glory and the express image of His person.” So Jesus was able to say to Philip: “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (Jno. 14:9). Jesus is the example for us all; and as we await his return we are instructed to turn from idolatry, to put off the old man and to put on the new man “who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him Who created him” (Col. 3:8-11), in order that we might, in the day of his appearing, truly be changed to be like the Lord Jesus Christ.

(All quotations from the New King James Version)

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

THE VERBAL INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

A belief in a wholly-inspired Bible is the very foundation principle of the Christadelphian faith. The verbal inspiration of Scripture is a doctrine of fundamental importance; for if the writing of the Bible was not Divinely (and therefore infallibly) guided, then the source of what we know of God and His dealings with men would be unreliable. If we could not, with absolute confidence as to its Divine origin and production, turn to the Bible as the authoritative Word of God in all its parts, then we would be quite unable to make any certain progress towards true enlightenment in spiritual things and in matters related to salvation.

This is why the Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith begins with the Foundation Clause: “That the book currently known as the Bible, consisting of the Scriptures of Moses, the prophets, and the apostles, is the only source of knowledge concerning God and His purposes at present extant or available in the earth, and that the same were wholly given by inspiration of God in the writers, and are consequently without error in all parts of them, except such as may be due to errors of transcription or translation (2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Cor. 2:13; Heb. 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:21; 1 Cor. 14:37; Neh. 9:30; John 10:35)”.

The key aspects of Biblical inspiration are as follows:

- 1 The Bible was produced by the ‘outbreathing’ of God through His Spirit:**
2 Timothy 3:16—“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (where the italicised words are a single Greek word, *theopneustos*, meaning, literally, ‘God-breathed [out]’). (There are no really sound linguistic grounds for weakening the sense of Paul’s words, as the NEB and the RV do, by translating it as “Every Scripture inspired of God is also . . .”; the RV margin, the NIV, the Jerusalem Bible and many other modern translations give the proper sense required by the Greek sentence construction.)
- 2 The Spirit of God ‘carried men along’ to write His Word:**
2 Peter 1:20,21—“. . . no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved [Gk. *pherō*, ‘to be carried (along)’] by the Holy Spirit”.
- 3 The inspired writers of the Bible wrote with the Divine authority of God Himself, and their words are binding on God’s people:**
1 Corinthians 2:12,13—“Now we have received . . . the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth”.
1 Corinthians 14:37—“. . . the things that I [the Apostle Paul] write unto you are the commandments of the Lord”.
John 10:35—According to Jesus, “the scripture cannot be broken”.

4 The inspiration of the Bible involved the Divine control or superintendence of the very words used:

Numbers 22:38; 23:3,5—“And Balaam said . . . the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak . . . and whatsoever He sheweth me I will tell . . . And the Lord put a word in Balaam’s mouth”.

2 Samuel 23:1-3—“Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said . . . The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was in my tongue. The God of Israel said . . .”.

Jeremiah 1:7,9—“But the Lord said unto me [Jeremiah] . . . whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak . . . Behold, I have put My words in thy mouth”.

John 14:10,24—“. . . the words that I [Jesus] speak unto you I speak not of myself . . . the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s Which sent me”.

5 Because the words themselves were Divinely inspired (as well as the writers), the possibility of the original Scriptures containing errors is excluded:

Psalms 12:6—“The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times”.

“We do not insist on any particular theory as to the modus operandi of inspiration. What we contend for is that by whatever process the result is, the Scriptures are the product of inspiration, and that inspiration does not err” (Robert Roberts, *The Christadelphian*, Feb. 1887).

6 The power of God’s Spirit to enlighten, to convert, and to save is in the Scriptures themselves, and the benefit of their Divine origin is conveyed to us in their words, which do not require the additional operation of the Holy Spirit to make them intelligible:

2 Timothy 3:15—“. . . the holy scriptures . . . are able [Gk. *dunamai*, ‘have power’] to make thee wise unto salvation”.

John 6:63—“. . . the words that I [Jesus] speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life”.

Acts 20:32—“I [Paul] commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified”.

Romans 10:17—“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”.

Isaiah 55:11—“My word . . . that goeth forth out of My [God’s] mouth . . . shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it”.

“The Bible is our light and life as much today as when fresh from the hands of its Author . . . As we value our life, let us stand with indomitable resolution against all doctrines that would . . . detract from the authority or importance of the Scriptures” (Robert Roberts).

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

ISRAEL IN THE PURPOSE OF GOD

"For the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain" (Acts 28:20).

The great purpose of God with the earth is to fill it with the knowledge of His glory (Num. 14:21; Ps. 72:19; Isa. 6:3; Hab. 2:14). He will be "all in all" at the end of the Kingdom, when, under the good reign of His Son, all human rulers and authorities will be put down, and death itself will be no more (1 Cor. 15:24-28). The earth will then be populated by men and women who reflect the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26).

The promises of God

In His wisdom, God has chosen a nation, Israel, to be the means or channel by which this great purpose will be achieved. It was to the fathers of Israel that God gave covenants of promise (Gal. 3:16; Eph. 2:12). God appeared to Abraham at least seven times, and gave him promises concerning the land of Canaan, eternal life, nations that would descend from him, and a seed who would bring blessings to all nations (Gen. 12:1-3,7; 13:14-17; 15:18-21; 17:3-8,19; 22:15-18). Similar promises were made to Isaac, his son, and Jacob, his grandson (26:2-5,24; 28:13-15; 35:9-12; 46:3,4).

From Jacob the twelve tribes of Israel descended and became a large nation in Egypt, from whence they were led out by Moses to the Land of Promise (Canaan). God told them that they were a special nation for Him, and that they should behave as holy people. Through Moses, God gave them His laws and the Ten Commandments, which Israel agreed to keep (Ex. 19:5,6; 20; 24:4-8; Deut. 7:6-11; 9:3-6). But Israel failed to keep God's laws, and added to their sins by rejecting God, Who was their unseen King, and asking for a king they could see. Eventually God gave them David, "the sweet psalmist of Israel" and the conqueror of Goliath, "a man after [God's] own heart", and he was anointed with oil as their king (1 Sam. 8:7,8; 13:14; 16:11-13; 2 Sam. 23:1).

David, the king of Israel, was given further covenants of promise. His kingdom (Israel, the kingdom of God) and throne (Jerusalem) would be established for ever, and, like the promises to Abraham, there would be a seed (descendant) who would fulfil these things. David himself would see it all (2 Sam. 7:12-17; 1 Chron. 17:11-15; 28:5; 29:11,23; Ps. 89:20-37).

The coming of the seed

A succession of kings followed David, some faithful and others not. God remonstrated with His people by sending many prophets to Israel, such as Jonah, Isaiah and Jeremiah. Eventually the nation became so corrupt that God sent foreign invaders, the Assyrians, the Babylonians and the Greeks, as punishment (2 Chron. 36:15-17; Ezek. 21:25-27; Dan. 11). At the time when the Romans had succeeded the Greeks as the dominant power in the region, Jesus Christ was born a Jew.

Although the common Jewish people heard Jesus gladly, their rulers did not, and they had Jesus crucified. But he rose from the dead after three days, and was given everlasting life. He instructed the apostles in his teaching for forty days, and went to heaven with the promise that he would return to the earth. Shortly after his ascension to heaven, the Romans besieged Jerusalem, and Israel as a nation ceased to exist. It has been predominantly Gentiles over the last 2,000 years who have accepted the teachings of Christ and his apostles (Lk. 21:20-24; Acts 1:11; 2:22-24; 13:46).

Although for nearly 2,000 years the nation of Israel did not exist, the purpose of God through His people is unchanged. Jesus, through his mother Mary, is Jewish and descended

from Abraham and David. He is the seed promised to these two men who will sit on David's throne in Jerusalem and rule for ever over the Kingdom of God (Israel restored and enlarged) and bring blessing to all families of the earth (Mt. 1:1; Lk. 1:31-35; Acts 1:3-7; 2:30,31; 3:19-21). When Jesus came 2,000 years ago, the Jews did not realise that, before the promises to Abraham could be fulfilled in their entirety, he would offer himself as a sacrifice for sins. Abraham was shown in Genesis 15 that the promises were conditional upon sacrifice, and enacted that sacrifice with his son Isaac (ch. 22). Several prophecies of the Messiah foretold his sufferings for sins and his resurrection (2 Sam. 7:14,15; Ps. 16:9-11; 22; Isa. 53).

Israel restored

Today, after 2,000 years of being scattered and persecuted, there is once again a nation of Israel for the Jewish people. This has all happened just as God foretold in the prophets (Deut. 28:15-68; Isa. 11:1,10-16; Jer. 30:3,10,11; 31:10-14; Ezek. 37:21-28). But modern Israel still turns its back on God, and their religion, Judaism, fiercely rejects Jesus Christ as being the Messiah.

The prophets, again, show us how modern Israel is to change. They will accept and love Jesus as their King and Redeemer so that they become a righteous, faithful and God-fearing nation. They will be God's people and He will be their God. There is to be a great invasion of Israel by northern and western nations in the not too distant future, which will overwhelm and crush Israel. But God will bring a huge earthquake, hail and brimstone, disease and mutual destruction upon the invaders. Jesus will be revealed as their Saviour, and, after intense national mourning, a remnant of the nation will welcome Jesus, as he foretold long ago, and the twelve apostles will rule over their twelve tribes (Ps. 118:22-26; Isa. 59:19-21; Ezek. 37:23-28; 38; 39; Joel 3; Micah 5:4,5; Zech. 12:9-14; 13:6-9; 14:1-11; Mt. 19:27,28; 23:37-39; Rom. 11:25-29; Rev 1:7; 16:15-18).

A worldwide Kingdom

Israel has been and still is at the centre of God's purpose. Israel's immortal King (Jesus Christ) and co-rulers (those faithful to God since the Creation up to the return of Jesus) will rule from Jerusalem, as David was promised, over God's Kingdom (the nation of Israel). The cleansed and righteous nation will be a tool of judgement against nations who rebel against Christ's authority, and an example of obedience for the Gentile nations. The Kingdom of God under the guidance of the Lord Jesus Christ will extend over all the earth and bring blessing to all peoples (Ps. 72; Isa. 2:2-4; 32:1,15-19; 44:21-23; 49:13-23; 60; 62:1-7; 65:17-25; Jer. 31:31-37; 51:19-23; Zeph. 3:8-20; Zech. 14:14-21; Mt. 5:35; Jno. 4:22; Acts 24:14,15; 26:6-8; 28:20,23).

Centre of the gospel

The gospel taught by Jesus and the apostles is centred in the promises and prophecies given earlier in the Scriptures. A true Christian understands the Israelitish nature of his hope and rejoices in the partial return of the Jews to Israel as an indication that the return of Jesus is not far off, and the resurrection and the setting up of the Kingdom also. Such believers who are baptized into the saving name of Jesus Christ are "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise", and will in God's mercy see the glorious things that are to be fulfilled in Israel (Dan. 12:1-3; Lk. 21:24-28; Rom. 11:1,11-36; Gal. 3:8,9,16,26-29; Eph. 2:11-13).

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

JERUSALEM, CITY OF THE GREAT KING

“Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King” (Ps. 48:2);

“Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together: whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the LORD” (122:2-4);

“Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God” (87:3).

Central to the message of salvation in the Bible is God’s chosen race of Israel and the land which He gave to them. It was from this nation and to this land that His only begotten Son came, with the promise, made to his mother, that “the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Lk. 1:32,33).

This ‘throne of David’ was the royal seat of the kingdom of Israel in Jerusalem, which was promised by God to David’s descendants and therefore ultimately to Jesus himself (1 Chron. 17:11,12; 28:5; 29:23). Jerusalem is therefore identified as the future location of the rulership of the Lord Jesus Christ over the Kingdom of God; it will assume the role of the capital city of his worldwide régime.

The history of Jerusalem

Jerusalem first appears in history around 1900 B.C. as the hilltop city of *Salem*, associated with the king/priest Melchizedek who there met and blessed Abraham, the forefather of the Israelites (Gen. 14:18-20). Later it is mentioned under the name *Jebusi* (Josh. 18:28), the home of a Canaanite tribe, the Jebusites. It was from the Jebusites that David captured the city, around 1004 B.C., and made it the capital of Israel, also referred to as *Zion*, and *the city of David* (1 Chron. 11:4-7).

During the period of the divided monarchy, Jerusalem continued as the capital of the southern kingdom of Judah. It was captured and destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. (2 Kgs. 25:1-10) but restored under the Persian Empire (Ezra 1:1-4; Neh. 2:17; 6:15). It remained the principal city during both the Greek and Roman periods, but was again destroyed and the temple burnt by the Romans in A.D. 70.

In subsequent centuries Jerusalem was at various times occupied by Byzantines, Persians, Arabs, Crusaders and Turks, eventually coming under British mandate following the First World War. After the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, the city was divided between Israel and Jordan until the Six-Day War in 1967, when it was reunited to become the modern capital of Israel.

The place for God’s Name

Jerusalem, the name of which probably means ‘foundation of peace’, has a significance in the Bible far beyond being simply the administrative capital of Israel. Even before the nation entered the land under Joshua, God had appointed a ‘place’ at which Israel would congregate to worship, and which is described as bearing His Name: “. . . when ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the LORD your God giveth you to inherit, and when He giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety; then

there shall be a place which the LORD your God shall choose to *cause His name to dwell there*" (Deut. 12:10,11). This place, although referred to twenty-one times, is not named in Deuteronomy, but the connection with Abraham and the offering of his son Isaac on Mount Moriah, one of its hills (Gen. 22:1,2,14), clearly identifies Jerusalem as the appointed centre for Israel's worship.

Consequently, when David came to the throne he understood Jerusalem to be 'the place' chosen by God as the nation's capital and the location for the 'house of the LORD', the temple (1 Chron. 21:28; 22:1). David accumulated a large store of materials for the temple's construction, received its plans by revelation, and charged his son Solomon with the task of building (28:2-6,11,12; 29:1-5). When Solomon succeeded to the throne he was faithful to that charge, and over a period of twenty years oversaw the erection of both the temple and the royal palace and judgement hall (2 Chron. 2:1; 3:1; 8:1). God's acceptance of the temple as a fitting symbol of His spiritual presence among His chosen people was marked by a manifestation of Divine glory (7:1) and by words of approval to Solomon in a dream (vv. 12-16).

After the Babylonian exile, the temple was rebuilt in Jerusalem at the urging of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 1:1-4; 5:1,2; 6:14,15). During the Roman period, Herod the Great began the rebuilding of the temple on a grander scale, but this was scarcely finished before the destruction of A.D. 70. This was the temple visited by the Lord Jesus Christ, who twice cleansed its courts by expelling the traders who misused it (Jno. 2:13-17; Mt. 21:12,13) and correctly prophesied of its demise, because of the injustice and violence of its rulers (Mt. 23:34-39; 24:1,2).

Present strife, future glory

Just as the Bible's prophets declare the continuing role of the Jewish people in the purpose of God as His witnesses (Isa. 43:10; Rom. 11:1,2,25-27), so they are emphatic concerning the future position of Jerusalem. Jesus himself foretold not only the banishment of the Jews from Jerusalem but also their future reoccupation of it (Lk. 21:24), which was finally fulfilled after the Six-Day War of 1967. The city is yet to be the focus of the conflict among the nations, which will lead to Armageddon and the return of Jesus, and hence an insoluble problem for the world's leaders (Zech. 12:1-3; 14:1-3), as it is becoming at the present time.

However, the future glory of Jerusalem is assured by the words of the same prophets. Its temple is to be rebuilt yet again to act as the centre of worship for the nations (Zech. 14:16; Ezek. 43:4-7), and the Lord Jesus Christ is to make it the seat of his worldwide government, from which God's righteous laws will be administered to bring justice and peace (Isa. 2:1-4; Mic. 4:1-7). Indeed, those who are the true followers of Jesus by faith share the privilege of honorary citizenship of Jerusalem (Ps. 87:5,6) and can look forward to being witnesses of its coming glory.

"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations" (Mt. 25:31,32);

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek thy good" (Ps. 122:6-9).

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

THE JEWS—GOD'S WITNESSES

*"Therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, that I am God" (Isa. 43:12).
"Though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I
not make a full end of thee" (Jer. 30:11).*

The Jews, the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob, have a special place in the purpose of God with mankind. They were recipients of, and custodians of, God's written revelation. Through them God raised up His Son, their Messiah. In their deliverance from Egypt and their subsequent history they have become witnesses to the truth of God's promises to them, and thus witnesses to His existence.

Their role has not ceased with the first coming of Jesus, for their regathering in the twentieth century, in fulfilment of Bible prophecy, is a witness to the nearness of Jesus's second coming, and the focus for the revelation of Divine power to save them from international aggression. This will cause God's Name to be known among all nations, and will establish Jerusalem as the centre of the Kingdom of God.

Gentile believers are given title to the promises made to the fathers of Israel through belief of the gospel (also described as the Hope of Israel) and baptism into Jesus Christ. If faithful they will be part of the "all Israel [that] shall be saved" (Rom. 11:26) when Jesus comes.

- **Beloved for the fathers' sakes**

The children of Israel were selected as the channel of Divine revelation because they were the descendants of the faithful fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, not for their moral excellence. They were expected to show a similar faith by believing and obeying God's Law. In this way they would become an example to the surrounding nations, and fulfil their calling as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

(Gen. 12:2; 13:15,16; 22:16-18; Ex. 19:4-6; Deut. 4:5-8; 7:6-11; Jno. 8:39)

- **A covenant people**

The descendants of Jacob were forged into a distinct nation in Egypt. Their deliverance was a signal act which showed God as a God of judgement, power and graciousness. This event is commemorated annually when Jews keep the Passover to celebrate their redemption from Egypt. At Sinai their calling was confirmed when they agreed to be obedient to God's law. This covenant was renewed with the

generation that actually entered the Land of Promise, Canaan, and is the basis of God's treatment of them, as witnessed by their history: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities".

(Amos 3:2; Gen. 15:13,14; Ex. 1:7; 9:13-16; 12:15,17; 24:7; Deut. 4:23,24; Josh. 24:21-25; Rom. 3:1,2)

- **Scattering and regathering**

Israel were offered prosperity and blessing in return for obedience, but deprivation and cursing if disobedient. Continued disobedience would result in removal from the land and scattering among the nations, where they would be oppressed and become a proverb. Both outcomes have been experienced by the nation. Blessings were abundant in the reigns of David and Solomon and other faithful kings; trouble and captivity came following continued disobedience, culminating in the deportation of the ten tribes to Assyria and the two tribes to Babylon.

Following the national rejection of Jesus as their Messiah, the nation was scattered throughout the world for nearly two millennia, and Jerusalem became subject to Gentile control. Yet their national identity has been preserved, a witness that God keeps His word.

God's promises also allowed for their return and re-establishment as a nation in the Land of Promise. This became a reality in 1948, and the whole of Jerusalem came under Jewish control in 1967. However, the prophets tell us that this situation will be opposed by other nations, resulting in an international attack that will require the nation to be saved by Divine intervention on Jesus's return.

(Deut. 28; Lev. 26; Joel 3:1,2,9-17,20,21; Zech. 14; Lk. 21:20-27)

- **Not cast off**

Some contend that Israel's persistent disobedience, culminating in the murder of their Messiah, means that the nation has been cast off and its place taken by believers in Jesus Christ. Paul specifically refutes this idea. The Jews are still the basis of God's work of salvation, but Gentiles can, by faith, share the promises, which will be fulfilled at the return of Jesus when "all Israel shall be saved" (Rom. 11:26).

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

LOVE

The love of God is far above natural love; nevertheless the love between a husband and his wife is typical of the love of God for Israel and of Christ for the ecclesia. In the Greek there is a word for the love of God, namely, *agapē*, and a word for natural love, *phileō*. In the Hebrew Old Testament, however, there is one word, *ahab*, for both the love of God and natural love.

Agapē is described as sacrificial love because it is love of a person contrary to our natural feelings when no cause for love exists. It is best expressed in the words: "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

Phileō means to be a friend or to have affection for (denoting personal attachment as a matter of sentiment or feeling). *Agapē* is wider, as shown in the above quotation. In nearly every place where it is used it is in connection with the love of God. In a very few instances it is used in such ways as the love of the world, possibly because *agapē* conveys the idea of a deliberate act as opposed to a natural act. If we turn from the Truth to the world it is a deliberate act in opposition to the Truth.

God's love for us

Agapē love is so bound up with God that we read that "God is love". Hence the words: "Beloved, let us love one another: *for love is of God*; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for *God is love*. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 Jno. 4:7-10).

The character of God is love. In the Hebrew the word 'name' has the meaning of 'character', and God's Name is revealed in Exodus 34. Moses desired to know God's way that he might know Him, and to be shown His glory (Ex. 33:13,18), and Yahweh replied:

"I will make all My goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD [Yahweh] before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy" (v. 19).

Then, in the morning, Moses went up Mount Sinai with the tables of stone, and Yahweh proclaimed His Name there:

"And the LORD [Yahweh] descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD [Yahweh]. And the LORD [Yahweh] passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD [Yahweh], The LORD [Yahweh] God [EL], merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation" (34:5-7).

In this Name are expressed the qualities of love. Let us note the qualities of the love of God: merciful, gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. But He will by no means clear the guilty. The last part of the above quotation is qualified by Exodus 20:5, where we read: ". . . visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them *that hate Me*".

We see, then, that love is a combination of goodness and severity. Hence the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 11:22: "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell [Israel at this time], severity; but toward thee [the Gentiles], goodness, *if thou continue in His goodness*: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off". Also the words in 1 Corinthians 13:6, which says that love "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth". (Note that 'charity' should read 'love' here; it is the word *agapē* in the original.)

Our love for others

There are fifteen elements of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, all worthy of consideration. It:

- 1 "suffereth long"—forbears, shows fortitude, is slow to anger;
- 2 "is kind"—shows usefulness, is gentle;
- 3 "envieth not"—does not show misguided zeal, is not jealous;
- 4 "vaunteth not itself"—does not boast, is not a braggart;
- 5 "is not puffed up"—is not inflated, proud or haughty;
- 6 "doth not behave itself unseemly"—is not void of proper deportment, does not act with moral deformity;
- 7 "seeketh not her own"—see Philippians 2:4;
- 8 "is not easily provoked"—is not incited, does not become exasperated;
- 9 "thinketh no evil"—does not take an inventory to estimate or judge;
- 10 "rejoiceth not in iniquity"—does not delight in what is contrary to right, or in impropriety which is repugnant;
- 11 "rejoiceth in the truth"—rejoices in truth as the revealed reality lying at the basis of and agreeing with an appearance;
- 12 "beareth all things"—covers with silence, endures patiently;
- 13 "believeth all things"—has faith in all things in God's Word;
- 14 "hopeth all things"—hopes, trusts; see Romans 8:24;
- 15 "endureth all things"—bears trials, has fortitude and perseverance, remains behind after others have gone, bravely bears up against suffering.

