

His name is *J e s u s*

1. *Son of God & Son of Man*

Just over 2,020 years ago, a baby was born whose life changed the world forever! His name *is* (not “*was*”) Jesus, for He is still alive today!

In the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, His genealogy is traced back through both His father Joseph (Matthew 1:1-17) back to Abraham, and His mother Mary (Luke 3:23-38) back to Adam.

The miraculous thing about His birth was that He was born to a virgin – divinely conceived through a human mother! So Jesus was both the Son of God, through the Holy Spirit, and also the Son of Man, through Mary (Matthew 1:18-25).

An angel of the Lord told Joseph that Mary would have a child Who would be named Jesus (Saviour) because He will save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). While Joseph probably found this very hard to believe, he accepted what the angel told him.

Some time after Jesus was born, wise men saw His star in the sky, and followed it because they recognised that this was a unique and divine sign that would lead them to the King of the Jews. Because of this, they brought Him gifts of gold for a King, incense for His High Priestly ministry, and myrrh for His death and burial – three prophetic gifts concerning His role as King, High Priest and Saviour through His death on our behalf (Matthew 2:1-12).

The Hebrew Old Testament Scriptures contained a number of prophecies concerning the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. These Scriptures also told of the coming of the Messiah (the Anointed One – “Christ” in Greek), and the Jewish people were waiting for and expecting the soon-coming Messiah.

Matthew, for example, quotes the following Old Testament prophecies concerning His birth:

A virgin will conceive, bear a Son, and He will be called Emmanuel (God with us) – see Matthew 1:23, quoting Isaiah 7:14.

Jesus would be born in Bethlehem as King of the Jews – His rising star in the East indicating His Kingship. He would be both a Ruler and a Shepherd of God’s people Israel. See Matthew 2:5-6, quoting Micah 5:2; see also Psalm 72:10-11 and Jeremiah 23:5-6.

Luke tells us of the words given to Mary in Nazareth before Jesus was conceived: she would have a Son Who would be called Jesus – the Son of the Most High, King on David’s throne (King David was a human ancestor of Jesus), He would reign over Israel forever, His Kingdom would never end (it would be eternal). He will be uniquely holy, and be called the Son of God. See Luke 1:26-38, quoting Isaiah 9:6-7 and Daniel 2:44-45; 7:14, 27.

In Luke 2:1-40 we read about how and why Mary and Joseph had to leave their home in Nazareth and travel about 145 km to Bethlehem, where Jesus was born, as prophesied in Micah 5:2. Again this was divine intervention, because the Scriptures said Jesus would be born in Bethlehem but Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth – why should they go to Bethlehem? These verses in Luke 2 speak of Bethlehem, Jesus as Saviour, Messiah (Christ, the Anointed One), and the Lord (v. 4, 11).

When they returned to their home in Nazareth, “The Child (Jesus) grew and became strong, was filled with wisdom, and the favour of God was upon Him” (Luke 2:40).

So, Jesus is ...

- The Son of Man (Mary, a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob/Israel, Judah and David).
- The Son of God by His miraculous birth through the Holy Spirit; Son of the Most High.
- The King of Israel, and of the Kingdom of God – seated on an everlasting throne.
- The Shepherd.
- The Messiah (the Anointed One promised in the Old Testament – Daniel 9:24-26).

- The Lord. Nine times Jesus called Himself “I AM” – using the divine name, Exodus 3:13-15. See John 4:26; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:13, 19; 18:5, 6, 8. He also said, “I am ... the Door, Good Shepherd, Way, Truth, Life, Resurrection and the Life, Bread of Life, Light of the World, True Vine, God’s Son.”
- The Saviour of those who put their faith and trust in Him.

After Jesus rose from the dead, Thomas said, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in His hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails, and my hand in His side, I will not believe.” So Jesus appeared to him, and Thomas said, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus replied, “Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen [that’s us!] and yet have come to believe.” (John 20:24-29). What more can **we** say to Jesus, than “My Lord and my God!”

QUESTIONS

1. Why did Jesus need to be born in Bethlehem?
2. What circumstances ensured that Jesus was born in Bethlehem and not in His parents’ home town of Nazareth?
3. How was Jesus born as both the Son of God, and the Son of Man?
4. Why didn’t Jesus just come as an angel, rather than as a man?
5. How does Jesus’ *humanity* help us? How does His *deity* help us?
6. Why did Jesus call Himself by God’s name (“I AM”, or YHWH)? What does this imply?
7. “Christ” is from the Greek word (*Christos*) meaning “Anointed One”. “Messiah” is the Hebrew word which means the same, but is often thought of as Jesus’ surname or title. Why is it probably more helpful to use the title “Messiah” rather than “Christ”?