The number fifteen is used in connection with a vow or promise to God for a male of sixty or above (Lev. 27:7). Perhaps it is a reminder that love is a sign of maturity in the Truth (Col. 3:14) and that we should promise to strive to walk in love. It is a good practice to memorise these qualities of love and to repeat them in prayer to our heavenly Father, asking for His help to manifest them in our lives.

We stated at the beginning that the love between a husband and wife is a pattern for God's love for Israel and Christ's love for the ecclesia. The ultimate expression of God's love is the giving of His only begotten Son (Jno. 3:16). Hence the words of the Apostle Paul: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church [ecclesia], and gave himself for it . . . So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies" (Eph. 5:25,28).

The sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ was a manifestation of true *agapē* love, and we are exhorted to manifest this sacrificial love to the ecclesia, by laying "down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jno. 3:16). The object of Christ's love was: "that he might present it to himself a glorious church [ecclesia]" (Eph. 5:27); so our objective with one another should be that we might help one another to attain to the Kingdom (1 Thess. 2:19).

"And now abideth faith, hope, charity [love], these three; but the greatest of these is charity [love]" (1 Cor. 13:13).

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

MARRIAGE—“ONLY IN THE LORD”

Choosing a marriage partner is one of the most far-reaching decisions in our lives, affecting most if not all of the rest of our lives. If Christ means anything to us, then we will delight to practise his commands, including those about marriage.

The institution of marriage

It began when God created male and female, and said: “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:26-28). This is expanded in Genesis 2:18-24, and the arrangement is confirmed by Christ (Mt. 19:4-6; Mk. 10:6-9). Eve, being made from the rib of Adam, was “flesh of [his] flesh”; and so, following the same pattern, their descendants become “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24) when married.

Principles derived from this are:

- They become one flesh (with resulting responsibilities)
- Marriage is permanent (Mt. 19:6; Mk. 10:9)
- It is valid without sacrament or ceremony.

Parallel with Christ and the ecclesia

Ephesians 5 parallels human marriage and the relationship between Christ and the ecclesia. Christ and the ecclesia is the primary relationship, marriage being derived from it. It is therefore a type, and Christ’s requirements must come first, otherwise the type is spoilt.

Headship and submission (vv. 22-24):

Christ has saved us and is our head. The whole ecclesia should be in submission to him. From this parallel, wives should be in submission to their husbands, as to the Lord.

- **But**, if married out of the Lord, this is not possible in the most important things.

Love of husband for wife (as himself) (vv. 25-29):

Christ gave himself for the ecclesia that it might be sanctified and perfected. So also husbands should show true love for their wives, in Divine things as well as natural.

- **But**, this role is absent if a man marries outside the ecclesia. Neither can the wife help her husband, as Eve was provided as a help suitable for Adam (Gen. 2:18).

One flesh (vv. 30-33):

Paul quotes Genesis 2, interpreting it as referring in the first place to Christ and the ecclesia. From this he develops the theme of unity between husband and wife (v. 33).

- **But**, this is neither meaningful nor feasible if one partner is not in Christ.

A direct command

1 Corinthians 7:39: “The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord”.

The phrase “only in the Lord” concerns a widow remarrying, who may only marry a fellow disciple, and establishes a general principle that the marriage of any disciple should be “only in the Lord”.

Our obligation to Christ

Christ's loving service to us obliges us to obey and serve him (2 Cor. 5:14,15). Christ comes first for the believer. His wishes take precedence over those of a marriage partner (Mt. 6:33; 10:37,38). They involve a full belief in his teaching and obedience to it. To choose a partner in marriage having different beliefs and different principles is a denial of Christ. Our example affects others, and we cannot expect others to keep the commands of Christ if we do not practise them, or if we teach an exception to one of them.

Influence of a marriage partner

2 Corinthians 6:14: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?"

Marriage is the most intimate way in which two people are yoked together. Because the marriage bond is intended to be permanent (1 Cor. 7:10,11), separable only by death (Rom. 7:3; 1 Cor. 7:39), it normally has a lifelong influence for good or ill. If our partner's life is based on different principles, this will work against us. Husbands and wives should be working to a common goal. Scripture shows that neglect of the principle of marriage only in the Lord had dramatic effect, leading to the Flood (Gen. 6:1-7), and causing Israel's downfall under the Judges (Judg. 3:1-7).

The separation indicated in 2 Corinthians 6 cannot be practised if our partner is not in the Faith. Holiness in mind and body, both within and outside marriage, is part of the true disciple's way (Eph. 5:3-7; 1 Thess. 4:3-5,7). Our bodies are members of Christ, "one spirit" with him (1 Cor. 6:17), a greater relationship than marriage in the flesh. If we count Christ as a close friend we will choose other close friends of that same "one spirit". God hates competition from false 'gods' (anything which competes with Him for worship and attention).

What about the children?

By marrying an unbeliever we do not put just ourselves at risk. There are also effects on any children. How will they be brought up? There is spiritual conflict in the family. To put oneself in this position shows irresponsibility and lack of thought for the children. It reduces the opportunity of them being saved for eternal life. In the time of Ezra this was counted as the holy seed mingling themselves with others, and as sin against God (Ezra 9:2; cf. Neh. 13:23-29). We too through Christ share in the covenant God made with Abraham's seed, and this covenant ought not to be defiled. Malachi, when the LORD'S holiness was profaned by marriage with the unbeliever, remarks on the purpose of having children—that God "might seek a godly seed", that is children of His own (Mal. 2:11,15, note mg.). This is difficult when both parents are committed to the Truth, and much more when this is not so.

Finally

The suggestion that good may come from marrying an unbeliever, with the unbeliever being converted, will tempt some. More likely the opposite will occur. Those most strongly based in the Truth are less likely to succumb to the temptation anyway, because their spiritual interests will bring them more into companionship with those of a like mind. The weakly based put themselves at even greater risk. Once we forsake the principle of marriage only in the Lord, and justify our action, it is difficult to teach or advise others of the right way.

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

MILITARY SERVICE AND THE DISCIPLE OF CHRIST

Five principles for the followers of Christ

1 Not to resist evil. To “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you”, that we may be children like our Father (Mt. 5:39,44,45). Strife is incompatible with service to Christ (2 Tim. 2:24). We are to “Follow peace with all men” (Heb. 12:14; Rom. 12:18), and not “render evil for evil” (1 Thess. 5:15; Rom. 12:17). Although this principle is primarily directed at personal relationships, it prevents us obeying crucial orders in the armed forces, and would result in us being very unsatisfactory soldiers for our country.

We are not to avenge ourselves—this is God’s prerogative (Rom. 12:19). Although we may not use force on behalf of ourselves or for other men and women, we are not pacifists, and when it is His will God can command that His vengeance should be taken (Ex. 23:31; Deut. 9:3,4). There is therefore a limit to His patience with the “unjust”, and a time when He will send Christ to judge the world (Mt. 5:45; Acts 17:31; 2 Thess. 1:7,8). “All His saints” will share in the honour belonging to this work (Ps. 149:9).

2 Not to kill (Jas. 2:11; Rom. 13:9). This command applies in the present era not merely to murder, but also to war, because Christ has left us with the further command not to use the sword: “Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword” (Mt. 26:52-54; Rev. 13:10). So Christ does not permit use of the sword until his return, even on his own behalf or the gospel’s—how much less on behalf of other men and their interests! The spiritual arms used by followers of Christ at the present time are not relevant to physical strife with flesh and blood (2 Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 6:11-13).

3 To be in the world, but not of it (Jno. 17:14-18). We are “children of God”, “strangers and pilgrims”, separate from political, ecclesiastical and national organisations of men, witnessing for Christ and against them (Rom. 8:16; 2 Cor. 6:14-18; Eph. 5:11; Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 2:11; Rev. 12:17). Therefore we cannot join their armies or defend them (Lk. 21:20,21). The servants of Christ do not yet fight for the Kingdom of God to replace the kingdoms of this world (Jno. 18:36). However, we are looking for the removal of human kingdoms and the coming of “a better country” according to the promises, that is, a Divine political kingdom, and we may need to give our lives for the sake of this belief (Rev. 11:15; Heb. 11:14-16,37,40; 13:14). Killing fellow brothers in Christ in war for the sake of ephemeral Gentile governments is inconceivable.

4 To put Christ first (Lk. 14:26; Mt. 10:37). Since our allegiance is to him, we cannot blindly obey a different commanding officer (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23). We are soldiers of Christ only, not allowing ourselves to be entangled with “the affairs of this life” (2 Tim. 2:3,4).

5 To obey human governments only when their laws do not conflict with the laws of God: paying, for example, our taxes on demand; recognising that existing governments are appointed by God, striving neither to keep them in being nor change them ourselves, but looking for the coming of God’s government; rendering honour as due, while acknowledging a higher authority in heaven (Acts 5:29; Rom. 13:1-7; Tit. 3:1; Dan. 4:17; 1 Pet. 2:17; Acts 17:7).

Questions and answers

- 1 Why were the Old Testament wars of Israel right, when they conquered the land, and executed a policy of genocide?**

Answer: God commands whether to fight or not (2 Sam. 5:23; Jer. 21:8,9; 27:5-8). These were God's battles (1 Sam. 25:28). God fought for Israel and sought to destroy the Canaanites for their wickedness and idolatry (Deut. 7:1,2; 9:3-5; 13:15; 20:16-18).

- 2 Why have so many Christians down the centuries taken part in war?**

Answer: Because they left their original allegiance to Christ, stopped obeying his commands and took a political initiative in the world. Many leaders delighted in the present power and glory which resulted, rather than looking for Christ's power and glory in his Kingdom when he returns.

- 3 How is Christ "The Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6) if he and his angels (2 Thess. 1:7,8) are to fight the nations at his return?**

Answer: Christ will administer a just government. Helpers are being selected and prepared now. In order to introduce and keep peace, the self-interested and self-assertive will need to be rebuked and controlled. Any fighting will be under God's command.

- 4 Is there not such a thing as a just war?**

Answer: War against aggression may appear just. However, what is just from one nation's view can be unfair from another's. God is the only One Who can decide whether a war is just or not. When Christ returns from heaven he will call a halt to aggression (Isa. 2:4).

- 5 Did God help Israel when she fought in the Six-Day War?**

Answer: The answer to this must be, Yes. God helps His people survive because of His promises to the fathers of Israel (Zeph. 3:12,13). The Six-Day War, as also the War of Independence of 1948, was a war of survival. Although, because of her sins, God does not always help Israel, He will ensure her survival because of His given word.

- 6 Do we not have a debt to our country and those who give their lives by fighting for it?**

Answer: Individually we may feel a debt to those who have died for our freedom, but we only have freedom by the will of God, so our true debt and loyalty is to Him. Our 'debt' to the nation would be more than discharged by preaching the life-giving gospel.

- 7 Can a Christian engage in noncombatant service, including civil defence? Is it right to do work of 'national importance' as directed by the government or to stay within a reserved occupation?**

Answer: There can be no objection to obeying the directions of the government if these directions do not conflict with the commands of God; in fact, it is important that we do so (Mt. 22:21; Rom. 13:7). However, providing organised support for the armed services or national defence would be upholding "the kingdoms of this world" (Rev. 11:15). Providing for the personal needs of members of the armed forces on an occasional basis is not something to be avoided, however (Mt. 5:41).

- 8 Should a Christian work in the manufacture of military equipment used by armed forces?**

Answer: It is difficult to see how a follower of Christ can construct, or aid the construction of, equipment which is intended for fighting, and anyone so engaged may have a hard time persuading the authorities to accept their objection to other forms of military service. As true followers of Christ we need to maintain consistency.

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

MORTALITY AND IMMORTALITY

- Mortality:** Liable to die
The state we experience from the moment of birth to the moment of death
- Immortality:** Deathlessness
The state promised to those accounted worthy to inhabit the Kingdom of God to be established following the return of Christ.

The mortal body—the beginning

The Scriptures record that, “In the beginning . . . the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground” (Gen. 1:1; 2:7). A bodily framework of a man was formed, complete with limbs, sense organs and brain, but it was inanimate, without life. It did not function until “the LORD God . . . breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (2:7). It was at this point that limbs were energised, senses enervated and consciousness activated. It was the breath that gives life that transformed the lifeless structure, and “man became a living soul [Heb. *nephesh*, translated ‘creature’ nine times, as, for example in Genesis 1:21,24]”.

This living creature was new, different from, and of greater mental ability than those previously created. A particular task was given to him: “the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it” (v. 15); and a special opportunity for the exercise of his unique faculty of free will was placed before him: “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (vv. 16,17).

The decision and disobedience of the man led God to pronounce upon him the consequence: “in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (3:19). In due course “he died” (5:5), which is a statement that confirms his mortality and that of all his descendants, be they Seth, Abraham, Job, David—or even Jesus.

The mortal body—the ending

When Abraham’s life ended, it is recorded that he “gave up the ghost, and died” (25:8). The RSV states that he “breathed his last and died”, which is much closer to the original Hebrew word, which means ‘expire’, ‘breathe out’ (*Strong’s* 1478). Life began when there was a breathing in of the breath that gives life. When that breath is breathed out for the last time, life ceases. A similar phrase is used of, amongst others, Isaac (35:29), Jacob (49:33), Job (Job 10:18)—and Jesus. Mark, for example, records: “Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost” (15:37). Again, the RSV more faithfully presents the meaning of the original Greek word (*ekpneō*, *Strong’s* 1606, meaning ‘to expire’): “Jesus . . . breathed his last”. Without the invigorating breath of life, the bodily structure wastes away.

A further description of death is given, starting with David. It is recorded that “David slept with his fathers” (1 Kgs. 2:10). Similarly, this idea is used of Solomon (11:43), Rehoboam (14:31) and most of the kings, Job (Job 7:21), Lazarus (Jno. 11:11)—and Jesus, for it is said of him that “now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Cor. 15:20).

Sleep as we know it, as an essential ingredient of mortal life, is a period of rest and relaxation, when we are incapable of controlled and purposeful thought, word, action or emotion. In this it is a most apt figure of death, as is seen from these Bible statements: “For

in death there is no remembrance of Thee: in the grave who shall give Thee thanks?" (Ps. 6:5); ". . . when I go down to the pit . . . Shall the dust praise thee? shall it declare Thy truth?" (30:9); "His [the son of man's] breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish" (146:4); ". . . there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest" (Eccl. 9:10). Yet it is a period of inactivity from which we expect to arise.

Immortality

In the same chapter that spoke of Christ being the first to be raised from the sleep of death (1 Cor. 15) in the context of the Kingdom of God (v. 50), it is the mortal body that undergoes a change: "this mortal must put on immortality" (v. 53). This does not speak of some part independent of the body that continues existence forever, but stresses that "we shall all be changed" (v. 51). The idea of a change to a state completely opposite to that experienced now would be unnecessary if immortality were, in some way, already possessed. The Scriptures affirm that "Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father" (Rom. 6:4), and "being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him" (v. 9). It was a consequence of his sinlessness that he was raised from the dead, and it was a consequence of his resurrection that he "brought . . . immortality to light" (2 Tim. 1:10).

It is a principle of God that without the shedding of blood there can be no remission of sins (Heb. 9:22). God Himself provided the Lamb whose blood was shed for the sin of the world. It is those "that are Christ's" who are eligible to be "made alive . . . at his coming" (1 Cor. 15:22,23). To the worthy, God will give His gift, which is "eternal life" (Rom. 6:23).

The question of the immortal soul

- Scripture does not directly speak of or teach the doctrine of the immortal soul. Indeed, this term never appears in the Bible.
- It would appear that pagan beliefs held in the kingdoms of Babylon and Egypt, and the teachings of the likes of Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato, became incorporated into Jewish and Christian religion in the years following Christ's death. It is, then, a belief that is man-made and not God-given.
- Any passages of Scripture that appear to support such teaching must be interpreted with this crucial information in mind.
- Thus, when, for example, Stephen as he died said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59), he was speaking, not of an immortal soul, but of that breath without which we die.
- If Adam had possessed an immortal soul, then the pronounced punishment on Adam following his disobedience—"dying thou shalt die"—would have been to no avail, if he or part of him continued in some conscious and active form.
- If we have an immortal soul, life continues whatever happens at death. How can this be reconciled to the Scripture, which says that "our Saviour Jesus Christ . . . hath abolished death, and hath brought life . . . to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10)?

It cannot. We have no immortal soul. When we die the whole of us dies, and those responsible await the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to effect their resurrection, and then, by God's grace, have immortality bestowed upon them.

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

PATIENCE

Various proverbs of uncertain origin proclaim that “patience is a virtue.” It is certainly recognised as a desirable quality in daily living; but, given the complexity and pace of life in the twenty-first century, patience can be very difficult to maintain. It sometimes seems that impatience and bad temper are rather more prevalent. The Apostle James warns that “no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (Jas. 3:8); and he consequently advises: “let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (1:19,20).

But patience is not just the ability to remain calm under stress, or to resist the temptation to explode in anger when provoked. It can also describe the refusal to succumb to difficult circumstances, or to be defeated by trials or depressed by delay. This form of patience may be exhibited over many months or years while waiting for some hoped-for goal. James reassures those early Christians facing persecution for their beliefs: “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience” (vv. 2,3). Furthermore, Peter reminds the believers of the example of Christ: “For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example . . .” (1 Pet. 2:20,21).

Waiting for the Second Coming

The true Christian hope, established in the Bible by the promise of God Himself, is that Jesus Christ will return to the earth to establish God’s Kingdom. In the words of the angel to the disciples, as Jesus ascended to heaven, “This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). The scoffer can readily point to the fact that nearly 2,000 years have elapsed since those words were uttered and Jesus has still not come. But for the believer the promises of God cannot fail, and there is much encouragement to be drawn from the many signs of the times. There is also a recognition that for every disciple there is the test of faith the apostles spoke of, a period of waiting for the glorious prospect, which demands patience.

The need to endure

The writers of the New Testament, inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16), employ two different words in the original Greek to encourage patience in disciples of Jesus Christ. The first (*hupomonē*, and its verbal form, *hupomenō*) has the basic meaning of ‘abiding under,’ as if describing someone steadfastly *bearing up under a heavy load*. It thus conveys the idea of ‘endurance,’ ‘persistence’ or ‘perseverance,’ and is in fact frequently translated in these ways in modern versions of the Bible, whereas the King James Version almost always renders the word as ‘patience.’

Here is a quality that God looks for in those who follow His Son Jesus Christ. It is the faith which is shown to last under trial. And it is not only *passive*, enduring trials, but also *active*, showing itself in works of faith (Jas. 2:14-18). This patient endurance looks beyond present hardships to the promised goal of the Kingdom of God. It is thus the very opposite of despondency, and is the companion of hope.

The New Testament includes many passages encouraging this kind of virtue, which perhaps explains why generations of Christians have been able to retain their faith through periods of savage persecution:

"let us run with *endurance* the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus . . . who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross . . ." (Heb. 12:1,2);
 "If you *endure* chastening, God deals with you as with sons . . ." (v. 7);
 "but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces *perseverance*; and *perseverance*, character; and character, hope" (Rom. 5:3,4);
 "We give thanks to God . . . remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labour of love, and *patience* of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ . . ." (1 Thess. 1:2,3);
 "Blessed is the man who *endures* temptation; for when has been approved, he will receive the crown of life . . ." (Jas. 1:12);
 "Indeed we count them blessed who *endure*. You have heard of the *perseverance* of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful" (5:11);
 "because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who *endures* to the end shall be saved" (Mt. 24:12,13).

The quality of longsuffering

The second word used for 'patience' in the New Testament (*makrothumia*, and its verbal form, *makrothumeō*) has the literal sense of 'long-tempered' (compare our expression 'short-tempered') and is frequently translated as 'longsuffering'. It is the quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation, being slow to retaliate or punish, and is clearly associated with mercy. It is in fact a characteristic of God Himself, as proclaimed to Moses on Mount Horeb: "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, *longsuffering* [*erek aph*, meaning 'long-of-anger,' the Hebrew equivalent of *makrothumia*], and abounding in goodness and truth" (Ex. 34:6). This Divine quality was demonstrated on the many occasions when God spared the people of Israel, even though they rebelled against Him. And, equally, He is prepared to forgive us our transgressions through our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

For our part, we are called upon to demonstrate this virtue while awaiting the fulfilment of God's promises. Although the progress of God's plan seems slow to us, we have the assurance that His purpose is not deflected: "shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He *bears long* with them?" (Lk. 18:7).

Consequently we are to wait patiently for that day: "Therefore *be patient*, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, *waiting patiently* for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also *be patient*. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (Jas. 5:7,8).

At the same time, the followers of Jesus Christ are exhorted by the apostles to emulate the Father's longsuffering in their dealings with one another:

"the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, *longsuffering*, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22,23);

"I . . . beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called . . . with *longsuffering*, bearing with one another in love" (Eph. 4:1,2);

"as the elect of God . . . put on . . . *longsuffering*; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another . . ." (Col. 3:12,13);

"Therefore, beloved . . . be diligent to be found by Him in peace . . . and consider that the *longsuffering* of our Lord is salvation" (2 Pet. 3:14,15).

"Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him . . .
 Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him" (Ps. 37:5,7).

(All quotations from the New King James Version)

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

PRAYER

Prayer **To pray** is to communicate with God
is the substance of what is communicated to God

Introduction

God knows everything. Nothing we say or do is unknown by Him. No thought or intention escapes His attention. Our attitudes, feelings and disposition are fully known by Him. Why then is there a need to pray? What can we communicate that He does not know already? Jesus said: "your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him" (Mt. 6:8).

From earliest times there has been a two-way communication between God and man (Gen. 1:28; 3:9). Despite the separation God imposed, following the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden, He has maintained that communication (though differently achieved) lest man should feel totally isolated and rejected.

Prayer is a responding to God's invitation to communicate. It is a drawing near to God so that His reality may be more fully appreciated, His praise verbally expressed, and our desires and needs presented to Him after careful thought.

We communicate with our fellow beings through more than just the spoken word. The written word, facial expression, body posture, and our behaviour all send messages to those who can see. Because God's eyes "are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3) we transmit information to Him about our beliefs, our faith, our desires, and our hopes through our attitude, our response to situation and circumstance, and our behaviour in general. In that way our whole life becomes a prayer, and so, thereby, we fulfil Paul's appeal: "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17).

The principles of prayer

Prayer invited

In times past God clearly indicated that His people should call upon Him in prayer.
1 Kgs. 3:5; 2 Chron. 7:14; Ps. 50:15; Jer. 33:3.

Prayer encouraged

Aware of this, and experienced in its application, many have encouraged others to respond to this call.

1 Chron. 16:11; Ps. 32:6; Prov. 2:3; Joel 2:32; Mt. 7:7; Lk. 21:36; Jas. 1:5; 1 Jno. 3:22.

Response promised

As an encouragement to active prayer God has promised to respond.

Ex. 22:27; Ps. 34:17; Isa. 30:19; Jer. 29:12; Mt. 6:6; 21:22; Jno. 9:31; 1 Jno. 5:15.

Prayer answered

To emphasise that His promises do not fail, God has caused to be recorded evidence of His answer to prayer.

Solomon: *1 Kgs. 3:9,28*

Daniel: *Dan. 9:20-23*

David: *Ps. 34:4*

Jesus: *Lk. 22:42,43*

Elijah: *Jas. 5:17*

Paul: *2 Cor. 12:8,9*

The practice of prayer

Prayer presented

The channel of communication for us, now, is through the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our mediator.

Jno. 16:23; Rom. 1:8; Eph. 2:18; 1 Tim. 2:5.

Physical posture

There is no prescribed form in which we should present ourselves while at prayer. Each is at liberty to use whatever manner best befits the occasion. The Scriptures record many variations:

standing:	<i>1 Kgs. 8:22; Neh. 9:2; Mk. 11:25</i>
kneeling:	<i>1 Kgs. 8:54; Ps. 95:6; Lk. 22:41</i>
bowing:	<i>Gen. 24:26; Neh. 8:6; Eph. 3:14</i>
prostrated:	<i>Num. 16:22; Josh. 5:14; Mt. 26:39</i>
hands raised:	<i>1 Kgs. 8:38; Ps. 28:2; 1 Tim. 2:8.</i>

Mental attitude

Far more important than bodily position is our mental state before, during and after prayer. Examples of what appear to be essential attitudes and characteristics for prayer to be effectual include:

faith:	<i>Mt. 21:22; Heb. 10:22; Jas. 1:6</i>
obedience:	<i>Jno. 9:31; 1 Jno. 3:22</i>
truth:	<i>Jno. 4:24; Heb. 10:22</i>
perseverance:	<i>Lk. 18:1; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2</i>
forgiveness:	<i>Mk. 11:25</i>
secrecy:	<i>Mt. 6:6.</i>

As faith without works is dead, so prayer without our associated watching, listening, action and support lacks a crucial ingredient.

Subject of prayer

Any matter which concerns God's purpose and man's salvation is a legitimate subject for prayer. Many illustrations are to be found in the Scriptures, among them:

praise:	<i>Ps. 7:17</i>	thanksgiving:	<i>Eph. 5:20</i>
confession:	<i>Dan. 9:4</i>	forgiveness:	<i>Acts 8:22</i>
mercy:	<i>Heb. 4:16</i>	blessing:	<i>Joel 2:13,14</i>
wisdom:	<i>Col. 1:9</i>	help:	<i>Jas. 5:13</i>
God's will:	<i>2 Thess. 1:11</i>	God's Kingdom:	<i>Mt. 6:10</i>

The effect of prayer

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jas. 5:16).

(The references listed above are, in most cases, but samples taken from more extensive lists.)

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

PREACHING THE GOSPEL

There are several Greek words translated 'preach' in the New Testament. Two of the most common, following Strong's transliteration, are *euaggelizō* and *kerussō*. According to Strong, *euaggelizō* is made up of the Greek word *eu*, meaning 'good', and *aggelos*, meaning 'angel' or 'messenger'. It is the verb of the Greek word *euaggelion*, which means 'gospel' or 'good news'. For this reason *euaggelizō* is sometimes translated not just as 'preach' but as 'preach the gospel'. *Kerussō* simply means to 'preach', 'proclaim' or 'publish'. An example of where the two words occur together is found when the Lord Jesus quoted a prophecy about himself from the words of Isaiah:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel [*euaggelizō*] to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach [*kerussō*] deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach [*kerussō*] the acceptable year of the Lord" (Lk. 4:18,19).

Preaching in the Old Testament

The deliverance of which the Lord Jesus was speaking in Luke 4 is the deliverance from the captivity of sin and death. The need to deliver people from this 'prison' is a theme of preaching from Genesis onwards. As Peter shows, those to whom Noah preached were spiritually in a prison:

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water" (1 Pet. 3:18-20).

Paul confirms that the idea of preaching, and the gospel itself, are to be found in Genesis:

"And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed" (Gal. 3:8).

The Lord Jesus and the disciples preached primarily about the Kingdom: "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom . . ." (Mt. 4:23); "And [Jesus] sent [the twelve] to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick" (Lk. 9:2). After Christ's death and resurrection the content of the preaching was expanded to include things about the Lord Jesus Christ as well. The Kingdom and Jesus Christ are portrayed in Scripture as the two main themes of preaching:

"But when [the Samaritans] believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12);

". . . preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him [Paul]" (28:31).

The command to preach

Preaching is essential because it is the way in which others are able to believe in the gospel: "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14).

The disciples were given a command to preach to all the world: "And [Jesus] said unto them [the eleven disciples], Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk. 16:15). This command was fulfilled before the end of the Jewish commonwealth in A.D. 70: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Mt. 24:14). In fact the command had been fulfilled by the time Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians: ". . . if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister" (1:23).

When the Kingdom of God is established the gospel will once more be preached to all the world: "And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people" (Rev. 14:6).

Although the command to preach to all the world was long ago fulfilled by the apostles, brethren and sisters should still be a shining light to those around them:

"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father Which is in heaven" (Mt. 5:14-16);

"but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15);

"preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2).

We have a responsibility to preach to others about the coming judgements of God upon the earth:

"But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand" (Ezek. 33:6).

Christ said: "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give" (Mt. 10:8). Unlike the twelve apostles, to whom these words were addressed, we have not received the Holy Spirit to enable us to perform miracles, but we have received freely the gospel. We should therefore "freely give" to others the good news of the Kingdom.

How should we preach?

We should:

- preach to all who will listen (Acts 28:30)
- preach with confidence (v. 31)
- not preach with "wisdom of words" (1 Cor. 1:17)
- only preach the true gospel (Gal. 1:8)
- preach with sincerity and goodwill (Phil. 1:15)
- be "blameless and harmless" and "shine as lights in the world" (2:15)
- preach with warning and teaching (Col. 1:28).

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

GOD'S PROMISES

The true hope of salvation in Jesus Christ, the hope of the gospel, is founded upon promises made by God in the Bible. These are described by the Apostle Peter as “great and precious promises”, by which we may share “the divine nature”, that is, eternal life (2 Pet. 1:4).

A promise is an undertaking from one person to another, guaranteeing to do or give something *in the future*. The promises of God are concerned with the future, both of mankind and of the world He has created. Unlike men's promises, which can be and often are broken, God's promises cannot fail. But to become effective for any individual, they must be *believed*; in Biblical terms, *faith* is the belief of God's promises, centred in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The phrase ‘to give one's word’ has the same sense as ‘to promise’. In the Scriptures, God *gives His word* concerning the future, with all the force of a promise. All of the prophecies in the Bible concerning the future are therefore, in a sense, promises. But those principal promises that constitute the gospel are linked to *covenants*, or binding agreements. It is remarkable that the Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth, should be prepared to enter into covenants with mortal men and women, and to affirm them by solemn oaths, but this is what the Bible records.

The beginning of the promises

The expression of God's gracious intention to save sinful men and women begins in Scripture immediately after the Fall of Adam and Eve, in this pronouncement: “I will put enmity between thee [the serpent] and the woman [Eve], and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). Although enigmatic, these words foretell a conflict between good and evil that would be resolved by the victory of a Saviour provided by God, the promised *seed* (or descendant) of Eve.

In the course of time, man's wickedness drove God to bring the judgement of the Flood upon the earth. But in the aftermath, He made a second great promise to faithful Noah: “I will not again curse the ground any more . . . While the earth remaineth . . . summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease” (8:21,22). This promise of the permanence of the earth was confirmed by a covenant, made by God with all flesh, and symbolised in the rainbow (9:11-13).

God's promises to Abraham

The next great development in the unfolding of God's promises for the future was made to Abraham (originally Abram). He was called by God, about 2000 B.C., to leave his home in Mesopotamia to journey to Canaan, which was to become known as the *Promised Land*. The promises God made to him were amazingly wide in scope:

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

“Lift up now thine eyes, and look . . . for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever” (13:14,15);

“Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be” (15:5).

Abraham's belief in the last of these promises from God was "counted . . . to him for righteousness", in other words, his sins were forgiven because of his faith (v. 6; cf. Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; Jas. 2:23).

These promises once again focused on the promised *seed*, descended from Abraham, eventually revealed as the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16). The multiplication of that seed "as the stars of heaven" refers to the multitude of people of all ages who would gain salvation through Jesus, by believing the same promises (Dan. 12:3; Heb. 11:12,13).

God endorsed His promises to Abraham by covenants, first a covenant for the land of Israel (Gen. 15:18) and then one with his seed, that He would be *their* God. This was marked in Abraham's natural descendants, the nation of Israel, by the rite of circumcision (17:1-14). Finally God sealed all of His promises and covenants with a solemn oath:

"By Myself have I sworn, saith the LORD . . . that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven . . . and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (22:16-18).

These promises, subsequently reiterated to Isaac and Jacob (Israel), are the very foundation of the gospel of salvation (Gal. 3:8,9). They require that Abraham and all the faithful must rise from the dead, as Jesus did, in order to enjoy them (Acts 24:14,15; 26:6-8).

God's promises to David

Nearly 1,000 years after Abraham, when his descendants, the nation of Israel, had become a kingdom in the land of promise, God made further momentous promises to David the king: "I will set up thy seed after thee . . . and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be My son" (2 Sam. 7:12-14). These promises too were affirmed by God by covenant and oath (Ps. 89:3,4), and were reiterated by the angel Gabriel at the annunciation of Jesus's birth (Lk. 1:32,33).

God's promises to Jesus

All of these promises are centred in Jesus, the Son of God (Acts 13:32,33; Rom. 15:8,9; 2 Cor. 1:19,20), and so the New Testament begins with the words: "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of *David*, the son of *Abraham*" (Mt. 1:1). But there are other promises in the Old Testament directed personally to him.

For example, Jesus is personally promised rulership of God's Kingdom: "Ask of Me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession" (Ps. 2:8). Exalted to God's throne in heaven, Jesus is affirmed by an oath to be a priest or mediator for all believers: "Sit thou at My right hand . . . The LORD hath sworn . . . Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Ps. 110:1,4; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 5:5-10).

God's promises to us

While God's promises cannot fail to be fulfilled, for us as individuals they are *conditional* upon our faith, our covenant with Jesus the Saviour through baptism, and a patient seeking for godliness: "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ . . . And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:27-29). By believing and acting upon God's promises, we can obtain eternal life and share in the marvellous blessings of God's Kingdom which is to come on this earth.

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

DUAL FULFILMENT OF PROPHECY

About one-third of the Bible is prophecy. Much of it has more than one fulfilment. Are there any principles which help us in seeing how a prophecy might be fulfilled more than once? Here are three ways in which Bible prophecies can be fulfilled more than once.

1 A typical fulfilment first

Some Bible prophecies have their complete fulfilment in the long term, but in the short term there is a partial fulfilment in events which are types of the complete fulfilment.

Example. The promises to David are quoted with reference to Solomon; compare 1 Chronicles 17:12,13 with 22:9,10. This is because Solomon's reign was a type of Christ's Kingdom; compare 1 Kings 4:25 with prophecies of the Kingdom in Jeremiah 23:6 and Micah 4:4. However, their complete fulfilment comes with Christ; see Luke 1:32,33 and Acts 13:33.

Other examples. Micah 4,5 was initially fulfilled by Hezekiah in relation to the Assyrian invasion, but will be more completely fulfilled by Christ setting up the Kingdom. Some features of Psalm 72 were fulfilled by Solomon's kingdom, but the psalm will be completely fulfilled in the future reign of Christ.

2 A typical fulfilment later

Some Bible prophecies are fulfilled completely initially but this fulfilment is typical of something greater to come.

Example. Isaiah 17 was fulfilled in the Assyrian invasion in Hezekiah's time, culminating in the destruction of the Assyrian host (v. 14). Yet this fulfilment is also typical of the host which invades the land at the time of Christ's return, and is destroyed.

Other examples. Jeremiah 50 and 51 are prophetic of the overthrow of the kingdom of Babylon, but the extensive use of the language of these chapters in Revelation 17 and 18 shows that this overthrow was typical of the overthrow of spiritual Babylon at Christ's return. Psalm 41 (not strictly prophecy) is about David's experiences in the revolt of Absalom, but his betrayal by Ahithophel is typical of Judas's betrayal of Christ (v. 9, quoted in John 13:18).

3 Prophecies fulfilled on a number of occasions

Some Bible prophecies are fulfilled on several occasions because of situations which keep occurring.

Example. Deuteronomy 28:49 prophesies of "a nation . . . from far" which God would send against Israel if they forsook Him. Note how the terms of this verse were fulfilled by Assyria (Isa. 5:26; 33:19; Hos. 8:1) and Babylon (Jer. 4:13; 5:15) as well as Rome (Mt. 24:28).

Other examples. Cannibalism, prophesied in Leviticus 26:29, is recorded in both 2 Kgs. 6:26-31 and Lamentations 4:10, and according to Josephus occurred in A.D. 70. The opposition to Christ by rulers foretold in Psalm 2:1-3 occurred at his birth (Mt. 2) and his crucifixion (Acts 4:25-28), and will occur at his Second Coming (Rev. 17:12-14) and at the end of the Millennium (20:7-10).

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

REMEMBERING CHRIST IN BREAD AND WINE

The very centrepiece of true Christian worship is a simple ceremony called “the breaking of bread” (Acts 2:42).¹ It can also correctly be referred to as a “communion”, a word meaning ‘sharing’ (1 Cor. 10:16) or “the Lord’s Supper” (11:20).

It was first celebrated by the Lord Jesus with his disciples on the very night of his betrayal, arrest and trial, which preceded the horror of his death on the cross. It most probably took place on a Wednesday evening: Jesus was subsequently three days and nights in the tomb before the glory of his resurrection upon the first day of the week.

The close disciples of Jesus were sharing a meal in an Upper Room in Jerusalem when, “as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ Then he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.’ And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives” (Mt. 26:26-30).

Profound meaning

It is remarkable that the sharing of a symbolic² meal of bread and wine should be endowed with such deep spiritual meaning. The Breaking of Bread can be viewed from at least four complimentary viewpoints:

- As a **commandment** of Jesus to be obeyed: “This is my body which is given for you; *do* this in remembrance of me” (Lk. 22:19). This is a token of friendship with him, for Jesus also said, “You are my friends if you do whatever I command you” (Jno. 15:14).
- As a **remembrance** or memorial of our Lord’s suffering for us to bring forgiveness of sins: “do this in *remembrance* of me” (Lk. 22:19); for “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 Jno. 1:7).
- As a **fellowship** in Jesus, signifying that true believers are one in him; as the Apostle Paul declared: “The cup of blessing . . . is it not the communion [sharing, fellowship] of the blood of Christ? The bread . . . is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread [loaf] and one body” (1 Cor. 10:16,17).
- As an acted **prophecy** of Christ’s return, for the Lord promised: “I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Mt. 26:29). Consequently, it expresses the believers’ faith in the Second Coming of Jesus, for “as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26).

For forgiven sinners

The Breaking of Bread was designed to be shared by sinners who have been forgiven through repentance and baptism. Jesus even invited Judas Iscariot to partake! Sometimes believers make the excuse for absence from the Lord’s Table that they do not feel worthy. Yet it is precisely because nobody is ‘worthy’, because all are forgiven sinners, that they are to meet to remember the sacrifice that has brought them forgiveness.

The Lord Jesus chose the simplest possible activity by which his followers could celebrate his love for them, the sharing of a frugal meal. This requires no pomp, ceremony or priest. It can be performed anywhere, at any time, with any number of believers, as Jesus

said: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them" (Mt. 18:20).

The early church

From the Acts of the Apostles we learn that the Breaking of Bread was one of the fundamental activities engaged in by the baptized believers: "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). At the earliest stage, it appears that they broke bread daily in their own homes: "and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart" (2:46). It seems the Breaking of Bread was included as part of a regular meal, much as Jesus had done at the Last Supper.

The New Testament contains no commandment about which day of the week the Breaking of Bread is to be observed. However, the episode at Troas, recorded in Acts 20, reveals that by the time of Paul's visit there it had become customary to meet on the first day of the week, in celebration of the Lord's resurrection. Paul seems to have waited there a whole week so as to be present: "we . . . joined them at Troas, where we stayed seven days. Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul . . . spoke to them" (20:6,7). That memorial meal was accompanied by words of exhortation from Paul, just as Jesus had spoken to his disciples at the Last Supper (Jno. 13-16).

Unsuitable behaviour

From 1 Corinthians 11 we learn that including the Breaking of Bread in normal meals was leading to unsuitable behaviour, even to greed and drunkenness. Consequently it was established as a special and separate rite, to be performed with due reverence and self-examination (vv. 20-34). There is a clear implication that it was to be performed regularly: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till he comes" (v. 26). We also learn that the Breaking of Bread was considered an appropriate time to collect money for the support of the community: "Now concerning the collection for the saints . . . on the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside . . . that there be no collections when I come" (16:1,2).

Summary

At the Breaking of Bread the disciples of the Lord Jesus obey his command to meet together to remember his sacrifice. In so doing they demonstrate their fellowship in him, they confess their sins and recognise their need for redemption in his blood. They receive exhortation and encouragement and proclaim their belief in his Second Coming. This remembrance is to be performed regularly and upon any day of the week that is convenient (as, for example, when visiting a member in hospital), but the most appropriate is the first day of the week, the Lord's Day. It is a cause for thanks and praise that believers have been given this simple but profound way to celebrate the love and grace of our heavenly Father and His Son, and to express their faith in the promise of the coming Kingdom of God. Jesus has promised that at his coming this memorial meal will be re-enacted as the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Lk. 12:36,37; Rev. 19:9), to be shared by all who, by God's grace, are privileged to enter that glorious age.

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1. All quotations from NKJV.
 2. Church doctrines such as Transubstantiation and the Real Presence, denying that the bread and wine are symbols, insist that the actual body and blood of Christ are present, while retaining the *appearance* of bread and wine. They are based on philosophical concepts not found in the Bible.

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

REPENTANCE

*“The Lord . . . is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish
but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9).*

*“Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation . . .
but the sorrow of the world produces death” (2 Cor. 7:10).*

Dictionary definition

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines the meaning of the English word ‘repent’ as “feel or express sincere regret or remorse”. It is a word with moral overtones; and even today, in religious contexts, ‘repentance’ is associated with the process of seeking forgiveness for having done something wrong.

Old Testament words for ‘repent’

The Old Testament Hebrew word *nacham* conveys broadly the same meaning as this dictionary definition of ‘repentance’. Job, for example, used the word to describe how wrong he had been to question the justice and wisdom of God. “I abhor myself”, said Job, “and *repent* in dust and ashes” (Job. 42:6). Later on, God Himself used the same word to criticise the people of Judah in the time of Jeremiah because they showed no remorse for their evil doings: “No man *repented* of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?” (Jer. 8:6).

Yet there is much more to Biblical repentance than simply ‘saying sorry’. The idea of *turning back (or away) completely* from the wrongdoing repented of is the real meaning of the Hebrew word *shub*—a word which is used three times in one single powerful call to repent addressed to the people of God through the prophet Ezekiel: “‘*Repent*, and *turn* from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin . . . get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit . . . For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies’, says the Lord GOD. ‘Therefore *turn* and live!’” (18:30-32).

John the Baptist’s call to repentance

It was against this Old Testament background of repentance—in which God required His people not only to be sorry for their sinfulness but also to turn their backs permanently upon it—that John the Baptist first appeared in the deserts of Judea. As the herald of Jesus, who, when he came, would “save his people from their sins” (Mt. 1:21), John was sent to prepare God’s people for both the spiritual and the physical salvation that Jesus would bring them. John’s first recorded words were therefore highly significant: “*Repent*”, he cried, “for the kingdom of [or from] heaven is at hand!” (3:2). Thus repentance was (and still is) the necessary prerequisite for receiving the salvation of God in Jesus Christ: if we want to be in the Kingdom of God, we must repent in the fullest sense.

John’s powerful call to repentance was highly effective at the time, for “Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins” (vv. 5,6). But John insisted that true repentance was not just the washing away of old sins. It involved also the turning away from sin to a new way of life; and that is why he warned the Jewish leaders who came to him that they must go on to “bear fruits worthy of repentance” (v. 8). It is never enough just to *say* to God that we are sorry: we must, if we are truly repentant, go on to *show* it to Him . . .

The gospel of Jesus Christ

The need for true repentance lies right at the heart of the teaching of Jesus. At the outset of his public ministry, Jesus deliberately repeated the selfsame words that John had used: "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (4:17). Like John, too, Jesus confronted the self-satisfied Pharisees, and told them, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to *repentance*" (9:13). His disciples, too, "went out and preached that people should *repent*" (Mk. 6:12). Then, just before Jesus ascended to heaven, he solemnly charged his followers that "*repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem*" (Lk. 24:47).

Christianity itself is thus based upon the need for men and women to recognise their sinfulness, to 'repent' of it, and, through faith in Jesus Christ, to be forgiven and ultimately to be saved from eternal death. And the expression of that faith, based on true repentance, is to be made in submission to the rite of baptism into Jesus Christ, as the Apostle Peter made clear to a large number of converts on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem. "Cut to the heart" by what they had heard Peter say about the death and resurrection of Jesus, they asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"; to which Peter replied with crystal clarity, "*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins*" (Acts 2:37,38).