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2. *Filled with the Holy Spirit*

Jesus’ early childhood

Between the ages of about 2 years and 30 years, we read very little about the boyhood and early manhood of Jesus. His parents returned to Nazareth from Egypt, and it is said of Jesus that He “grew and became strong, was filled with wisdom, and the favour of God was upon Him” (Luke 2:40). What a testimony for any child or young adult to have!

The Bible also says that Joseph, Mary and Jesus every year went down from Nazareth to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover. When Jesus was 12 years old and His parents were returning to Nazareth after the Feast, they thought Jesus was amongst the group of people who had come down to Jerusalem with them. They travelled all day on their journey back before they realised they had left Him behind in Jerusalem. On returning to find Him, after three days they found Him in the temple, talking with the teachers, listening to them, and asking them questions. His teachers were amazed at His understanding and His answers! When His mother asked why He had done this, He replied, “Why were you searching for Me? Didn’t you know that I must be in My Father’s House?” They returned to Nazareth and the Bible says, “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.” (Luke 2:41-52)

When Jesus was a baby, His parents dedicated Him to God in the temple (Luke 2:22-38). He grew up in the knowledge and wisdom of God, and in the Word and ways of God; and the favour of God was upon Him. As a result, He not only grew up with God’s favour on Him, but also He lived His life in such a way that other people were attracted to Him too. Surely this is the way that every child should be raised, to the best of their ability, by Christian parents.

Jesus is our Example

Jesus has left us all an example of how we should live – dedicated to God, and walking in His ways day by day. This world would be incredibly different if every Christian (and especially if every professing Christian) lived like this!

- **John 13:15** Jesus said to His disciples, “I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.”
- **1 Timothy 4:12** Paul said to Timothy, “Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct; in love, in faith, in purity.”
- **1 Peter 2:21** Peter says, “If you endure when you do what is right, but suffer for it, you have God’s approval. For you have been called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in His steps.”
- **1 John 2:6** John says, “This is how we can be sure that we are in Him: whoever says ‘I abide in Him’ ought to walk just as He walked.”

Jesus is our example!

Jesus’ baptism

Jesus’ cousin, John the Baptist, was a prophet who called people to repent of their sins, turn to God and be baptized in water as a symbol of them being washed from sin and rising up out of the water into a new life of following (or, being a disciple of) the Lord. Because of his unique ministry, some people thought John might be the Messiah, but he said to them, “I baptize you with water for repentance, but One Who is more powerful than me is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” (Matthew 3:11)

Consequently, when Jesus came to John and wanted John to baptize Him, John thought it was all the wrong way around – Jesus should baptize him! Jesus replied, “Let it be so [as I have asked] for it is proper for us to fulfill all righteousness in this way” – and so John baptized Jesus in water. Remember: He is our example.

“When Jesus had been baptized, just as He came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to Him and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on Him. Then a voice from Heaven said, ‘This is My Beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased’.” (Matthew 3:16-17). Remember: He is our example.

So Jesus was baptized in water and in the Holy Spirit. He identified with Mankind as a Man. He was born into a fallen world, although He personally had no sin. As our example, He went through the waters of baptism. As our example, He was also baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Jesus’ ministry on earth flowed out from Him being baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit, and His walking in the Spirit all His life. Acts 10:38 says, “God anointed Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit and power, and Jesus went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.” Jesus did good works by the power of the Spirit, and He said to His disciples, “As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you.” (John 20:21). “You shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to Me ...” (Acts 1:8)

If Jesus needed to be baptized in water, and baptized in the Holy Spirit, how much more do we! In fact, this is so important for us that we are told in the Bible to “walk in the Spirit”; to “pray in the Spirit”; to “live by the Spirit” (Romans 8:4; Ephesians 6:18; Galatians 5:16, 25). It is the power of the Holy Spirit which enabled Jesus, as a Man living on this earth, to do what He did. Remember: He is our example!