A change of mind

Consistent also with all that went before, the repentance required of the followers of Christ, as the people of God, is expressed throughout the New Testament by the Greek word *metanoia*, meaning literally 'a change of mind'. In the Baptist's call to repent, and in the preaching of Jesus and his disciples (both before and after the ascension), *metanoia* is used to signify that *repentance* extends way beyond the necessary recognition of sinfulness, and that it is but the first stage in a life-changing process that will lead, through baptism and a life of faith, to newness of life and a change to immortal nature in God's Kingdom.

The Apostle Paul understood all this; and his own teaching on the subject of true repentance is therefore most helpful. While he gladly acknowledged that it is "the goodness of God [that] leads [us] to repentance" in the first place (Rom. 2:4), and that we are saved "by grace . . . through faith" (Eph. 2:8), it is nonetheless our part, says Paul, to "*repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance*" (Acts 26:20). Moreover, now that the gospel message of Jesus Christ has spread across the world, men and women are without excuse if they fail to obey the call to repentance, as God no longer 'overlooks' the former "times of ignorance"; instead, as Paul insisted ominously to the Athenians, "God . . . now commands all men everywhere to *repent*" (17:30).

True repentance (*metanoia*) is a complete change of mind, which implies a radical change of direction in life. According to Hebrews 6:1,2, "*repentance from dead works*" is one of the "elementary principles" of Christian teaching. It is an integral part of "the foundation", and its importance needs to be clearly understood.

(All quotations from the New King James Version)

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

RESURRECTION AND JUDGEMENT

Resurrection

Christ proved that the resurrection would take place by quoting words which God spoke to Moses: "But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Mt. 22:31,32; cf. Ex. 3:6).

The Greek for resurrection is *anastasis*, 'standing again'. In Daniel 10 the prophet experiences a figurative raising from the dead. First he gets up onto his hands and knees (v. 10). This is the awakening of consciousness. He is then commanded to "understand", and stands "trembling" (v. 11). This typifies the resurrected person's understanding returning as he stands. The standing again of a dead man is seen in 2 Kings 13:21: "he revived, and stood up on his feet".

The judgement seat

Christ will "judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:1), for God "hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (Jno. 5:22). All those resurrected will stand before the judgement seat:

"For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25,26);

"[God] hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained" (Acts 17:31);

"we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Rom. 14:10);

"we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:10).

Sinai is a possible location for the judgement, for Christ and the saints will march from this direction after the judgement (Ps. 68:17; Isa. 63:1; Hab. 3:3).

Accountability

At the judgement seat people will give an account to Christ:

"But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall *give account* thereof in the day of judgment" (Mt. 12:36);

"So then every one of us shall *give account* of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12).

This is typified by Daniel speaking (Dan. 10:16). Only those who can be held accountable, or responsible, will be resurrected. Accountability will be based on knowledge:

"And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Lk. 12:47,48);

"If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin" (Jno. 15:22);

"sin is not imputed when there is no law" (Rom. 5:13);

"For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment" (Heb. 10:26,27);

"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (Jas. 4:17).

Some of those who are accountable will be the ecclesia or house of God. These will be led to the judgement seat first. Those who heard the gospel but disobeyed, for example, those of Sodom and Gomorrah (Mt. 10:15), will then be judged:

“For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?” (1 Pet. 4:17).

Those who cannot be held accountable will not be resurrected:

“Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish” (Ps. 49:20);

“They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise: therefore hast Thou visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish” (Isa. 26:14);

“ . . . sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the LORD” (Jer. 51:39).

Two resurrections

There will be two resurrections. The first will take place when Christ returns; this is the first resurrection. The second will take place at the end of the thousand years. This second resurrection will involve those who have died during the thousand years:

“the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished” (Rev. 20:5).

For each of these two resurrections there will be two groups of people. One group will be found worthy, the other group will be condemned:

“For such as be blessed of Him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of Him shall be cut off” (Ps. 37:22);

“The righteous shall never be removed: but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth” (Prov. 10:30);

“And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2);

“all that are in the graves . . . shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (Jno. 5:28,29);

“there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust” (Acts 24:15).

It is written: “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years” (Rev. 20:6). Those referred to here are the “just”, who are found worthy by Christ when he comes. Those in the second resurrection at the end of the thousand years who are found worthy will be blessed with eternal life but will have missed out on the millennial blessings of reigning with Christ.

Those who are condemned will eventually die to live no more: “But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt. 8:12); “. . . who shall be punished with everlasting destruction” (2 Thess. 1:9). They will die a “second death” (Rev. 21:8) and thus be “twice dead” (Jude v. 12).

Those who are found worthy will be given immortality: “this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:53). In Daniel 10 this is typified by being “strengthened” (v. 18). This is the end of a process involving several stages. Paul writes: “the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Cor. 15:52). Here, the whole process, including resurrection, judgement, and being given immortality and a place of honour in the Kingdom, is summarised in the phrase “raised incorruptible”. This is spoken of by Paul in Romans 2:7 as follows: “to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality [will be given] eternal life”.

BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

SACRIFICE IN THE AGE TO COME

THE sacrifice of animals goes back to the very beginning of God's dealings with man:

“Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins [literally, *of a skin*], and clothed them” (Gen. 3:21);

“And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering” (4:4).

There were clearly laws relating to sacrifice in the time of Noah and during the period of the Patriarchs (8:20; 15:9-17). These laws concerning sacrifice were further amplified in the Law given to Israel by God through Moses. The first seven chapters of Leviticus are full of the detailed regulations that governed Israel's sacrificial approach to God, and chapter 16 specifies exactly what should be offered on the Day of Atonement.

Pointing forward to Christ

In many ways these sacrifices pointed forwards to the greater sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ:

“And Abraham said, My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering” (Gen. 22:8);

“For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins . . . but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God . . . For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Heb. 10:4,12,14).

It might be thought, therefore, that, following the perfect sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, the concept of the sacrifice of animals would no longer feature in the Divine purpose. The animal sacrifices under the Law could not take away sin. The offering of animal sacrifices was brought to an end with the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 and has never been re-established by the nation of Israel—despite its having been in existence for over fifty years. What possible purpose could be served by further animal sacrifices?

The evidence of Scripture

There can be no doubt, however, that there are many references in Scripture to the reinstatement of animal sacrifice in the Kingdom age. Consider the following passages:

“For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same My name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto My name, and a pure offering: for My name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts” (Mal. 1:11);

“and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years” (3:3,4);

“And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles” (Zech. 14:16);

“Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him . . . even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon Mine altar; for Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people” (Isa. 56:6,7);

“The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee: they shall come up with acceptance on Mine altar, and I will glorify the house of My glory” (60:6,7).

It is evident from the contexts of these passages that they must refer to the time of the Kingdom. For example, whatever anticipatory fulfilment there was of Isaiah 56 in the time of Hezekiah, Jesus’s quotation of this passage in Mark 11:17 shows that it also has a future fulfilment.

No reference has yet been made to the last nine chapters of the prophecy of Ezekiel, which describe in great detail the future temple and the sacrificial work of priests and Levites therein. There can be no doubt that the language of Ezekiel 40–48 is quoted in Revelation 21 and applied to the city-community which is elsewhere described as the bride of Christ. Yet this spiritual application does not negate the fact that several of the other passages quoted above require that there will be a central place of worship in the Kingdom age and that the worship offered there will include the sacrifice of animals. Why will these things be so?

Why sacrifice in the Kingdom?

Jesus commanded all those who enter by baptism into the new covenant to break bread and drink wine “in remembrance of me” (Lk. 22:19). This weekly memorial reminds fallible mortals of the body which was given in accordance to the command of his Father and the blood which was poured out that forgiveness of sin and reconciliation to God might be made possible.

Sacrifice in the future age will not point forward to the offering of another Messiah. It will not be a means for obtaining the forgiveness of sins; that has been done for all time in the sacrifice of Jesus. Nor will it be the means of bringing in another covenant; the new covenant of which Scripture speaks has already been ratified by the shedding of the blood of Jesus. The immortalised saints in the millennial age will not have any need for animal sacrifice.

There is, however, another principle upon which the shedding of the blood of animals will be reintroduced in the time of the Kingdom. It will serve the purpose which the bread and wine achieve now for those in Christ. It will be a memorial of the one great offering which provided the means of taking away sin, which brought in the new covenant and made possible everlasting righteousness. *Nations*, rather than individuals as at present, will have to be taught that these things were not done without great cost, and the reinstatement of animal sacrifice in the future temple and in the isles of the Gentiles is the Divinely appointed means by which these lessons will be taught.

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST

*“The blood of Jesus Christ . . . cleanseth us from all sin” (1 Jno. 1:7).
“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (Jno. 1:29).*

The idea of sacrifice is found throughout the Bible from its beginning to its end. God clothed Adam and Eve to cover their nakedness with coats of skins (Gen. 3:21). This indicates animal sacrifice. In the Book of Revelation, the saints sing their grateful thanks for the sacrifice of Christ: “for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (5:9). In the Letter to the Hebrews we are told that the sacrifices offered before Christ came were foreshadowings of his perfect sacrifice. Those sacrifices were “a figure for the time then present”; “the patterns of things in the heavens”; “a shadow of good things to come” (9:9,23; 10:1).

All the acceptable sacrifices offered both before and during the time of the Mosaic (Old) Covenant pointed forwards to the Lord Jesus Christ’s offering.

The reason for sacrifice

The simple principle stated in Hebrews 9:22, “without shedding of blood is no remission”, tells us why sacrifice is necessary. Man has sinned, and the forfeiting of life shows man what sin deserves. In Leviticus 17:11, amply confirmed by biological science, we are told that “the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls”.

What was special about the shedding of the blood of Christ and the offering of his body? Two passages of Scripture answer this question:

“for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Rom. 3:23-26);

“For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh” (8:3).

The first passage brings to the fore the fact that Christ’s sacrifice declared *the righteousness of God*. This is repeated to underline its importance, along with the other feature, the grace and forbearance of God. The second passage tells us that Jesus “condemned sin in the flesh”, something that the sacrifices under the Law, and at other times, could not do.

These passages help us to understand how God could reconcile sinful man to Himself without jettisoning His principles of righteousness and justice.

God was able to raise Jesus from the dead because he did no sin. He did not earn sin’s wages, but only inherited the sin and death principle by his descent from Adam. Biological science again confirms that death is programmed into our human DNA.

Consider the Scriptures:

- “For He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21)
- “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Mt. 1:1)

- “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14)
- “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (v. 9)
- “Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him That was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared . . .” (5:7)
- “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned . . .” (Rom. 5:12).

God’s righteousness upheld in Jesus’s life

For the sacrifice of Christ to be acceptable, Jesus had to live a sinless life. This was shown, for example, in the following:

- His baptism “to fulfil all righteousness” (Mt. 3:13-17)
- His temptation, in which he repudiated the suggestions that appealed to the flesh (Lk. 4:1-13)
- His rejection of Peter’s suggestion that he should not go up to Jerusalem and be killed (Mt. 16:21-23)
- His anguish as he contemplated his “baptism” or approaching death (Lk. 12:50)
- His reply to the young ruler, in which he repulsed the suggestion that there was any good in the flesh and instead directed attention to his Father alone as the source of all good (Mt. 19:16,17).

God’s righteousness upheld in Jesus’s perfect sacrifice

“God’s method for the return of sinful man required the putting to death of man’s condemned and evil nature in a representative man of spotless character whom He would provide, to declare and uphold His righteousness, as the first condition of restoration, that He might be just while justifying the unjust, who should believingly approach Him in humility, repentance and confession (Rom. 3:24-6; 8:3; Heb. 2:14-15; Rom. 5:21)”.

This statement (by Brother Robert Roberts) is an excellent summary, and explains also why other sacrifices would be in vain. In the case of unblemished animals, physical perfection was a shadowy way of pointing to the sinlessness required in the ‘substance’ to come. In fact animals have nothing to do with man’s weakness and sin, cannot be tempted as we are, and so cannot take away sin. Hence Jesus’ sacrifice pleased God more than the sacrifice of oxen (Heb. 9:12-14; 10:4-9; Ps. 40:6-8; Isa. 53:10; Ps. 69:31). Angels cannot die so cannot be sacrificed. Though sinless, they could never satisfy God’s righteousness for the redemption of men because they could never represent man (Heb. 2:9; 10:14-17). Finally, the death of a mere man would in itself demonstrate and uphold God’s law of sin and death, but resurrection could not follow, and this was envisaged by God for the Saviour of men.

The sacrifice of Christ brings before us the great love of God, which was the motive that initiated His plan of redemption. It brings us also to the great love of Christ for his disciples, without which his sacrifice would not have been possible. Father and Son together, like Abraham and Isaac 2,000 years previously, walked to Calvary in an act of boundless mercy and love, to bring about reconciliation and forgiveness. The joy of the resurrection that followed was the consummation of it all, once again declaring the righteousness of God.

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

SATAN AND THE DEVIL

The Bible does not support the commonly held belief that Satan, otherwise referred to as the devil, is a fallen angel who, supported by other evil spirits, works to alienate man from God.

The Bible does speak of Satan and the devil as though they are beings. However, a careful reading of the whole of Scripture shows that either one specific person or a particular group of humans is being referred to, or a figure of speech is being employed, namely personification, in which a characteristic, a tendency or an idea is represented as a person.

SATAN

The word 'Satan' appears in both the Old and the New Testaments of the Authorised Version of the Bible.

The Old Testament

Here it occurs 19 times (1 Chron. 21:1; Job 1:6,7 [twice], 8,9,12 [twice]; 2:1,2 [twice], 3,4,6,7; Ps. 109:6; Zech. 3:1,2 [twice]), and on every occasion the Hebrew word is *satan*, showing that this is not a translation but the transference of the Hebrew word directly into English (transliteration). On 14 occasions the same Hebrew word is translated. The references and their translations are: Numbers 22:22 (adversary), 32 (withstand); 1 Samuel 29:4 (adversary); 2 Samuel 19:22 (adversaries); 1 Kings 5:4; 11:14,23,25 (adversary); Psalm 38:20; 71:13; 109:4,20,29 (adversaries); Zechariah 3:1 (resist).

Thus the basic idea of the Hebrew word is that of an adversary, one who resists, opposes or withstands.

Examples of its use in the Old Testament

1 Chronicles 21:1. "And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel". 2 Samuel 24 also records this event and shows that it was the Lord Who was angry with Israel and was acting as an adversary towards them.

Psalms 109:6. "Set Thou a wicked man over him: and let Satan stand at his right hand". The word *satan* appears four times in this psalm: v. 4 (adversaries), v. 6 (Satan), v. 20 (adversaries), v. 29 (adversaries); so verse 6 would appear to be an example of the translators' inconsistency and Satan ought to have been rendered 'adversary'.

Job 1 and 2. In the Hebrew the definite article 'the' is associated with *satan* here, indicating that a particular or specific adversary is being spoken of. This is true also of Zechariah 3, where *the* adversary is 'resisting' (Heb. *satan*) the high priest because the high priest is behaving in an unseemly manner.

The New Testament

In the New Testament Satan appears 37 times, each time reflecting the Hebrew word found in the Old Testament, *satan*, and carries with it the same idea of an opposer or adversary. For example, Jesus spoke of Peter as Satan, or adversary, when Peter suggested Jesus should not go to Jerusalem (Mt. 16:21-23). He was opposing the declared intention of Jesus.

In Acts 5 Peter used the same idea in talking to Ananias when he said: "why hath Satan filled thine heart . . . ?" (v. 3). The next verse shows it was in fact Ananias who was being an adversary to himself, preventing himself from doing what he had declared: "why hast *thou* conceived this thing *in thine heart*?"

THE DEVIL

The Old Testament

There is no specific reference to 'the devil' at all in the Old Testament. The word 'devils' appears four times. Twice it is translated from a Hebrew word which on 51 other occasions is translated 'goat[s]' or 'kid[s]'. On the other two occasions it comes from a word with the basic meaning of 'to ruin' or 'to spoil'. Thus there is no *direct* reference in the Old Testament to the devil who is supposed to be a supernatural being in opposition to God.

The New Testament

There are 45 references in the New Testament to 'the devil'. Twelve of these are translations of a group of words (*daimonion, daimōn, daimonizomai*) used to describe mental illness or false gods. The rest are translations of the Greek word *diabolos*, which is also translated 'false accusers' (twice) and 'slanders' (once).

Other associated terms are 'the evil' ('the evil one' in the RSV), 'the wicked one' (six times; Mt. 13:19,38; 1 Jno. 2:13,14; 3:12; 5:18), 'the god of this world' (once; 2 Cor. 4:4).

That personification is being used in the case of these terms is suggested by the comparison to be found in the following selection of verses:

"Him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14)	"Sin . . . bringeth forth death" (Jas. 1:15)
"Overcome the wicked one" (1 Jno. 2:14)	"Overcometh the world" (1 Jno. 5:5)
"Keep them from the evil one" (Jno. 17:15, RV)	"Keep himself unspotted from the world" (Jas. 1:27)
"The children of the devil" (1 Jno. 3:10)	"The children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2)
"Neither give place to the devil" (Eph. 4:27)	"Make not provision for the flesh" (Rom. 13:14)

In these passages "the devil", "the wicked one" and "the evil one" stand for sin, or for that inclination in individuals and in society to disobey or act in a manner which, like Eve, doubts God's Word, accuses Him of misrepresentation, and chooses to behave in such a way as to malign His character and His principles or to treat Him as irrelevant or non-existent.

Some unScriptural misconceptions

1. Satan is a fallen angel

- The Bible uses the word 'Satan' to refer to the disciple Peter (Mt. 16:23), enemies of Paul and opponents of his preaching (1 Thess. 2:18), Jews opposed to Christ's followers (Rev. 2:9,13) and even God Himself (compare 1 Chron. 21:1 and 2 Sam. 24:1).

2. The devil is immortal

- The Bible states that only God has immortality (1 Tim. 6:16), and has bestowed it upon His Son.
- The Bible states that the purpose of Christ's death was to destroy the devil (Heb. 2:14).

3. The devil dwells in hell

- The Bible never states this.
- In the Old Testament hell is the grave, and in the New Testament hell refers either to the grave or to destruction.

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS CHRIST

Jesus the Saviour

The true Christian hope is centred in the work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Jesus first came into the world around 2,000 years ago, to suffer and die as a sacrifice for the sins of men, and to rise again from the dead to glory and eternal life:

- “For I delivered unto you first of all . . . how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3,4);
- “God . . . hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things . . . who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person . . . when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb. 1:1-3).

This role of Jesus as Saviour was prophesied in the Old Testament and announced by angels before his birth:

- “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief . . . he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities . . . and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:3-6);
- “thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Mt. 1:21).

Jesus the King

But Jesus was also declared to be the Messiah, the anointed King who would rule over Israel and all the nations of the world forever:

- “And, behold, thou [Mary] shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS . . . and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Lk. 1:31-33).

The future role of Jesus as the ruler of the Kingdom of God requires that he must come a second time to the earth. The Scriptures repeatedly give assurance that Jesus will come again to reign as King:

- “the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of Me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession” (Ps. 2:7,8);
- “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given . . . Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever” (Isa. 9:6,7);
- “. . . so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for him he will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation” (Heb. 9:28, NKJV);
- “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory” (Mt. 25:31).

And so the disciples who witnessed Jesus ascend into heaven were assured by the angel of his future return:

- “this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

What is Jesus coming for?

The Lord Jesus Christ, as supreme ruler appointed by God, will have jurisdiction firstly over his saints, those redeemed by his sacrifice, and secondly over the nations. At his coming he will raise the dead of all ages who are responsible (through knowledge of the command of God to repent), and judge them:

- “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout . . . and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:16,17);
- “for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (Jno. 5:28,29);
- “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Cor. 5:10).

With the assistance of the redeemed saints, Jesus will then commence the task of subduing the nations and establishing righteous government, bringing peace and justice to the world and deliverance to the poor and the oppressed:

- “Give the king Thy judgments, O God . . . He shall judge Thy people with righteousness, and Thy poor with judgment . . . He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor . . . In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace . . . all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him . . . His name shall endure for ever” (Ps. 72:1,2,4,7,11,17);
- “behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven . . . And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed . . . And the kingdom and dominion . . . shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High” (Dan. 7:13,14,27);
- “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection . . . such . . . shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years” (Rev. 20:6).

When is Jesus coming?

The time of Christ’s Second Coming is known only to the Father in heaven. However, He has given many prophetic signposts in Scripture to encourage faithful believers to watch and to prepare themselves for that day. They include the re-establishment of Israel as a nation in the Holy Land, strife with its Arab neighbours, the growth of both Russian and Catholic-based European powers, and worldwide fear and moral decline:

- “And [the Jews] . . . shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. And there shall be signs . . . and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity . . . men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (Lk. 21:24-27).

Since there are abundant signs that Jesus will come soon, all true believers should be studying the words of Scripture, and watching and praying for that day to come soon!

- “Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man” (v. 36).

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

*“Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7).
“And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe” (Jno. 14:29).*

Bible prophecy is of vital importance to those who have confessed their belief in the “things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ” at their baptism. Such a belief requires an acceptance that since Eden God has foretold future events, and is controlling and influencing the affairs of the world and individual lives. The two quotations above confirm, firstly, that God’s plans are made known to men and women in advance, and, secondly, that when prophecy is fulfilled, it encourages the faith of those who have received the prophecies.

1 Bible prophecies are given to:

- Reveal the true God, and that He is in control
- Reveal the future
- Explain the present
- Encourage faith and motivate witness
- Identify where believers are in God’s time scale
- Convince those whom God is calling
- Confirm the truth of God’s Word the Scriptures

(Deut. 18:20-22; Isa. 43:9-12; 48:3-8; Jer. 28; Dan. 2:20-22,28,31-45; Jude vv. 14,15; Rev. 4:1)

2 Only God can accurately foretell the future

Prophecy is not conjecture, nor a demonstration of passive foreknowledge by God (that is, that God knows what will happen and fits His purpose around events without influencing them). Prophecy is a direct message from God, not human speculation, and Scripture emphasises this with phrases such as “the LORD shall bring”, “I will turn thee back”, “the most High ruleth”.

(Deut. 28:36,49,64; Ezek. 38:1,4; Dan. 4:17,35; Acts 1:6,7; 17:26,30,31; Rev. 2:5)

“We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed . . . For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:19-21)

3 God gave signs of the times to previous generations

There are numerous prophecies of the return of Jesus, the establishment of the Kingdom of God on the earth, and what this Kingdom will be like, but God has not left a void from Eden to the return of Jesus. Every generation has had the sign (miracle) of fulfilled prophecy, often witnessing it happening for themselves:

- Moses expected the Hebrews to recognise the times (*Acts 7:25; Gen. 15:13; 50:24*)
- Daniel understood the times from the writing of Jeremiah (*Dan. 9:2*)
- Jesus expected his followers to identify the times from Daniel (*Mt. 24:15-18*)
- Paul warned the ecclesias of the sign of apostasy (*Acts 20:29-31; 2 Thess. 2:3-12*)
- John taught the first-century believers to identify antichrist (*1 Jno. 2:18; 4:1-3*)

4 Jesus Christ was the sign of the times to his own generation

The religious leaders of Israel did not recognise Jesus as the promised Messiah, and he condemned the Pharisees and Sadducees for being unable to “discern the signs of the times” (Mt. 16:1-4). They wanted a sign (miracle) that would show conclusively that Jesus was the Son of God. They were blind to the signs that abounded, and were not able to accept *the* sign of their generation, the death and resurrection of Jesus, the greatest sign heaven could give. The birth, ministry, trial, death and resurrection of our Lord all fulfilled prophecy, and Jesus instructed his disciples in these.

(Mt. 2:1-6; Mk. 1:1-3; Mt. 21:1-9; Jno. 1:37-51; Mk. 7:6; Jno. 19:24,28,36,37; Lk. 24:25-27,44-47)

5 God has given us signs of the times also in these last days

This generation has seen some tremendous signs come to pass, and we must be on our guard to ensure that we are not ensnared by the things of this life, which will cause us to be blind to the hand of God at work and leave us unprepared for the coming of the Master. Disregarding prophecy or listening to false prophets will have disastrous consequences.

(Lk. 21:34-36; 1 Thess. 5:1-4; 2 Pet. 3:11,12; Mt. 7:15-23)

Signs for us include the following:

- The regathering of Israel (*Jer. 30:11; 31:10,28,35-37; Ezek. 37:1-14*)
- Jerusalem returned to Jewish control (*Lk. 21:24*)
- Libya, Ethiopia, Persia (Iran) same political persuasion (*Ezek. 38:5; Dan. 11:43*)
- The state of the world: Distress, perplexity, fear (*Lk. 21:25,26*)
Immorality (*Lk. 17:28-30; Gen. 13:13; 18:20*)
Godlessness (*2 Tim. 3:1-7*)
Corruption and violence (*Lk. 17:26,27; Gen. 6:11*)
- An explosion of knowledge (*Dan. 12:4*)
- An expansion of military might, particularly in the Middle East (*Joel 3:9-14*)
- A reunited Europe with a strong apostate religious influence dominated by a particular nation or region (*Dan. 8:23-25; 11:36-39; Rev. 17; Ezek. 38:1-7*)
- A change from the east-west divide of nations to a north-south, particularly in relation to the Middle East (*Dan. 11:40*)
- The search for peace and prosperity in the Middle East by Israel (*Ezek. 38:10-12*)

The unfolding of God’s prophetic message in our day and age is a great encouragement to the faithful disciples, for “when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh” (Lk. 21:28) is the exhortation of Jesus. These things confirm for us the truth of God’s declaration:

I am the LORD: that is My name: and My glory will I not give to another, neither My praise to graven images. Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them” (Isa. 42:8,9).

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

THE ROLE OF SISTERS

“And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone;
I will make him an help meet for him” (Gen. 2:18).

“And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (vv. 22,23).

“For we [brethren and sisters] are members of his [Christ’s] body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:30-32).

“For a man . . . is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man” (1 Cor. 11:7).

The principles which govern the relationships and responsibilities of men and women are set out in Genesis and continue right through Scripture. Neither the passing of time, nor the environment, nor social custom, can affect or change these principles or the requirements they place on the individual. They stand from Eden until Christ returns and establishes the Kingdom on the earth.

Woman was created as a “help meet [suitable]” for man. Adam allowed Eve to usurp his authority and teaching, and as a consequence sin entered the world. God then placed His pattern, by which men and women should live and worship, into the earth; and this pattern, and the principles governing it, are carried down through time into the first-century ecclesias, and should be seen in His household today.

Ephesians 5 shows the link with Eden clearly. As Eve came from Adam, so the saints come out from Christ and reflect His glory. The sister is representative of the Bride of Christ, the ecclesia, made up of both brethren and sisters. The brother is representative of Christ. The sisters work alongside the bridegroom, the brethren, who take responsibility for the ecclesia until the true Bridegroom comes. This does not affect the status of the sister in the sight of God, for both brethren and sisters are joint heirs of salvation; yet the pattern is clear: God—Christ—man—woman. Christ represents God, man represents Christ, and the woman represents both male and female in the figure of the Bride of Christ, the ecclesia. In fulfilling this pattern neither men nor women lose their equality in Christ, but they fulfil differing responsibilities, which for the sisters are many, varied, and extremely important.

Sisters: when the ecclesia comes together

In the formal meetings of the ecclesia (breaking of bread, public talks, Bible classes, fraternal gatherings, baptisms, etc.) the sister is under the restriction of the Word of God. It counsels her not to usurp the authority of the brethren, but to display that quietness of spirit through her demeanour and head-covering that becomes one representing an ecclesia subject to Christ. Her discreet behaviour reflects that disciplined mind which Scripture enjoins her to cultivate. In these gatherings the sister remains silent, but does join in the praises of hymns, gives assent to the prayers, and by her presence witnesses to the faith of the ecclesia and the love of the ecclesia for its Lord and God.

1 Cor. 11:1-16; Eph. 5:22-33; 1 Tim. 2:9-15; 3:11

Sisters: as helpers in Christ

There is a great deal of work for sisters within the household. Teaching other sisters, teaching children (in Sunday school, youth group and the home), pastoral work in caring for the sick and aged, visiting the housebound and lonely, helping other sisters in their family duties, caring in a maternal sense for children in the ecclesia as needed (perhaps this is a possible meaning of the expression “saved in childbearing” in 1 Timothy 2:15, giving a wider meaning than strictly childbirth)—all of these responsibilities are specifically listed in Scripture as the work of the sisters. To this is added the help they give in preaching activities outside the formal meetings, teaching unbelievers and helping brethren in the preaching activities.

Tit. 2:3-5; Rom. 16; Phil. 4:3; Acts 1:14; 18:24-26; Heb. 6:10

Sisters: as keepers at home

The tremendous work of creating a home where the spirit of Christ prevails, the principles of Scripture are upheld and children are brought up “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4), is one of the most important activities a sister can engage in, whether as a wife or as a single or widowed sister. Scripture gives examples of mothers whose godly influence affected the faith and adult life of their children; of women who gave hospitality willingly; of wives whose attitude to their husbands portrayed that love for and wisdom of God that comes from a woman’s response to her call to holiness. In a world in which homes are often built on materialism and covetousness, a sister can create an environment of stability and peace where the lasting values are not affected by the pressure of the world.

1 Tim. 2:9-10,15; 3:11; Prov. 31; 2 Tim. 1:5; 1 Tim. 5:10,14

Sisters: as heirs of salvation

The fact that sisters are required to fulfil a role and responsibility within the ecclesia and family life which is different from that of brethren in no way diminishes their status and standing before God. Sisters are “heirs together of the grace of life” and “all one in Christ Jesus” with the brethren. Our attitude to one another, brethren to sisters and sisters to brethren, must be that of esteeming others greater than ourselves. Sisters through the power of prayer and the wearing of head coverings represent the Bride of Christ (male and female), and work for the salvation of those whom God has called.

Gen. 18:12; 1 Pet. 3:1-7; Gal 3:26-29; 1 Tim. 5:10; Phil. 2:3; 1 Cor. 11:1-16

“Both [men and women] are to ensure that such influence as they can bring to bear on their surroundings is a Divine influence and, in the spirit of Christ, seek to make the Lord’s will paramount. The woman, however, though encouraged by Scripture to use initiative, is to work out her dominion within the overall framework of male leadership. It is the man who has the ultimate responsibility for controlling the direction of events which are to be, to the best of his understanding, in accordance with God’s ways. In turn, he is to seek and to value the woman’s counsel, remembering always that the phrase ‘help meet’ means a God-given fellow-worker in the task of understanding and implementing the Divine will”.

Michael Lewis, *Man and Woman*, The Testimony, 1992, p. 54.

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

TEMPTATION AND ITS CONQUEST

Temptation defined

Temptation is a state experienced when a person thinks thoughts, considers intentions or desires things which are contrary to the thoughts, intents and desires of Almighty God. When those thoughts are fulfilled through action, those intentions translated into achievements and those desires satisfied by accomplishment, then sin is committed. Sin unrepented of by the sinner and not forgiven by the Father leads to death. Temptation is a link in the chain of circumstances that leads to death (**Jas. 1:14,15**).

Temptation and life

Temptation is also a link in the chain of circumstances that can lead to life. Temptation is necessary. It is the means whereby faith is tested (**Jas. 1:2,3,12**).

Temptation is universal

It is no respecter of persons. No one escapes its influence. It is not confined by time or place, nor restricted by age, social standing, intellect, race, gender or creed (**Gen. 3:6; 2 Sam. 11:2-5; Mt. 4:1-11; Rom. 3:10,12; 1 Cor. 10:13; Heb. 4:15**).

Temptation—its origin

Temptation can arise because of our situation. The people we are with, the place we are in, and the time may all have an influence (**Gen. 3; Josh. 7; Mt. 19:3; 26:14-16; Lk. 20:21-26**).

Temptation may arise because of our unique emotional constitution. Not everyone exposed to the same situation will be affected in the same way (**1 Cor. 8:7-13**).

Temptation can be overcome

We have been promised that we shall have the strength for all eventualities (**1 Cor. 10:13**).

Temptation—its conquest

Overcoming temptation involves appreciating that danger exists, recognising the cause, and taking appropriate action. Sometimes that action involves avoidance, sometimes confrontation (**Prov. 4:14,15; Mt. 5:29,30; Mk. 8:33; Jas. 4:7,8**).

We must not place ourselves in situations where temptation will arise. We must remove ourselves from circumstances where temptation has arisen (**Ps. 1:1; Lk. 4:30**).

We should seek the company of those who are wise and strong, and who will influence us for good (**Prov. 9:6; 13:20; 22:24**).

We must starve our wayward emotions of food (**Rom. 13:14; Eph. 4:22**).

We must be quick and decisive when we are confronted with temptation, and positive in our reaction against it (**Prov. 1:10-15; Mt. 16:23; Heb. 12:1,2**).

We must be awake to and aware of the insidious nature of temptation (**Mt. 26:41; Lk. 12:15; 1 Cor. 10:12; 1 Pet. 5:8**).

Inadequate on our own to conquer every temptation, we must seek God's help in prayer and through His Word. We have a pattern of perfection. We need to emulate and adopt that model (**Mt. 6:13; 26:41; Heb. 12:1,2; 2 Pet. 2:9**).

Sin breeds sin. Overcoming one temptation strengthens us to overcome the next (**Jas. 1:2-4**).

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

THE ECCLESIA

Ekklesia is a Greek word which occurs over one hundred times in the New Testament. It is usually translated 'church' or 'churches'. The word comes from two words: *ek* ('out of') and *kaleō* ('called'). The two words occur separately in the following quotation:

"Out of Egypt have I called My son" (Mt. 2:15).

The ecclesia is a group of people who have been 'called out'. Usually the word is used of the believers in Christ who have been called out from the world to be a people for their God, but it is also used of Israel in the wilderness (Acts 7:38) and of the "assembly" of Diana worshippers in Ephesus who gathered at the theatre (19:32,39,41).

Particular ecclesias and the ecclesia in general

To avoid confusion with the way the world uses the word 'church', Christadelphians usually use the word '*ecclesia*'. In this leaflet '*ecclesia*' is used instead of 'church' in quotations from the New Testament AV.

Ecclesia can refer to groups of believers in specific locations:

"the *ecclesia* which was at Jerusalem" (Acts 8:1);

"the *ecclesia* that is in their house" (Rom. 16:5);

"the *ecclesia* of the Laodiceans" (Col. 4:16);

"the *ecclesia* of the Thessalonians" (1 Thess. 1:1).

Ecclesia can also refer to the believers as a whole:

"upon this rock I will build my *ecclesia*" (Mt. 16:18);

"I persecuted the *ecclesia* of God" (1 Cor. 15:9);

"concerning Christ and the *ecclesia*" (Eph. 5:32).

The ecclesia and the promises

In Hebrews 2:12 the writer quotes from Psalm 22:22. The Greek word *ekklēsia* is used to translate the Hebrew word *qahal* ('congregation'). So *qahal* is an Old Testament word for *ecclesia*. The first occurrence of *qahal* is in Genesis 28, where it is translated 'multitude': "And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a *multitude* of people" (v. 3). Thus the ecclesia has its roots in the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Later on in Genesis 28, Jacob set up a stone as a pillar and called it "God's house" (v. 22). Paul alludes to this in writing to Timothy, when he likens the ecclesia to a house and a pillar: ". . . the house of God, which is the ecclesia of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15).

The ecclesia and Christ

The ecclesia is likened to a body with Christ as the head: "And he is the head of the body, the *ecclesia*" (Col. 1:18); "Now ye [the *ecclesia*] are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (1 Cor. 12:27). Just as a body has many different parts, each with its own function, so the ecclesia is made up of many brethren and sisters, each with their own role: "If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were

hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him” (vv. 17,18). As parts of this body, brethren and sisters should avoid schisms (divisions), and “care one for another” (v. 25).

In Ephesians 5 the ecclesia is likened to a bride with Christ as the bridegroom. The husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the ecclesia (v. 23). Wives should be subject to their husbands just as the ecclesia is subject to Christ (v. 24). Christ loves the ecclesia as a husband should love his wife; such is his love that he gave himself for the ecclesia (v. 25). The bride is to be cleansed by “the washing of water by the word” (v. 26), and so the Word of God should play a central part in the life of an ecclesia.

Ecclesial life

A central aspect of ecclesial life is remembering the sacrifice of Christ by breaking bread and drinking wine, usually “upon the first day of the week” (Acts 20:7). The meeting on the first day of the week is also an appropriate time when collections can be taken (1 Cor. 16:2). When we meet together we should also exhort one another: “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Heb. 10:25).

Another Old Testament word which matches with *ekklēsia* is the Hebrew word *miqra*. This word is made up of the Hebrew words for ‘out’ and ‘called’, as found in “and called My son out of Egypt” (Hos. 11:1). *Strong’s Concordance* defines it as meaning, ‘something called out’. It is translated ‘convocation’ (Ex. 12:16), ‘assemblies’ (Isa. 1:13) and ‘reading’ (Neh. 8:8). In Nehemiah 8:8 the Hebrew is better translated ‘in convocation’ or ‘in assembly’. This assembly in Nehemiah 8 provides us with an example of the kind of things an ecclesia should do when it meets together:

- gather together as one (v. 1)
- read the Word of God (v. 3)
- worship God (v. 6)
- expound the Word (v. 7)
- teach (v. 9)
- have joy in understanding the Word (v. 12).

Other points

When a member of the ecclesia persists in wrong behaviour then he or she should be withdrawn from: “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us” (2 Thess. 3:6).

The letters to the seven ecclesias in Revelation provide us with much instruction and warning for ecclesial life. The ecclesias varied in their spiritual health. For example, the Ephesians were commended for their works, labour, patience, refusal to bear evil, and their hatred of things which Christ hated, although they had left their “first love” (Rev. 2:2-6). But the Laodiceans were rebuked for being materially rich but spiritually “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (3:17).

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

THE FLOOD

"God . . . spared not the old world, but saved Noah . . . a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly" (2 Pet. 2:4,5).

"And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all" (Lk. 17:26,27).

The Flood—a real historical event

The Bible always speaks of the Flood as a real historical event, which has lessons for succeeding generations. It was a dramatic Divine judgement on a totally godless, wicked world. Noah's contemporary world is described thus:

- the world of the ungodly (2 Pet. 2:5)
- all flesh had corrupted His (God's) way upon the earth (Gen. 6:12)
- the earth was filled with violence (v. 11)
- the wickedness of man was great in the earth . . . every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually (v. 5; cf. Job 22:15-17)
- society was wholly preoccupied with everyday activities (Mt. 24:37-39; Lk. 17:26,27).

There are references in ancient literature to a flood which destroyed all human life except one man and his family, the best known being the Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic.

The Flood—totally destroyed Noah's contemporaries

The Divine judgement destroyed the world of Noah's day completely.

God promised it:

"behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die" (Gen. 6:17);

"every living substance that I have made will I destroy from off the face of the earth" (7:4).

God carried out His word:

"And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man: all in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died" (vv. 21,22).

Peter reminds us of the fact:

". . . the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished" (2 Pet. 3:6).

The Ark was a very large structure, much bigger than Noah and his family needed for their own safety. God used it to house the animals and birds that would otherwise have perished but would be needed to replenish the earth after the Flood had receded.

God's covenant with Noah and his descendants

God's covenant with Noah after the Flood guarantees that all flesh will not again be destroyed by a flood: "I will establish My covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off

any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth" (Gen. 9:11). The token of this covenant is the rainbow. It may be that the rainbow had not been seen before the Flood. But whether it had or not, the significant point is that "the bow shall be in the cloud; and I [God] will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth" (v. 16).

Noah saved by faith and works

God spared Noah, "a just man and perfect in his generations" who "walked with God" (6:9). Although a man of outstanding character, whose name is linked with Daniel and Job as a righteous man (Ezek. 14:14,20), Noah was required to believe God's warning about the impending Flood and to prepare an ark to escape from its devastation (Gen. 6:14):

"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (Heb. 11:7).

The Flood—a figure of salvation through faith and baptism

The Ark, built by Noah in faithful response to God's warning, became the means of salvation from the Flood. Being in the Ark, shut in by God, was the only way to be saved from the catastrophe that engulfed that civilisation. Peter uses this event to represent the way of salvation available today, through belief, baptism and faithful way of life:

"the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 3:20,21).

Just as Noah responded to God, so too men and women are required to believe God's Word. The resulting baptism is thus more than a wash; it becomes "the answer of a good conscience towards God". Like Noah, believers will continue to live their lives by God's standards.

The Flood—a warning to us of God's judgements to come

Jesus likened the state of society at the time of his return to that in Noah's time (Mt. 24:37-39; Lk. 17:26,27). That society was violent, godless, and concerned only with day-to-day material activities.

Peter warned that people would wilfully ignore the fact that God had destroyed the world in Noah's day, despite its witness to a God of judgement, Who intends to "judge the world in righteousness" by Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:5-7; Acts 17:31).

He further warns, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night . . ." (2 Pet. 3:9,10).

Those who heed the warning of the Flood will, "according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (v. 13).

BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

Scripture makes it plain that sin creates a breach in our relationship with our Creator. This breach needs to be repaired if, as God's children, we are to enjoy the blessings of a restored relationship with Him now, and to take advantage of His offer of everlasting life in His coming Kingdom. It has fairly been observed that every part of the Bible has something to contribute to the story of how this can be achieved.

Sin is disobedience to God's commandments, and it demonstrates an attitude of mind with no regard for God and His ways (see also Romans 14:23 and James 4:17):

"Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness" (1 Jno. 3:4).

When we sin, we fall short of the standards of behaviour He asks of us as His creation:

"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

No wonder, then, that the first sin resulted in punishment, when Adam and Eve broke God's commandment in the Garden of Eden and were condemned to death for it. Although we are not responsible for their sin, as their descendents we have inherited the mortality they incurred as a result, and on top of this we have our own sins to worry about too:

"through one man [Adam] sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because [literally, 'upon which'] all sinned" (5:12).

With only one exception—the Lord Jesus Christ—no man or woman is without sin:

"there is no one who does not sin" (1 Kgs. 8:46).

Sin is therefore a universal problem, affecting every one of us, and requiring our urgent attention if we are not to perish for ever, unforgiven and without hope. Dealing with sin truly is a matter of life and death.

God is righteous, and as the supreme arbiter of right and wrong He is just to condemn sin. But if we are all guilty of sin, and God is to enforce his death sentence against each of us as a result, how then can any of us receive forgiveness of our sins and hope to inherit eternal life at the return of the Lord Jesus? To unravel this conundrum is to gain an insight into the very mind of God Himself, and to avail ourselves of His grace in a wonderful way.

After the appearance of sin in the world, God in His mercy initiated a marvellous rescue plan by which He could enforce His righteous condemnation of sin without compromise, yet still provide hope for all those who desire to be at one with Him. This is how we can reconcile what at first sight seem to be contradictory 'sides' of God's character, but which are in fact are merely two aspects of the God we worship. Moses puts this beautifully when he pleads with Him to forgive the nation of Israel, knowing that "The LORD is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression", yet at the same time appreciating that He "by no means clears the guilty" (Num. 14:18).

Central to God's merciful rescue plan for mankind was sacrifice. In Old Testament times, particularly under the Law of Moses, a person who recognised his sin could take an animal which had been prescribed and offer it in sacrifice to God. The animal whose blood was shed did not die *instead of* the sinner; rather, by placing his hand on the head of the flawless animal being sacrificed (for example, Lev. 4:29), the sinner identified with it, acknowledging his guilt in the sight of God and symbolically *dying with the sacrifice*. Sacrifice thus taught the sinner a number of important principles:

- Death was God's righteous punishment for sin
- There was a cost to the sinner in being reconciled with God

- The perfection of the sacrifice symbolised the perfection God asked of the offerer but which he had not shown
- Forgiveness of sin required the shedding of blood, showing that life was forfeit
- There needed to be a strong connection between the offerer and the sacrificial offering

If these principles were recognised, not only would they provide powerful motivation against sinning again, but, more immediately, God in His mercy would forgive the sin which had been committed. As Leviticus puts it, the sacrifice would “make atonement for him” (v. 31), meaning that the sin would be covered, no longer regarded by God.