Jesus only did what He saw His Father doing

Jesus said to His disciples, “Truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing on His own, but only what He sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. ... I can do nothing on My own. As I hear, I judge, because I seek to do, not My own will, but the will of Him Who sent Me.” (John 5:19, 30)

Jesus also said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM, and that I do nothing on My own but I speak these things as the Father instructed Me. The One Who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to Him.” (John 8:28-29)

We all need to continually seek to hear, see and discern what God is saying and doing, to and through us. We need to walk in His Spirit and so please and glorify Him.

QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the most important things that parents can do to encourage their children to 'grow and become strong, be filled with wisdom, and know the favour of God upon them', like Jesus (Luke 2:40)?
2. What can parents also do to encourage them to 'increase in favour with God and people' (Luke 2:52)?
3. How important is it that all believers are baptised in water and the Holy Spirit, as Jesus was?
4. Jesus always did what He saw His Father doing. Can we also "see" what God is wanting to do in and through our lives? How can we at least get a glimpse of this?
5. What does it mean to be "filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18); to "walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16, 25; Rom. 8:4-5); and to "pray at all times in the Spirit" (Eph. 6:18)?
6. How well does my life demonstrate my faith and love for Jesus, both to Christians and to people who are not yet Christians?

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3. Gifts of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' Ministry

The gifts of the Spirit

Paul lists 9 gifts of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11.

"There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are varieties of services, but the same Lord. There are varieties of activities, but it is the same God Who inspires all of them in everyone. To each person is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one person is given, through the Spirit, the utterance of **wisdom**. To another person, the utterance of **knowledge** by the same Spirit. To another, **faith** by the same Spirit. To another, gifts of **healing** by the one Spirit. To another the working of **miracles**; to another **prophecy**; to another the **discernment of spirits**; to another, various kinds of **tongues**; to another, the **interpretation of tongues**. These are all inspired by one and the same Spirit, Who gives to each one individually as the Spirit chooses."

Let's look at each of these gifts of the Spirit, what they are, and examples of them, especially in the life of Jesus.

Wisdom

The supernatural gift of wisdom comes as God reveals things to a person which are not known, or worked out, simply by human wisdom or experience. King Solomon, for example, asked God for wisdom and God gave it to him in amazing ways (1 Kings 4:29-34). Of Stephen, just before he was martyred for his faith, it was said that he was "a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit", and the people "could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which He spoke." (Acts 6:5, 10).

Jesus also exercised the gift of wisdom on a number of occasions as He dealt with various people – e.g., the woman at the well in Samaria (John 4:5-38); the woman who was about to be stoned for adultery (John 8:1-11); people – especially the scribes and Pharisees – who tried to trap Him or trick Him; His trial before Caiaphas, Herod and Pilate; and so on.

The gifts of wisdom and knowledge are both gifts of revelation, where the Holy Spirit reveals things that are not humanly known. See, for example, Luke 2:46-47 and John 7:14-18.

Knowledge

Knowledge, also, comes by a revelation of God's Spirit to a person. It is not something the person already knows, or thinks might happen, but comes by divine revelation. God reveals something that could not be otherwise known. God may reveal knowledge about something, or something to come, and then give the wisdom to know how to deal with it. Jesus exercised the gift of knowledge (often alongside wisdom) on a number of occasions. For example, in choosing His disciples; His teaching

and example; with the scribes and Pharisees; with the Canaanite woman; about paying Temple taxes, and taxes to the emperor; answering tricky questions put to Him by people trying to trap Him; answering the rich young ruler; His parables; the way He summed up all the Law and commandments with the two greatest commandments – total love and commitment to the Lord, and loving others as we love and care for ourselves, and so on.

Faith

The gift of faith enables a person to believe for the “impossible” because, with God, all things are possible. If He said it, it will happen, no matter how humanly impossible it may seem. For example, Jesus walked on water but when He called Peter to step out of the boat, Peter had the faith to walk on water initially but began to doubt when he saw the waves. Jesus’ *whole life* was lived by faith – faith to live, to prophecy, to perform miracles and healings, etc. Jesus trusted His Father for everything – even His death on the cross – and His resurrection!

Healing

The Gospels are full of Jesus’ healing ministry – healing physically, mentally, spiritually – including deliverance from demon possession, and raising the dead.

Miracles

Supernatural events powered by the Holy Spirit – for example, Jesus’ feeding 5000 and 4000 people on two occasions; walking on water; causing storms to cease; turning water into wine; even catching fish! Jesus did “naturally”, by the power of the Spirit, what is otherwise impossible to do!