If animal sacrifices were so effective, why are we not still required to offer them for sin to be forgiven? The letter to the Hebrews explains that they could never be the real answer to sin:

“the law [of Moses] . . . can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect . . . But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. *For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins*” (10:1,3,4).

Sacrifices of animals were only a temporary way of dealing with sin until the time came when God provided the ultimate solution—a solution by which sins would not be merely covered, but completely taken away and remembered no more.

The true sacrifice God has provided is, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ. By his sinless life and obedient death, he showed us all that God asks of us. And just as it was possible under the Law of Moses for a repentant sinner to receive forgiveness by becoming involved in the death of the God-given sacrifice, associating himself with the perfect offering, so it is in Christ now. However, our involvement is shown not by killing an animal, but by repentance (rethinking our position and seeking a change of direction in life) and baptism. See how Paul explains this in Romans 6:

“as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death” (v. 3);

“Therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death” (v. 4);

“we have been united together [‘with him’] in the likeness of his death” (v. 5);

“our old man [our former way of life] was crucified with him” (v. 6);

“we died with Christ” (v. 8).

In a very real sense, therefore, Christian baptism fulfils all those principles we saw in the animal sacrifices of Old Testament times, yet it gets to the heart of the matter in a way the death of an unthinking animal never could. By acknowledging the Lord Jesus Christ as the standard God is looking for in us, and seeking to associate ourselves with his sinless life and sacrificial death, we simultaneously acknowledge the righteousness of God’s condemnation of sin and take advantage of His gracious offer of forgiveness. And the life we seek to live thereafter as a disciple of Christ is no longer our old life, but the life of Jesus himself:

“For if when we were enemies [separated from God] we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by his life” (Rom. 5:10).

The reconciliation with God we achieve in this way not only means the forgiveness of our sins now, but gives us hope of acceptance on the day of judgement to come:

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (vv. 1,2).

(All quotations from the New King James Version)

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

THE HOLY SPIRIT

*“. . . ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit . . . being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever”
(1 Pet. 1:22,23).*

“. . . God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 2:13,14).

*“There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling . . .”
(Eph. 4:4).*

God's Spirit

God's Spirit is His power by which He achieves all His purposes.

By His Spirit, God:

- Created all things *Gen. 1:1,2; Ps. 33:6; Rev. 4:11*
- Gives life to all creatures *Ps. 104:30; Job 34:14,15*
- Communicated His purpose through His prophets *2 Tim. 3:16; Deut. 18:18; Num. 12:6,7*
- Empowers and equips His angels to carry out His purposes *Ps. 104:4; 103:20*
- Revealed His character through
 - His inspired revelation in both Old and New Testaments *2 Pet. 1:19,21; Eph. 3:5*
 - His work with Israel *Isa. 63. 7-14*
 - His Son Jesus the Christ *Jno. 14:9; Acts 10:38*

The Holy Spirit

This description of God's Spirit occurs almost exclusively in the New Testament. The Holy Spirit is God's Spirit directed particularly to His work of salvation in Jesus, which may be described as 'the new creation in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:17; both RV mg.). Although referred to in a personal sense, the Holy Spirit is not a person, but God's power active through His Son, His apostles and His prophets in the first century, and through continuing angelic ministration (Acts 10:38; Eph. 3:5; 1 Cor. 14:29,30; Isa; 63:9,10).

Through the Holy Spirit, God:

- Caused the conception of His Son *Lk. 1:31,35; Mt. 1:18,20*
- Equipped His Son for his ministry *Jno. 3:34,35; Acts 2:22; Lk. 4:14,18-21 (citing Isa. 61:1,2); Acts 10:38*
- Equipped His apostles
 - to preach the gospel *Acts 1:8; 1 Pet. 1:12*
 - to perform miraculous signs *Acts 5:12; Heb. 2:4*
 - to witness against unrepentant Jewry *Jno. 14:26; 15:26; 16:8-14*

- Raised His Son, Jesus, from the dead
- Granted various gifts to apostles and believers in the first century to ensure the establishment of the ecclesia and the completion of His written revelation

1 Pet. 3:18; Eph. 1:19,20; 2 Cor. 13:4

Eph. 4:7-16

Holy Spirit gifts

These gifts were given to individuals at specific times in history: at the Exodus, during the prophetic ministries of Elijah and Elisha, during Jesus's ministry, and during the ministry of the apostles of Jesus to first-century believers, commencing with the initial outpouring at Pentecost (Acts 2). The powers varied, and were given to individuals for specific purposes at specific times (Eph. 4:7,11,12; 1 Cor. 12:4-11).

These gifts were a temporary dispensation for the two contemporary generations, "you, and . . . your children" (Acts 2:38,39) of Jews and Gentiles called to salvation. They were given to establish the first-century community of believers (the ecclesia) and allow the completion of the New Testament revelation (Eph. 4:7-14; 1 Cor. 13:8-10). Neither these gifts, nor any additional grace through the Holy Spirit, offered direct Divine influence to improve the believer's character or to help in overcoming sin, nor were either necessary before a person could believe the gospel (Acts 8:12,15-17; Rom. 6:17).

Apostles with these powers had "tasted the powers of the age to come" (Heb. 6:4,5), having received "the firstfruits of the Spirit" (Rom 8:23). The full harvest comes in the new age of the Kingdom of God when there will be a greater outpouring to equip saints for their role as godly rulers (Joel 2:28-32).

This ministry of the Spirit through apostles and prophets in the first century produced the New Testament revelation, which is wholly sufficient for directing people to, and instructing them in, the way of salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:16,17; Col. 1:28). The Word of God, given through the Spirit to "holy men of God" (2 Pet. 1:21), when sincerely believed is able to create in a person "the mind of Christ", the spirit of Christ, that is, a new man (Rom. 8:4,9,11,14; Gal. 5:16-18).

God's care for His children

God, as a Father Who gives good things to His children, has provided His care in all generations through the ministry of the angels. These, equipped with Spirit power, carry out His purposes, and in particular are appointed to care for believers (Heb. 1:14; Mt. 18:10; Ps. 34:7; 91:11; Acts 12:7; Gen. 48:16; Dan. 10:13).

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

“And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Mt. 1:21);

“Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (v. 23);

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).

The birth of Jesus was a miracle; his conception was brought about by the power of God, the Holy Spirit. He had a human mother, Mary, but his father was God, not Joseph. By this, Jesus was both Son of man and Son of God. His birth was greeted with joy by the angels in heaven, and with rejoicing on earth by those men and women who had anticipated his coming. The references above show that here was one who was to be a saviour for those condemned through sin to death, one who would show the character and purpose of God to men and women through his life and teachings, and one who would ultimately rule God's Kingdom on earth.

He was born at a time of God's choosing—“when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman” (Gal. 4:4)—in fulfilment of promises and prophecies given over thousands of years and faithfully recorded in the Old Testament. In Luke 24 we see the Lord Jesus, after his resurrection, confirming this to the disciples on the road to Emmaus (v. 27) and to the eleven gathered at Jerusalem (v. 44). The Law, the Prophets and the Psalms all speak of the one who was to come, born of a woman, destined to suffer and die as a sacrifice for sin, yet to be raised and then reign gloriously. The New Testament opens by confirming his link to the promises made to David and Abraham: “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Mt. 1:1).

Son of man

Although Jesus was conceived by the power of God, he bore the same nature as all men, and was subject to trial and temptation just as we are. It was not that he was unable to sin because he was the Son of God, but that he chose not to, even though he had a nature that would prompt him to follow fleshly desires. Here is the greatness of his victory. He among the millions of men is the only one who could say to his enemies, “Which of you convinceth me of sin?” (Jno. 8:46). The writer to the Hebrews makes the point very clearly: “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (4:15).

This victory over sin, this complete obedience to the will of God, was not something that was achieved easily. Again in Hebrews we read of Jesus: “Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him That was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered” (5:7,8). The Lord Jesus Christ was the only one who could say, “not my will, but Thine, be done” (Lk. 22:42), and fulfil this in every aspect of his life, even to the laying down of his life on the cross.

So we see that Scripture clearly shows us the humanity of Christ, and how essential it was that he should be of the same nature as all men, that in overcoming sin he might be the perfect sacrifice for sin for all men and women.

Our Saviour Jesus Christ

The Lord Jesus was always aware of the responsibility that he carried and what lay before him—death on the cross. His knowledge of Old Testament passages that spoke of his betrayal and suffering, such as Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53, must have been a heavy burden to carry. Yet he did not turn from the path set out before him, but, “when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Lk. 9:51). Twice Matthew records that he tried to make his disciples aware of the suffering, death and resurrection he was to experience (17:22,23; 20:17-19).

Thus he completed the work that God had set him to do, having declared, “Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God”. The result is that “we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ” (Heb. 10:9,10). It was his complete obedience to the will of his heavenly Father that made his sacrifice acceptable and his resurrection sure. To him is due all praise and glory, for he has made eternal life possible for men and women by his overcoming of sin and death:

“And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:9,10).

The Old Testament principle, established in Eden, that without the shedding of blood there could be no remission of sin, and confirmed in the Passover when Israel came out of Egypt, was fulfilled in Christ for us: “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7).

Son of God and King of kings

All the Gospels declare early on that Jesus was the Son of God (Mt. 3:17; Mk. 1:1; Lk. 1:32; Jno. 1:14-18). Because he was born by the power of God, he was the Son of God, and had the strength to overcome his human nature (Ps. 80:17; Isa. 11:2-5). As God’s Son he had a desire to hear and obey his Father: “The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back . . . For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed” (Isa. 50:5,7). Because of his claim to Divine Sonship, the Jews tried to stone him (Jno. 10:29-39), and his confession that he was the Son of God was used as grounds for condemning him to death (Mt. 26:63-66).

It was “for the joy that was set before him” that Jesus “endured the cross, despising the shame”, and as a result “is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2). As the Apostle Paul shows in Acts 13:33, the day of Christ’s resurrection was the day spoken of in Psalm 2:7 when God said, “Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten thee”. God brought Christ forth from the grave to die no more, and bestowed on him “a name which is above every name” (Phil. 2:9), confirming his inheritance, even the Kingdom and the saints. Glory and majesty now belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, and will be his in the Kingdom age, as is clearly seen in the Scriptures (Eph. 1:20,21; Phil. 2:10,11).

The Lord Jesus Christ has made it possible for men and women ultimately to dwell with God.

“This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent” (Jno. 17:3).

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

THE NEW COVENANT

What is a covenant?

In everyday use a covenant describes an agreement between parties where there are benefits and responsibilities for the parties and penalties for non-compliance. It was the practice when Scripture was being written to sacrifice an animal and divide the carcass into pieces. The parties contracting the covenant would then pass between the pieces to confirm the covenant and in acknowledgement that their lives would be forfeit if they failed to keep their part of the agreement. In Genesis 15:18, where the promise of the land is confirmed to Abraham, it says: "In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates". The word "made" should be translated 'cut'. It is clear when this chapter is carefully read that Abraham passed between the pieces of several sacrifices (vv. 10,11) and God also did (v. 17; the burning lamp must have been the Spirit of God). Another example of this practice is found in Jeremiah 34:18,19, and in the New Testament the writer to the Hebrews also seems to refer to this procedure in 9:15-17, where he argues that Jesus is the covenant sacrifice, the mediator who died to confirm the new testament, that is, covenant.

Covenants of promise

Covenants necessarily involve the two parties making solemn promises to each other. Scripture often links the ideas of covenants and promises, for example, Psalm 105:8,9 and Luke 1:72,73. Paul in Ephesians writes of "the covenants of promise" to which Gentiles can now be related (2:12,13). Whilst God will never renege on his side of a covenant, men have always failed to live up to their side, Jesus being the one exception. It is a wonder that the great God of heaven will stoop to make covenants with erring men, and many men of faith have acknowledged this in their prayers and teaching, addressing the Almighty as "God, Which keepeth covenant and mercy" (Deut. 7:9; cf. Neh. 1:5; Dan. 9:4).

Examples of covenants

- 1 The earliest covenant was made in Eden, and sacrifice was associated with it (Gen. 3:15,21). It is not called a covenant here, but God called it so when he saved Noah from the Flood: "But with thee will I establish My covenant" (6:18). Later on God gave Noah (and us) the rainbow as a token of His everlasting covenant with the earth and with all flesh, never again to bring a flood to destroy all life (9:8-17).
- 2 When Abraham was given the promise of a seed he was told that this was an everlasting covenant between God and his seed. The sign of this covenant would be circumcision, and every living descendant of Abraham through his son Isaac is a reminder to us that God's purpose with Israel will never fail (17:9-14,21).
- 3 Under Moses the nation of Israel entered into a covenant with God. This is called the old covenant, and it was confirmed, like the other covenants, by sacrifice. Moses sprinkled the blood of the offerings on the people, and they said: "All that the LORD hath said will we do" (Ex. 19:5; 24:4-8). But they soon broke the covenant.

The new covenant

When Jesus introduced the breaking of bread in the upper room in Jerusalem, shortly before his death, before he passed the cup of wine round he said: "this is my blood of the new testament [covenant], which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Mt. 26:28). This

covenant is different from the old (Mosaic) covenant because under it God promises forgiveness of sins. The old covenant was constantly broken by Israel, but, because of the excellence of Christ's offering, under the new covenant God can forgive, and will be able to fulfil all His covenants of promise (Rom. 8:1-4). References such as 2 Corinthians 4:14,15 and Galatians 2:20 show that the love of Christ in offering himself acts as a powerful example in the outworking of the new covenant on the hearts of believers. It is this which is called to mind in the breaking of bread service.

The covenant promises to Abraham and David confirmed by the death and resurrection of Jesus

Jesus is introduced to us in the New Testament as "the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Mt. 1:1). Two of the great covenants of Scripture were given to these men (Gen. 17:7; 2 Sam. 23:5). Paul says that Jesus came "to confirm the promises made unto the fathers [of Israel]", and that all the promises of God in him are yea and Amen (Rom. 15:8; 2 Cor. 1:20). So the offering of Jesus makes possible the fulfilment of the great and precious promises. This is seen in Genesis 15:4-21. Abraham was not lacking in faith, but wanted to know by what means he, a mortal and sinful man, might inherit the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession. God's answer to him was a prophetic vision of the sacrifice of Christ (see above). The apostle calls Jesus "the mediator of the new testament [covenant]" (Heb. 9:15). Zacharias, when his tongue was loosed, saw the Lord Jesus as the one who would fulfil the covenants of promise to Abraham and David (Lk. 1:68-73).

The new covenant is to be fulfilled by the nation of Israel

When we read Jeremiah 31:31-34, and the apostle's quotation of it in its entirety in Hebrews 8, we realise that the primary purpose of the new covenant is the cleansing and adoption of Israel as the people of God in the Kingdom. The apostle refers clearly to the house of Israel and the house of Judah, and the context is the people who rejected the old covenant now accepting the new. Other prophets teach the same. Isaiah 59:20,21 (quoted by the Apostle Paul in Romans 11:26,27) tells us that the redeemer (Christ) will come to Zion and turn away ungodliness from Jacob to fulfil the covenant. Ezekiel speaks of the everlasting covenant that God will make with His nation, and of their cleansing (37:23-26). Jeremiah tells us that the covenant of night and day is a guarantee to us that God will keep His promises to David (32:40; 33:20-22). Zechariah 12 and 13 describes how Jews in the land will be cleansed, and Ezekiel 20:33-44 tells how the Diaspora Jews will be cleansed by the work of the new covenant.

Some features of the new covenant

- It is primarily made with the nation of Israel (Jer. 31:31)
- It offers forgiveness of sins to many (Mt. 26:28)
- Jesus is its mediator (Heb. 9:15)
- Its work of forgiveness covers those under the old covenant and before (9:15)
- It is everlasting (13:20)
- It confirms the promises made in Eden, to Abraham and to David (Rom. 15:8)
- It preceded the old covenant by 430 years, but was not ratified until Christ came (Gal. 3:17)
- Today, believers enter the new covenant by baptism, which associates them with the sacrifice of Christ (Rom. 6:3-6; Gal. 3:27-29; Ps. 50:5)
- Those in covenant relationship with God should have God's laws written in their hearts and minds, and walk in faith to the Kingdom (Heb. 8:10; Jas. 2:20-22).

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

THE NEW LIFE

The magnitude of the change that accompanies becoming a disciple of Christ is described thus: "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were *dead* in our trespasses, *made us alive* together with Christ—by grace you have been saved . . ." (Eph. 2:4,5, ESV).

It is further emphasised by Paul, "remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having *no hope and without God* in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been *brought near* by the blood of Christ" (vv. 12,13, ESV).

Before belief we are dead; by belief and baptism we are made alive. Another analogy emphasises the change: "for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (5:8, ESV).

A new birth

The start of the Christian life is a new birth. It is the result of the Word of God acting on the mind of those who will hear it: "you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever'. And this word is the good news that was preached to you" (1 Pet. 1:23-25, ESV).

The newborn also needs feeding, and the Word of God is provided for that purpose also: "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby . . ." (2:1,2).

Children of God

Because the Word believed comes from God, those who are begotten of it are children of God. This is confirmed when faith is shown by belief of the gospel and by baptism: "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:26,27).

Baptism relates us to Christ by re-enacting Christ's death and resurrection as a symbol of our intention to live a new life patterned upon Jesus: "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:3,4).

Indeed, it is God's intention that all believers should develop characters like that of Jesus: "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (8:29); "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17, ESV).

Taking up the cross

Jesus made clear the challenge of the new life: "And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it" (Lk. 9:23,24).

It is a life of putting oneself second to the doing of God's will and meeting the needs of others. The disciple's aim is to "seek . . . first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness", knowing that "all these things [the necessities of life] shall be added unto you" (Mt. 6:33). This new focus means that "here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Heb. 13:14). The believer is now a 'stranger and pilgrim' in this world, for "our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself" (Phil. 3:20,21, ESV).

Living the new life

Learning from Jesus' example encourages the disciple to make a conscious move from behaviours that are described as the "old self", driven by "deceitful desires", to "the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:22-24, ESV). Following deceitful desires results in the works of the flesh (see Galatians 5:19-21); the new self develops the fruit of the Spirit, which is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (vv. 22,23, ESV), because "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (v. 24, ESV). Support for the new life comes from reading and meditating on God's Word (Ps. 119:105,130; Col. 3:16; 1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 3:15-17); prayer (Mt. 6:5-15; Acts 2:42; Rom. 12:12; Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6; 1 Thess. 5:17); remembering Jesus' death and resurrection in the memorial emblems (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 11:23-33); and fellowship with other believers (Gal. 6:10; Heb. 10:24,25; 1 Pet. 2:17).

Our relationship with the state is one of obedience to the laws of the country we live in (Rom. 13; Tit. 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). If the occasion arises that the state requires disobedience to God's law then the example of the apostles, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29), should be followed. Our relationship with others is, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). Indeed, Jesus requires us to "Love [our] enemies, bless them that curse [us], do good to them that hate [us], and pray for them which despitefully use [us], and persecute [us]; that [we] may be the children of [our] Father Which is in heaven" (Mt. 5:44,45).

Our new life should be evident to others and thus become a witness, enabling us to "[hold] forth the word of life" (Phil. 2:14-16; 1 Pet. 3:15). Our focus will not be a trust in uncertain riches, but rather, "having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (1 Tim. 6:8).

A positive benefit

The new life is very worthwhile. Following God's ways saves us from the physical and mental afflictions that are often the consequence of sinful living. Paul reminds us that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. 4:8). It enables us to benefit from God's providential care (Heb. 1:14), for He has promised, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (13:5). And, even if we are required to suffer for the faith, we are assured "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). Jesus himself set the example, because his focus was clear: ". . . Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2).

The new life is the school in which we learn to develop balanced spiritual characters that God will find fit to clothe with immortality and able to share in His Kingdom.

BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

THE PRIESTHOOD OF JESUS CHRIST

The Bible teaches that there is a great gulf between the God of heaven, the Almighty Creator, and fallen mankind, the result of man's rebellion and sin. God declares: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:9*). God is "of purer eyes than to behold evil", while fallen man "at his best state is altogether vanity" (Hab. 1:13; Ps. 39:5, AV). Thus men have long recognised the need for a go-between, a mediator who could intercede with God on their behalf. Job lamented: "Oh, that one might plead for a man with God, as a man pleads for his neighbour!" (Job 16:21). And God answered that need in the appointment of priests.

The office of priest

There are hints in Genesis of family priests in the age of the Patriarchs; and, when God established Israel as His chosen people, He instructed Moses to appoint as priests for the nation the house of Aaron, from the tribe of Levi: "Now take Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister to Me as priest" (Ex. 28:1). They were to wear special garments for the service of the tabernacle, the portable place of worship, and were consecrated by Moses for their office (chs. 28, 29).

The priests' principal duties were to offer sacrifices daily and upon the appointed feast days, as acts of worship, so that God would, symbolically, dwell among His people (29:44,45) and so be accessible to their thanksgivings and their supplications for forgiveness. The process of obtaining forgiveness and reconciliation with God involved the sacrifice of a specified animal as a sin offering. In this the priest acted as mediator, offering the blood upon the altar: "So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin, and it shall be forgiven him" (Lev. 4:26,31,35, etc.).

The limitations of this system of priesthood are made clear in the letter to the Hebrews. First, the priests were themselves sinners, in need of forgiveness: "if the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, then let him offer to the LORD for his sin . . ." (Lev. 4:3-12). Consequently, they themselves were mortal: "there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing" (Heb. 7:23). Secondly, it was necessary to repeat the offerings again and again, each time a new sin was committed, showing that they did not truly deal with men's sins: "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins . . . And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins" (10:4,11).

A superior priesthood

The Levitical system of priesthood is thus seen to have been a temporary one, foreshadowing the true means by which God would choose to offer men complete and lasting forgiveness, through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. He would be both *perfect* sacrifice and *immortal* priest. Jesus made both possible since, though fully sharing the nature of mortal man, he was totally submissive to his Father's will: "though he was a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered. And having been perfected, he became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him" (5:8,9).

The priesthood of Jesus is of a superior order, established by God and confirmed by oath in a remarkable psalm of David: "The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool' . . . The LORD has sworn and will not relent, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek'" (110:1,4). This Melchizedek was a king and also priest in Salem (Jerusalem), long before the time of Aaron's priesthood. He encountered Abraham and pronounced a blessing upon him: "Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: 'Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand'" (Gen. 14:18-20).

This 'order' thus combines the roles of king and priest; Jesus has been Divinely appointed *High Priest*, superior even to Melchizedek (Heb. 3:1), and future ruler of God's Kingdom on the earth, from David's throne in Jerusalem (Lk. 1:31-33). He has been granted immortality and exalted to heaven itself, and now exercises an eternal priesthood, in the very presence of God: "For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb. 9:24).

Jesus' position as High Priest is emphasised in the letter to the Hebrews because its recipients, first-century Jewish Christians, were in danger of turning back to Judaism and the Levitical priesthood of the temple, which had now been superseded. It was necessary to show them that Jesus is the one person in all history worthy to perform this role, making redundant any need for an earthly priesthood. This was demonstrated by the action of Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest who condemned Jesus: upon Jesus' acknowledgement that he was the Messiah, the Son of God, Caiaphas tore his clothes (Mk. 14:63), an action forbidden under the Law (Lev. 21:10), and thus symbolically brought the Levitical priesthood to an end.

At the same time, the prayer of Jesus recorded in John 17, delivered possibly in the temple courts shortly before his arrest and trial, has often been referred to as the prayer of the High Priest. In it the Lord makes intercession for his disciples and for their unity in him: "Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given me, that they may be one as we are" (v. 11).

A great High Priest

In the grace of God, true believers in the hope of Israel have been provided with a sinless advocate, a great High Priest in the very presence of God. The 'priests' of Christendom have no Scriptural sanction for their claim to intercede for men and women: "For there is one God and *one Mediator* between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Tim. 2:5,6).

Furthermore, he is a mediator fully aware of our trials and problems: "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:15,16). This is far from a theoretical or abstract concept: the priesthood of Jesus is real and powerful in the life of his disciples as he pleads their cause before the throne of the Father.

* Quotations from the NKJV except where stated otherwise.

BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING

Evil and suffering

We live in a world of evil, which brings with it much suffering. It is often difficult, and sometimes impossible, to find satisfactory explanations for particular and individual cases of evil and suffering, but the Bible helps us to understand the causes of evil, and how all suffering will eventually cease to exist in the earth.

Evils can be placed into two groups: those which are natural occurrences, and those which are man-made. Natural evils are things like storms, floods, tornadoes, whirlwinds, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, accidents such as lightning strikes, and diseases, and the greatest of all evils, death. Man-made evils include violence, war, political and industrial strife, exploitation of people and of their environment, terrorism, immoral behaviour, which can lead to pornography, sexual violence, drug addiction, greed, and much else. All this will cease when the glorious Kingdom of God has run its course and God's glory fills the earth, as He has promised many times (Num. 14:21; Ps. 72:19; Isa. 6:3; 11:9; Hab. 2:14).

God, of course, cannot be blamed for the many wicked things that people do to other people, for these things are caused by the innate sinfulness of human thinking (Jas. 4:1-12; Mk. 7:20-23). But the Bible tells us that the natural world is under God's control, and that therefore the natural evils listed above come from Him. Why does God allow evil? It should be remembered that many good things that we take for granted each day also come from God our Maker. Jesus said, "Your Father Which is in heaven . . . maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mt. 5:45; cf. Acts 14:15-17; Ps. 104:10-24). So both evil and good are of God, as Job acknowledged (Job 1:21; 2:10). Other scriptures such as Isaiah 45:7 and Amos 3:6 attribute evil, as well as good, to the Lord God.

The question remains, however, Why did God bring evil into the world with all the suffering that comes in its train?

Sin brought suffering

God saw everything that He had created and declared that it was very good (Gen. 1:31). He made one simple law for Adam and Eve to keep, with the warning that disobedience would result in death: "in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (2:16,17). As a result of Adam and Eve's breaking of God's law, all the descendants of Adam and his wife Eve die, and a curse was placed on the ground whence they were created (3:17-19). The physical earth on which we live, and its atmosphere, are sources of disease, of weeds and parasites, and produce earthquakes, volcanoes, tsunamis and adverse weather.

Some of the evil that comes by this means is Divinely directed by God for His purposes. Thus we read that when the plagues came on Egypt "*the LORD* brought an east wind upon the land all that day, and all that night" (Ex. 10:13). In the case of Jonah, God sent a storm and tempest as well as the great fish that swallowed him alive and vomited him out after three days and three nights (Jonah 1:4,17; 2:10). However, much of the evil that comes in the world cannot be attributed to particular sins committed by particular individuals or nations, but is part of the general outworking of the consequences of sin in the world. Jesus indicated this in his teaching, when he said regarding the man born blind that it was not due to either his sin or that of his parents (Jno. 9:3). See also Luke 13:1-5, where Jesus gives us an important lesson about tragic accidents.

Because sin is the root cause of evil and suffering, and God is both merciful and just, a way of conquering sin and removing its effects from the earth has been achieved through the work of Jesus Christ, who will return to set up a kingdom of righteousness and peace, ruled from Jerusalem.

The purpose of evil and suffering

God has decided to give the human beings He has created freedom of choice. We can trust Him or not, as we choose. We can believe His Word, the Bible, or we are free to ignore it. God wants us to love and trust Him of our own free will, and gives many of us a lifetime of opportunity to do so. This freedom of choice also results in suffering, because evil people bring evil upon others. Natural evil is part of the outworking of the Adamic curse on the earth, and will continue until the end of the Kingdom, when there will be no more curse (Rev. 21:4; 22:3). Suffering is designed to bring people to God as their only hope for a lasting cure for their ills, unlike the temporary cures that the medical profession can achieve; and suffering is an important way by which God perfects the characters of His servants (2 Cor. 4:14-17; Rom. 8:18; Heb. 12:7-11).

The book of Job is devoted to the problem of suffering, although it does not offer many answers (42:7,12; cf. Jas. 5:11). We have to accept the wisdom of God, Whose thoughts are much greater than ours (Isa. 55:8,9). Job was commended for his patience under trial: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him", he said (Job 13:15).

Above all, we have the case of Jesus. We are told in Hebrews 5:8, "though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered". If suffering was necessary for the perfection of the character of Jesus, the Son of God, then it is much more so for those who are his followers. The comforting promise is given to believers that they will not suffer more than they are able to endure (1 Cor. 10:13).

The end of all suffering and evil

The message that Jesus brought 2,000 years ago was the gospel (meaning 'good news') of the Kingdom of God. He demonstrated this good news in a practical way by healing all kinds of illnesses, handicaps and deformities in people who showed faith; in addition, he was able to control the elements and to raise the dead to life (Acts 10:38; Lk. 4:38-41; Jno. 11:38-44). When he comes again, with power and great glory (Lk. 21:27), he will judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31) and rule from Jerusalem on the throne of his father David over all nations (Lk. 1:32,33; Isa. 2:2-4). He will raise from the dead those responsible to God, and reward the faithful with everlasting bodies free from pain, blemishes and death (1 Cor. 15:21-23; Phil. 3:20,21; Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2,3; 2 Cor. 5:10).

Once again his healing touch will be at work amongst those who suffer and have faith: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert" (Isa. 35:5,6). Sin will become less common as people learn of God's ways and walk in His paths, and suffering will decline as people live longer lives (65:17-20). At the end of the 1,000-year reign of Christ (the Millennium) there will be a complete end to sin and death, and God will be all in all (Rev. 20 (whole chapter); 21:1-5; 1 Cor. 15:24-28).

The present time is our opportunity to show faith and obedience to the call of Christ and, despite all the suffering around us, look forward with confidence to the glorious Kingdom of God that Jesus will set up shortly.

BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain” (1 Cor. 15:14). This shows the central place which the resurrection of Jesus Christ has in the gospel message of salvation, the gospel which Paul says, “I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved” (vv. 1,2).

Objections to the resurrection

There are many references in Scripture to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and each Gospel contains detailed accounts of his appearances to people after his resurrection. Attempts have been made to dismiss the truth of these accounts on a number of different grounds:

- The women who first saw the resurrected Jesus went to the wrong tomb, an empty one, and wrongly concluded he had risen.
- Jesus did not really die, but revived after being put in the tomb.
- The body of Jesus was removed from the tomb by someone.

To deny that Jesus Christ rose bodily from the dead is to deny that the Scriptures are the Word of God, so clear and detailed are they on the matter. In any case, these efforts to deny that the resurrection really happened do not make sense for a number of reasons:

- There was considerable reluctance to believe that Jesus had actually risen. Twice Mark records that the disciples did not believe those who said that they had seen the risen Jesus, and when he appeared to them he reproved them for this (16:14). John records that Mary Magdalene did not at first recognise the resurrected Jesus when she met him, and Thomas declared that he would not believe until he had seen the wounds of his crucifixion (20:11-18,24-29).
- How could a man laid to rest as dead have had the strength to roll away the great stone from the mouth of the tomb and then convince people he had been raised?
- The Jewish authorities were strongly opposed to the idea that Jesus had risen, and if they could have produced his body they would have done so.
- The apostles suffered much from the authorities for preaching that Jesus rose from the dead. They must have been thoroughly convinced that he had, which rules out the idea that they had taken his body from the grave and pretended that he had risen.

Many witnesses

The Apostle Paul refers in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8 to the many witnesses there were to the resurrection of Jesus:

- Peter
- The apostles
- Over 500 brethren
- James (presumably Jesus’s brother)
- The apostles again
- Paul himself.

In Acts 1 we read that Jesus “shewed himself alive” to his apostles “by many infallible proofs” (v. 3), and that the eleven apostles, in choosing a successor to Judas Iscariot, were mindful of the need to choose one who had been a follower of Jesus in his ministry and who could be “a witness with us of his resurrection” (vv. 21,22). In their preaching the apostles attested to the fact that Jesus Christ had indeed risen from the dead. Peter, preaching to

the Jews on the day of Pentecost, said: "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses" (2:32). It is recorded later that "with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (4:33).

The importance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a key element in God's plan for the earth. The following is a selection of passages in which the significance of his resurrection is brought out:

- 1 "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you . . . whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it" (Acts 2:22,24). Jesus, because he was sinless, did not deserve to be left dead in the tomb, and so God raised him.
- 2 "God . . . That brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant" (Heb. 13:20). Jesus, though Son of God by the circumstances of his birth, shared our nature, being mortal and subject to temptation. By his perfect obedience and death upon the cross he overcame sin and instituted a new covenant that brought eternal life, which he was the first to obtain.
- 3 Our faith is counted to us for righteousness, "if we believe on Him That raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:24,25). The resurrection of Jesus is just as important in God's plan of salvation as his death. He did not die as our substitute but as our representative. If the former were the case he would have remained dead, but he has gone before us as our representative, dying to sin and being raised to a new and eternal existence.
- 4 Paul in Colossians speaks of believers as "buried with [Christ] in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, Who hath raised him from the dead" (Col. 2:12). Believers show they believe in God's work through Christ by identifying themselves in baptism with his death and resurrection.
- 5 "The gospel of God . . . concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:1-4). Jesus had to be Son of David and Son of God to fulfil the promises to David of one who would rule over God's Kingdom for ever. His resurrection to immortality confirmed that he was this promised Son, with power to rule the world and to save his people from sin.
- 6 "[God] raised [Jesus Christ] up from the dead, and gave him glory" (1 Pet. 1:21). Jesus was not a divine being who divested himself of his divinity to die on earth, then took it up again afterwards. God glorified him by raising him from the dead and exalting him to His right hand.
- 7 "[God] hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). The resurrection of Jesus Christ is God's assurance that one day he will return to the earth to judge the world.
- 8 "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming" (1 Cor. 15:20-23). Believers in Christ do not go to heaven at death, they wait in the grave for him to return from heaven to raise them and give them the immortal life which he already possesses. Without his resurrection they have no hope of life (vv. 17-19).

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

THE SOUL

The primary meaning of 'soul' in the Bible is a living creature, either man or animal. The word can also convey various characteristics of living beings, such as their individuality, body, mind and breath. The first occurrence of the Hebrew word for 'soul' (*nepes* or *nephesh*) in the Old Testament is found in Genesis 1:20, where it is translated "creature": "And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving *creature* that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven". The word occurs next in verse 24, where God makes the terrestrial creatures (*nephesh*). The third occurrence is in Genesis 2:7, where God breathed into the man's nostrils the breath of life and the man became a "living soul" ('creature', *nephesh*). Some translations render this phrase, "man became a living *animal*". Thus, in the Bible, fishes, birds, land animals and humans are all 'souls' (creatures, or living beings).

Uses of the word 'soul'

Contrary to ideas conveyed in some concordances (for example, *Strong's*) the phrases 'immortal soul' or 'ever-living soul' are nowhere to be found in Scripture. A careful perusal of the word *nephesh* in the Old Testament (the word occurs about 700 times) and its Greek equivalent *psyche* in the New Testament (which occurs about 180 times) will show the following characteristics of Biblical souls:

- **Souls die:** "Behold, all souls are Mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is Mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:4; see also Judg. 16:30; Isa. 38:17; Mt. 16:25,26; Lk. 12:19,20)
- **Souls can be hungry:** "It shall even be as when an hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite: so shall the multitude of all the nations be, that fight against mount Zion" (Isa. 29:8; see also Ex. 12:16 [AV mg.]; Lev. 17:10-12; Num. 11:5,6; Prov. 6:30)
- **Souls can be people or animals:** "And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life [a living soul, mg.], I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so" (Gen. 1:30; see also 9:10,12,15; Num. 31:28; Josh. 10:32; 11:11; Jer. 2:34)
- **Souls breathe:** "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7; see also Job 12:7-10)
- **Souls go to the grave:** "But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for He shall receive me" (Ps. 49:15; see also 16:10; Mt. 10:28)

The soul is not immortal

Although the expressions 'immortal soul' or 'ever-living soul' do not occur anywhere in the Bible, the idea that the soul is released from the body at death and lives forever is found today in many religions, including Christianity. Jesus and the apostles foretold that there would be a departure from the true Christian gospel (for example: Mt. 7:15-20; Acts

20:29,30). Paul wrote that men “shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim. 4:3,4).

The idea of the immortality of the soul came from the myths of ancient Egypt and ancient Greece, myths that were gradually introduced into Christian teaching. Many Bible students and authors on Church history have said that the immortality of the soul is unscriptural, among them Martin Luther, William Tyndale, Edward Gibbon and W. E. Gladstone. People often ask how it is that so many sincere believers and ministers of religion can be wrong in their beliefs about the soul.

Jesus and the apostles said that it would not be the majority who found the Truth, but the minority:

“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Mt. 7:13,14; see also Acts 28:22; 1 Cor. 1:26,27; 3:19).

Many people find it comforting to think that they will live on after death, rather than, as the Scripture teaches, that all consciousness and thought ceases when we die:

“For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun” (Eccl. 9:5,6; see also Ps. 6:5; 146:3,4; Isa. 38:18,19).

Belief in an immortal soul is therefore wishful thinking and a perpetuation of the serpent’s lie to Eve, “Ye shall not surely die” (Gen. 3:4), which was contrary to what God said.

The promised hope

The true Bible hope is clear and positive, and in keeping with the mercy and justice of God. Paul states, when writing to the Corinthians, that God made man a living soul at Creation, and that this is his “natural body” (1 Cor. 15:42-49). This corruptible, mortal body can be changed to an immortal body in the same way that Jesus was made immortal, by his resurrection and change of body (vv. 50-54). This is a “spiritual [or spirit] body” (v. 44). The spirit body is the same as possessed by the angels and the Lord Jesus Christ, and can be touched, seen and heard; but, unlike the mortal body, which humans have, it will never die:

“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Phil. 3:20,21; see also Lk. 20:34-36; 24:30,39-43; Acts 1:3; 1 Jno. 1:1).

When Jesus returns to the earth he will raise the dead, and he will change the bodies of faithful believers to make them immortal so that they can be his helpers in the Kingdom of God shortly to be set up on the earth:

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:22-26; see also Job 19:26; Dan. 12:1-3; Jno. 5:28,29; 1 Thess. 4:14-18).

Our souls will truly rejoice and be satisfied with this wonderful outcome!

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

THE VIRGIN BIRTH

“Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son”.

Bible teaching concerning the Virgin Birth is clear and unambiguous. It was taught and believed as part of the gospel faith that spread throughout the Roman Empire in the first and second centuries. The New Testament gospel records in Matthew 1 and 2 and Luke 1 and 2 detail the birth of Jesus Christ, attributing the birth to the power of the Holy Spirit, and not to Joseph, who was betrothed to Mary. In the Old Testament, written centuries before the event, the Virgin Birth is predicted, and it is stated that God would indeed be the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. The prophets Isaiah and Micah, along with the books of Deuteronomy, 2 Samuel, and Psalms, all support this doctrine.

Old Testament references

The prophet Isaiah speaks of the provision of Jesus in these words: “And He [God] saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor” (59:16). Here we see that God was aware of the sinful state of humanity and that there was no one who could render perfect obedience to deliver mankind from sin and death. It was for this reason that God caused Christ to be born by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that one of the human race might open up the way to salvation and eternal life both for himself and for all those who would come to God through him. In this there is an echo of the promise of God to Eve in Eden that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent, indicating God’s overruling power in bringing forth a saviour (Gen. 3:15).

Isaiah 7:14

Isaiah also delivered to the royal household in his day the powerful prophetic message concerning the Virgin Birth, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel”, meaning ‘God with us’. Although spoken to king Ahaz, it was not fulfilled until Mary, who was of the line of David, gave birth to the Lord Jesus Christ. The critics who do not accept the Bible teaching concerning the Virgin Birth raise a number of claims that this prophecy is not referring to Christ, foremost of which are that either that it refers to King Ahaz’s son, Hezekiah, or that the word translated ‘virgin’, *almah*, means a young woman of marriageable age; and that another word, *bethulah*, means ‘virgin’, and this would have been used if that was the true meaning of the prophecy. The first point can be discarded, for without doubt Hezekiah would have been born before Ahaz ascended the throne, so Ahaz’s wife would not be described here. Regarding the choice of words, we note that the word *almah* is used in six other references in the Old Testament, and none of these describes a woman who is not a virgin.* Matthew 1:22,23 says the birth of Christ was a direct fulfilment of Isaiah 7:14.

The Son of God in the Old Testament

This Immanuel, the son spoken of in Isaiah 7, is obviously the “child” and “son” whose “name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (9:6). The same person is spoken of as the “Branch” in Isaiah 11:1-10. Together, these references give us a vision of the one whom God would cause to be born, and of his work and authority. He was to be like God, to bear His Name, truly to be the Son of God. This supports the teaching of the Virgin Birth.

As we read the Old Testament promises and prophecies, the language clearly speaks of the one who was to come, the Lord Jesus Christ, as someone who would be unique because of his

* The other references are Genesis 24:43; Exodus 2:8; Psalm 68:25; Proverbs 30:19 and Song of Solomon 1:3; 6:8.

relationship with God. We read that God says, "I will raise . . . up" (Deut. 18:18), "I will be his father" (2 Sam. 7:14) and "Thou art My Son" (Ps. 2:7). When we come to the New Testament and the message of the angel to Mary in Luke 1 we see how all these Old Testament sayings lead naturally to the event of God's Holy Spirit power bringing about the conception of our Lord.

The birth of Jesus

Matthew 1 gives us an account of the birth of the Lord Jesus, and of Joseph's problem of finding Mary with child and needing the guidance of the angel as to how he was to respond. The sequence of human fathers in verses 1-16 contrasts with the message of the angel that the power of God caused Mary to conceive. In Luke's Gospel we see the contrast between the birth of John Baptist and that of the Lord Jesus. In the first the power of God enabled a natural conception to take place between Zacharias and Elisabeth, whereas with Mary it was the direct influence of the Holy Spirit that caused her to conceive. The words of Scripture leave no room for doubt or discussion in relation to what brought about the birth of Jesus. To reject the miraculous in this instance means that the later miraculous act of Christ's resurrection by God's power is also in doubt, and the whole foundation of the Christian gospel, the hope of salvation and the veracity of Scripture is called in question.

Matthew 1:18-25 is linked directly to Isaiah 7:14, and the birth of Jesus is presented as a fulfilment of that prophecy. To reject this is to reject the inspiration of Scripture. We read that the angel said to Joseph regarding Mary, "that which is conceived in her is of the Holy [Spirit]" (v. 20), so Joseph was encouraged to take her as his wife rather than putting her away, which was his first reaction when he found she was with child. The Matthew account refers to the work of Christ as one of saving people from their sins (v. 21), and this is followed in chapter 2 by the arrival of the wise men seeking one "born King of the Jews" (v. 2), a clear indication of ancient written records foretelling the birth of Jesus.

Luke describes the Angel Gabriel's message to Mary and her reaction. Although the name of the child is given, Jesus, indicating his work as a saviour, the main emphasis in this record is on the authority and kingship of the one to be born: "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David" (1:32). In response to Mary's question as to how this birth should come about, the message of the angel is clear and concise: "The Holy [Spirit] shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (v. 35). Here we see Jesus described as the Son of God because the power of God brought about his conception. (He is known as the Son of man because he also inherited his mother's nature.)

Other New Testament references

Luke 2:49; Matthew 26:29; John 12:49,50 and John 14:9 are just a few examples of the way in which Jesus in his life and ministry used words which clearly indicate his acceptance of his supernatural birth by the Holy Spirit. Acts 3:26; 13:33; Galatians 4:4; Ephesians 1:3 and Hebrews 1:5 are further references that show that throughout the New Testament the unique relationship between God and Jesus, that of a Father and Son, brought about by his conception through the power of the Holy Spirit, was clearly understood and taught: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mt. 3:17).

Scripture confirms through the words of God Himself the relationship which could only have come about by the power of the Holy Spirit acting on Mary. To Christ was the privilege given of being the 'firstborn' of God, a second Adam. Our relationship with God as our Father comes about through "adoption" (Gal. 4:4,5) because of Christ's faithful obedience to his Father.

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

THE CHRISTIAN AND POLITICS

“The powers that be are ordained of God” (Rom. 13:1);

“Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created” (Rev. 4:11);

“[God] hath made of one blood all nations of men . . . and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek God [RV] . . . feel after Him, and find Him” (Acts 17:26,27).

Politics is to do with rulership and is seen in various forms. In reality God overrules things that men and women intend to do when they are against His declared will, so that His purpose is achieved.

Bible teaching is clear: God is in control. The developments that take place in the world and in nations are according to His will. They will result ultimately in the Kingdom of God on earth, for He “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation . . . And . . . He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained [Jesus] . . .” (Acts 17:26-31).

The role of the Christian is clearly laid out as being that of a stranger (an alien)—that is, one with no political rights—and a pilgrim, who is travelling to another land and a Kingdom that is yet to be manifested on the earth. Consequently, the believer should have no roots in the present order, and, apart from desiring freedom to serve God, has no concern about who runs the country in which he or she resides. Neither does the Christian participate in the processes of democracy to select a new government, nor in political protest against the existing arrangements.

It is God’s world

To Nebuchadnezzar, the despot over the kingdom of men in Daniel’s time, God said that he would be humbled, “to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the basest [lowliest] of men” (Dan. 4:17). This lowliest of men will be Jesus as King in the Kingdom of God. Following his madness Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the supreme position of God over the world of men: “He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou? . . . The King of heaven, all Whose works are truth, and His ways judgment: and those that walk in pride He is able to abase” (vv. 35-37).

The Christian’s pilgrim status

Jesus calls believers to a new priority in their lives: “seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness” (Mt. 6:33). Response to this call will result in a person being called out of the Gentiles to be part of the “people for [God’s] name” (Acts 15:14) to become a member of the Commonwealth of Israel. This new allegiance requires believers to accept and follow new standards of behaviour patterned on Jesus’s teaching and example. He commanded: “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Mt. 22:21). This dual duty requires believers to obey the laws

of the country they live in and to pay taxes. The writer to the Hebrews highlights the example of the patriarchs, who “declare plainly that they seek a country” (11:14), for they “looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (v. 10). Also, for the Christian it can be said, “here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come” (13:14); “For our citizenship [RV] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil. 3:20).

Christian behaviour and the state

Because they are strangers and pilgrims looking for God’s new age to come, Christians cannot actively participate in the political processes of the country in which they live. Their role is one of obedience to, and compliance with, those in authority—unless required by them to break God’s laws. Although there is advice on how to live as a Christian in the world, significantly there are no instructions about behaviour in any roles to do with government, judging of social matters or putting right social injustice (1 Pet. 2:13-17,21). Jesus’s example is very clearly not about claiming political rights but submitting to God’s will.

The advice of Jesus’s apostles on the Christian relationship to the state is: “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:1-4). The whole of Romans 13 advises believers on their behaviour towards the state and the political world. Paul says that the following should characterise believers:

- subjection to higher powers because God puts them there
- payment of taxes
- respect towards those in authority
- showing love to one’s neighbour
- abstaining from works of darkness
- showing forth Jesus’s example by their living.

Christians are committed to following Jesus. His example and teaching require them to seek first God’s Kingdom and righteousness. They therefore have no part in the ambitions of the state they happen to live in. They accept that God is ruling in the world and will allow political developments that they would not support themselves; and therefore they will abstain from supporting political groups by voting or by membership. A Christian’s vote has already been given to the Lord Jesus Christ as King, both in his or her personal life and on the Lord’s return to rule the world with a rod of iron to bring righteousness and peace. A Christian’s place now is one of submission to the state and its laws, after the example of Jesus:

“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Tit. 2:11-14).

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BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

What is the Kingdom of God? Several answers are given to this question:

- Heaven, where God is
- The Church ruling spiritually on earth
- Jesus Christ ruling in men's hearts
- Jesus Christ ruling on the earth.

Only the last of these fits Bible teaching.

After His resurrection Jesus spent forty days with his disciples, "speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). At the end of this time the disciples "asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?". He did not tell them that their idea of the Kingdom was wrong, but said: "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power" (vv. 6,7).

Then Jesus ascended to heaven, and angels promised the disciples: "this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (v. 11). Later Peter said: "[God] shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of *restitution* of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (3:20,21).

Putting these passages together, the Kingdom of God is to do with:

- The restoration of what once existed
- The nation of Israel
- The return of Christ
- The teachings of the Old Testament.

That the Kingdom of God once existed is shown by some words of King David: "and of all my sons . . . [God] hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel" (1 Chron. 28:5).

Israel the kingdom of God

The Old Testament kingdom of Israel established under David was thus the kingdom of God. The various elements of this kingdom were all God's:

- 1 The king.** David said: "Howbeit the LORD God of Israel chose me before all the house of my father to be king over Israel for ever: for He hath chosen Judah to be the ruler; and of the house of Judah, the house of my father; and among the sons of my father He liked me to make me king over all Israel" (1 Chron. 28:4).
- 2 The subjects.** The subjects of the nation of Israel were the Jews, of whom God said: "thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth" (Deut. 7:6).
- 3 The land.** The land of Israel is God's land: "The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is Mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with Me" (Lev. 25:23).
- 4 The capital.** The capital of the kingdom of Israel was Jerusalem, of which the psalmist said: "For the LORD hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation. This is My rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it" (Ps. 132:13,14).
- 5 The law.** The law operating in Israel was given by God to Moses, who says: "I stood between the LORD and you at that time, to shew you *the word of the LORD*" (Deut. 5:5).

The future Kingdom

The basis of the Kingdom which Jesus Christ is to set up at his return is the kingdom of Israel restored, but this Kingdom will be worldwide in extent, though centred on Israel. This is shown by considering the future Kingdom under the same five headings:

- 1 The King.** Jesus Christ will rule Israel and the world as the descendant of King David: "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Lk. 1:32,33).
- 2 The subjects.** Ezekiel prophesies: "Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen . . . and bring them into their own land: and I will make them one nation in the land . . . one king shall be king to them all . . . And David My servant shall be king over them" (37:21-24). The Jews will be the subjects of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, who, as the Son (descendant) of David, will rule. His subjects will not be just Israel, however, but all the world: "all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him" (Ps. 72:11).
- 3 The land.** Notice the emphasis on the land of Israel in Ezekiel 37:21-24 quoted above: "I will . . . bring them into *their own land* . . . I will make them one nation *in the land* upon the mountains of *Israel*". The passage continues: "they shall dwell *in the land* that I have given unto Jacob My servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt" (v. 25). However, the rule of Christ will extend to all the earth: "And the LORD shall be king over all the earth" (Zech. 14:9); "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth" (Ps. 72:8).
- 4 The capital.** Jeremiah says: "At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem" (3:17).
- 5 The law.** Isaiah, also speaking of Jerusalem as the capital of the worldwide Kingdom of God, says: "many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (2:3).

When will the Kingdom be established?

The Kingdom of God will be established when Christ returns in fulfilment of the promise to the disciples in Acts 1:11. Jesus Christ provides two indications of when this will occur:

When Israel is restored: "And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Lk. 21:24). After nearly two thousand years, the Jews now control Jerusalem again.

When the world is in trouble: "And there shall be . . . distress of nations, with perplexity . . . men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth" (vv. 25,26). This situation has arisen in the twentieth century, especially in recent years.

Following this situation:

"And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" (v. 27);

"when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand" (v. 31).

The Kingdom of God will soon be established. Now is the time to prepare for it.

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The word "Trinity" does not occur in Scripture, as reference to any Bible Dictionary or Concordance will show. Nor is there any statement in the Bible that unambiguously sets out the doctrine, as understood by the mainstream Christian churches.

Thus the 1996 edition of the *New Bible Dictionary*, published by Inter-Varsity Press, has the following entry:

TRINITY: The term "Trinity" is not itself found in the Bible. It was first used by Tertullian at the close of the 2nd century, but received wide currency and formal elucidation only in the 4th and 5th centuries.

Three affirmations are central to the historic doctrine of the Trinity:

1. There is but one God;
2. The Father, the Son and the Spirit is each fully and eternally God;
3. The Father, the Son and the Spirit is each a distinct person.

Nowhere does the Bible explicitly teach this combination of assertions. It may, nevertheless, be claimed that the doctrine of the Trinity is a profoundly appropriate *interpretation* of the Biblical witness to God in the light of the ministry, death and resurrection-exaltation of Jesus - the "Christ-event".

History

Clearly from the above, the 1st century Church knew nothing of this doctrine. It developed out of disputes in the 2nd century over the nature of Christ, which resulted from the encounter of Christian doctrine with Greek philosophy, particularly neo-Platonism. A number of prominent Christian "fathers", such as Justin Martyr, Clement, Irenaeus and Origen, were enthusiastic students of Greek philosophy and expounded Biblical themes using philosophical terms.

When Constantine united the Roman Empire at the end of the 2nd century, and established Christianity as the state religion, he demanded of the bishops a common doctrinal position. This was established at the *Council of Nicea* (325 AD), when, after fierce debate between supporters of *Athanasius*, patriarch of Alexandria, and *Arius*, an Alexandrian priest, the *Nicean Creed* was adopted. The disputes continued for another 100 or more years, until the ascendancy of the Roman see, led to the fullest enunciation of the doctrine in the so-called *Athanasian Creed*.

The language of the creeds is philosophical language and very complex. Thus the Nicene Creed describes Jesus as:

"...begotten of his Father before all worlds.
God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God:
Begotten not made.
Being of one substance with the Father...
And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary..."

Notice that here Christ is "begotten" before Creation and not at his birth, which is the natural sense of begotten; instead he is said to be "incarnate" (not a Biblical word) at his birth.

The language of the 4th century Athanasian Creed is even more obscure:

"We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity: neither confounding the persons: nor dividing the substance. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost is all one..."

There is a marked contrast between this almost completely non-Biblical language and the

simplicity of the earliest written creed, now referred to as the "Old Roman" (c.150-170 AD), which begins:

"I believe in God the Father Almighty;
and in Christ Jesus his only-begotten Son, our Lord,
who was begotten from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary...."

Bible teaching about God

- God is firstly the Creator: Genesis 1: 1; Psalm 33:6,9; 105:5; Jeremiah 10: 10-13.
- He is eternal and alone possesses immortality: Psalm 90: 1-2; Isaiah 40:25-28; 1 Timothy 1: 17; 6: 15-16.
- In only a handful of OT passages, He is referred to as "Father" of Israel; e.g. Isaiah 63: 16; 64:8; cf. Exodus 4:22; in the promises to David, God prophesies that He will be the Father of the Messiah: 2 Samuel 7: 14.
- In the NT, following the divine begetting of Jesus, God is referred to as Father 265 times! e.g. Hebrews 1:5-6; Jesus *always* refers to God as "Father" (save in the cry from the cross).
- God is frequently *represented* by an angel who speaks in His name (as though he is God): e.g. Exodus 3:2,4, 14-15; Acts 7:30-32. He was similarly represented by the rulers of Israel: Exodus 21:8-9, where the word "judges" (KJV) is *elohim*, the normal word for "God"; see Psalm 82: 1,6-8 and John 10:34-36. This Biblical feature is summarised by the term *God-manifestation*: God was displayed or represented by angels, rulers, prophets, who spoke on His behalf.

Bible teaching about Jesus

- The coming of Jesus was foretold throughout the OT, both by direct prophecy, e.g. Psalm 2; Isaiah 9:6-7; and also by type and symbol: e.g. the Passover lamb - Exodus 12:5-7; the suffering of Joseph - Genesis 37:23-24, 31.
- The work of Jesus was foreknown and planned by God from the beginning: 1 Peter 1: 18-21; Acts 2:22-24; Acts 13:32-33; Romans 3:23-25; Ephesians 1:9-10.
- His *conception* in a virgin was miraculous, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that he was Son of God: Isaiah 7: 14; Matthew 1: 18-23; Luke 1 :30-35.
- Jesus was born from a woman in the normal way and was fully man, sharing our mortal nature: Luke 2:6-7; Galatians 4:4; Philippians 2:5-11; Hebrews 2:9,14; 4: 14-15; 5:5-9. Following his ascension to heaven, he is still man: 1 Tim. 2:5.
- Jesus was and is subordinate to his Father: John 14:28; 1 Cor.15:28. He was *made, sent, raised, and glorified* by Him: Romans 1: 1-4; Acts 2:36; 3: 13-15, 18,26; John 3: 16-17,34-35; 5:21-24; 8:42; 14:28; 17: 1-5. Jesus has been *given* all power but will eventually give all to his Father: Matthew 28: 18; 1 Corinthians 11:3; 15: 22-28; Ephesians 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3.
- Jesus is the supreme *manifestation* of the Father: John 1:1-3,14-18; 14:6-10; 2 Corinthians 4:4-6; Colossians 1:12-15,19; 2:8-9; Hebrews 1:1-3. (Note that an *image*, by definition, cannot be identical with the *object* it represents.)

Bible teaching about the Holy Spirit

- The word *spirit* in both OT and NT also translates as *wind* or *breath*. It is thus a metaphor for an unseen, life-giving force or power. By His power God creates, gives life and sustains it: Genesis 1:1-2; 2:7; Job 33:4; 34:14-15; Acts 17:24-28.
- The Spirit of God inspired the prophets: 2 Samuel 23: 1-2; Nehemiah 9:30; 2 Peter 1: 19-21; 2 Timothy 3: 15-16; it expresses His mind: Isaiah 63: 9-10; Acts 7: 51.
- The terms "Spirit", "Spirit of God" and "Holy Spirit (or Ghost)" are interchangeable:

compare the three records of Jesus' baptism - Matthew 3: 16; Mark 1: 10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32. The prefix "Holy", meaning *separated* or *consecrated*, is used principally in the NT for the work of the Spirit in bringing about the salvation of men and women through God's love in Christ.

- A number of parallel passages show that the Spirit is essentially the *power* of God, or, expressed another way, *God at work*. The phrase "God the Holy Ghost (or Spirit)" does not occur in Scripture. The Spirit is not a person but is said to be "of God", "of the Lord" and "of your Father". Compare: Genesis 1:1; 1:2; 2:7; Job 33:4; Psalm 33:6; Jeremiah 10:12; Matthew 10:20; Luke 1:35.
- The angels of heaven operate by the power of the Spirit; hence they are sometimes referred to as "spirits": Psalm 104:4; cf. Exodus 3:2; Hebrews 1:7; Isaiah 63:9-10.
- Similarly the Spirit has worked in, or "inspired" men, at certain times chosen by God. This has taken two main forms:
 - The performing of miracles, wonders and signs; e.g. Exodus 4:1-9; Numbers 11:16-17;24-25,29; 1 Kings 17: 17-24; Matthew 12:28; cf. Luke 11:20; Acts 1:8.;
 - Prophesying, that is declaring the Word of God: e.g. 2 Samuel 23: 1-2; Jeremiah 1:9; John 6:63; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21.
- The "Spirit Gifts" granted to the 1st century church, were designed to confirm the authority of the Gospel message and disappeared after the age of the Apostles: Acts 8: 14-18; 1 Corinthians 13:8-10. The words of many who claim today to speak by the Spirit (but believe different things) are refuted when tested against the true words of Scripture: 1 John 3: 1-3.

Passages linking Father, Son and Spirit

Since the work of God is performed by His Spirit and is centred in His beloved Son, there are many passages linking them: e.g. Luke 1:35; Matthew 28: 18-20; Acts 2:22; 10:37-38; 1 Corinthians 8:5-6; 15:24; 2 Corinthians 1:3; 4:3-6; 13:4; Colossians 3: 1; cf. Psalm 110: 1; 1 Timothy 2:5; 2 John 3.

Passages used to support the doctrine of the Trinity

Many of the verses used come from the Gospel of John. It seems strange that so important a doctrine should be so heavily dependent upon one book and it arises from placing a "philosophical slant" on John's words (see above).

- **John 1:1-3:** The common translations ignore the Greek pronouns used. It should read: "In (the) beginning was the Word, and the Word was *towards* the God, and (a) god was the Word. The same was in (the) beginning *towards* the God." In John the word "beginning" is almost always used of the start of Jesus' ministry, at his baptism; hence the immediate mention of John the Baptist (v.6). John is describing the start of the New Creation, by the Word of God (cf. Psalm 33:6), which is now revealed in Jesus; John 1: 14,18.
- **John 10:30:** The word "one" is neuter in gender; not "one being" but "one in spirit". So Jesus prays that his disciples will also be: John 14:9; 17:11,21. Jesus "manifested" or revealed his Father's character, as described above.
- **John 20:26-29:** Thomas exclaims to the risen Lord Jesus: "My Lord and my God". This is an acknowledgement that Jesus had risen from the dead, not that he was the immortal God Himself. Thomas, a Jew, was using a mode of expression common in the OT, that representatives of God are addressed as "God", e.g. Jacob of the angel at Peniel (Genesis 32:30). In the same chapter in John (v. 17), Jesus told Mary that he was to ascend to "my God and your God", clearly distinguishing himself from the Father.
- **Romans 9:5:** "...Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen." The

argument rests in the punctuation. The "amen" shows that Paul is using a doxology, similar to Psalm 41: 13, which ends Book 1 of the Psalms. Paul has listed the blessings of God to Israel (v.4,5) and concludes the list with Messiah (Christ); then praises God. The RSV translates: ". . .and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed for ever. Amen."

- **Philippians 2:5-7:** "Jesus ... thought it not robbery to be equal with God..." is generally agreed to be a bad translation of the original Greek. The whole sense of the passage is that, although Jesus was Son of God, he did not exalt himself but assumed the lowly position of a servant. RSV translates: "He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped." In this he contrasts strikingly with Adam, who did grasp at equality with God; see Genesis 3:4-6.
- **Hebrews 1:8:** "But unto the Son he saith: Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever." See the comments on John 20:28 above. In the next verse, the apostle continues: "...therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee..." showing that God the Father is higher than the Son; see also 1 Corinthians 11:3: " . . . the head of Christ is God."

It is surely significant that no passage can be found which declares, in the terms of the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds, that Christ is "Very God", or that describes in detail the "mystery of the Holy Trinity". Rather those who defend this doctrine are forced to depend upon scattered verses, taken out of context, such as those listed above,

Did Jesus exist before his birth?

The idea of Jesus' pre-existence is principally linked with the doctrine of the Trinity dealt with above. However the "Jehovah's Witnesses", although denying the Trinity, believe that Jesus was a "pre-existent spirit", the first created work of God. All of these ideas presuppose that the "spirit" or "soul" of a man can exist separately from his body: that Jesus previously existed as a "spirit being" in heaven, and was then "incarnate" in a body, firstly in the womb of Mary. Is there any Biblical justification for these ideas and what does the Bible say about the nature of the Son of God?

1. Man and his soul

Adam was formed from the ground; God gave him breath and man became a "living soul" or a living being (Heb. *nephesh*), Genesis 2:7. In this he was just like the animals, Genesis 1:20,21,30: where "living creature" and "soul"/ "life" are the same word, *nephesh*.

Man is a living creature with body, soul and spirit (or breath): 1 Thessalonians 5:23. Death brings an end to the whole man: Genesis 3: 19; Ezekiel 18:4; Psalm 146:3,4. The Bible nowhere teaches that the soul of man continues to exist apart from the body.

2. Christ was a man

Although his *conception* was miraculous, his birth was like that of any other man: Galatians 4:4, (and note the similarity to Adam, who was the direct creation of God). Jesus fully shared our physical nature: Hebrews 2:9,14; cf. Psalm 8. He experienced the full range of human emotions and suffering: Hebrews 5:7,8. He also shared our mortality, dying on the cross. Exalted to heaven as our mediator, he remains truly man: 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 10:12.

3. Christ's Victory

The value of Jesus' triumph is that he overcame sin in its battleground, human nature, as in the temptations in the wilderness (Matthew 4: 1-11). For this victory to be meaningful required that he should be wholly man, and not a divine spirit (incapable of sin) in human flesh; hence the parallels between Adam, who failed, and Christ who triumphed: Romans 5:

12-21. However Jesus received the strength to gain the victory and offer a perfect sacrifice for sins because God was his Father: Psalm 2:7-12; 80:17; John 8:28,29; 1 Peter 1:18-19.

4. Jesus predestined by the Father

The work of Jesus was foretold in many Old Testament prophecies, from Genesis 3: 15 onwards: e.g. Deuteronomy 18: 15,18; 2 Samuel 7: 12-16; Psalm 89:26-29; Isaiah 9:6-7; 42: 1-7. God had planned that he would be the means of man's redemption from the beginning. Thus he was predestined to be the Saviour of the world; but notice that those he would save were also predestined, or "marked out in advance": Ephesians 1:3-6; Roman 8:29,30 (and no-one suggests that the believers pre-existed in heaven!). See also: Jeremiah 1:5; Galatians 1:15; 2 Timothy 1:9.

In summary, Jesus "pre-existed" only in the mind and purpose of God. He was in every respect a true man, like us, yet equally the true Son of God. His work and ministry was planned by God from the beginning and in the fullness of time he was born into the world (Galatians 4:4) to fulfil all that had been written of him.

Passages which are used to support the pre-existence of Jesus

- **John 6:38:** "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me."

Jesus was born by the direct operation of the Spirit of God, and in this unique way his origin was in heaven. In the context of this verse Jesus is comparing himself to the Manna, the bread sent "from heaven" to sustain Israel in the wilderness. (In the same passage, in spiritual language, Jesus tells his disciples they must "eat his flesh and drink his blood".) Furthermore Jesus' ways and teaching were "heavenly" not earthly (see James 3: 14-18); so he says to the Jews: "Ye are from beneath; I am from above..." (John 8:23). Notice the humility of: "...not to do mine own will".

- **John 17:5,24:** "Now, O Father, glorify thou me... with the glory which I had with thee before the world was...thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world."

This is entirely in harmony with the fact that Jesus was predestined by God, as seen above. Peter says: "[Jesus] was foreordained (lit. foreknown) before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you" (1 Peter 1.20). So also the following passage:

- **John 8:56-58:** "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it and was glad...before Abraham was, I am."

Jesus was the subject of the promise made to Abraham of "a seed" who would inherit the Land and already promised to Eve (Genesis 3:15; 12:7; 17:4-8; 22:16-18); this is the topic of the debate in John 8:31-40.

- **Colossians 1:16:** "For by him [Jesus] were all things created...all things were created by him and for him [literally: "through him and into him"]."

This is taken to mean that Jesus, rather than God the Father, is the Creator, even though he

was "*sent* by God" (John 6:38 above). Yet in v.15, Jesus is "the firstborn of all creation" implying his created beginning; and in v.18 he is "the firstborn from the dead", i.e. in the resurrection. Paul is clearly teaching that the risen Lord Jesus Christ is the beginning of the new Spiritual Creation (see Acts 26:23; Romans 8:29; Revelation 1:5).

In the grace of God, we too can become part of this New Creation, though faith in the Son of God and by sharing in his resurrection.