Prophecy

Jesus prophesied of the days to come – both for Himself (for example, His death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and second coming) and of days to come for His followers – for example, Peter’s denials; the last days; destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem; the scattering of Israel; plus His second coming and the final day of Judgement.

Discernment of spirits

On a number of occasions Jesus discerned demonic activities in people’s lives and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, cast out those evil spirits and set people free. For example, two men; a boy; a man with a legion of spirits – He cast them all out with a word – “Out!” He cast out the spirits in order to heal the person – not just spiritually but also physically.

Tongues and Interpretation

Paul mentions two types of tongues – the tongues of men and of angels (1 Corinthians 13:1). **Tongues of men** are natural, spoken languages; though the gift of tongues may involve speaking in human languages that are not known to the speakers but are known by some of the hearers, as on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-12. There are also the **tongues of angels** – angelic languages which are not known on earth and will need the gift of interpretation if they are to be understood by people. (1 Corinthians 14:1-19).

Did Jesus speak in tongues? The Bible doesn’t say. But He had perfect communication with His Father in any language He chose to speak. He may have spoken in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Latin, or whatever He chose – the Father understood perfectly what His Son was saying, and the Son knew exactly what His Father was saying! Unlike us at times, He knew “how to pray as He ought” (Romans 8:26-27).

Paul speaks quite extensively about spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:1 to 14:25.

Jesus is **the** Son of God; and all those who have been born again of the Holy Spirit, are **children of God** by the new birth. Jesus is **the** Son of Man, and we are also, of course, children of Mankind by our physical birth. Like Jesus, we too can be filled with the Holy Spirit, receive gifts of the Holy Spirit, and minister under His authority, anointing and power.

REMEMBER: *Jesus is our Example!* And He was baptised in water and the Holy Spirit, lived constantly filled with the Spirit, exercised the gifts of the Spirit, prayed as He was led by the Spirit; and His power and authority were those of God, exercised under the leading, anointing and power of the Holy Spirit.

QUESTIONS

1. What is meant by “the gifts of the Spirit”? How do they differ from other talents and abilities we may have? Are there only nine gifts of the Spirit?
2. Knowledge, understanding and wisdom are three somewhat similar concepts. How do they differ? Why is each one so important?
3. Why is the gift of faith so important? What can we do if we exercise the gift of faith, which might not be done without the gift?
4. Have you ever seen a miracle of healing occur? What happened?
5. What examples of the gift of miracles have you seen or (reliably) heard of?
6. What is the difference between prophecy, and tongues with interpretation?
7. Is it reasonable to ask God to give you gifts of His Spirit in order that you might worship, serve, and honour Him in your daily life? (Have you done so?)

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4. Jesus studied the Scriptures and prayed

Undoubtedly, one of the most important things that Jesus did, during His life here on earth, was to walk closely with His Father.

Jesus prayed and talked with His Father. Jesus listened to His Father. He was guided, led and empowered by the Spirit of God. He learned the Old Testament Scriptures which the Holy Spirit had inspired. And He taught His disciples to do likewise!

In John’s Gospel we read of Jesus saying, “The Son can do nothing on His own, but only what He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows Him all that He Himself is doing; and He will show Him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. ... I can do nothing on My own. As I hear, I judge. My judgement is just because I do not seek to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.” (John 5:19-20, 30).

“When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realise that I AM, and that I do nothing on My own, but I speak these things as the Father has instructed Me. The One who sent Me is with Me; He has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to Him.” (John 8:28-29).

So, what else do the Gospels show us that Jesus did and taught with respect to the Scriptures and prayer?

The Scriptures

Jesus obviously had an excellent knowledge and understanding of the (Old Testament) Scriptures. Luke 2:41-52 tells us that Jesus’ parents used to take Him to the Temple in Jerusalem every year at the time of Passover. Even at the age of 12, He was found “in the Temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions; and they were amazed at His understanding and His answers!” “Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and with people.”

Later, after being baptised in water and the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:21-22), “Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit ... began to teach in the synagogues [in Galilee] and was praised by everyone. ... He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was His custom.” There He was given the scroll of Isaiah and He turned to Isaiah 61:1-2 and, after reading it, He said “Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Jesus then spoke about Himself and His ministry as a prophet and healer, which angered the people, even though they had spoken well of Him and were amazed at the gracious words that He spoke! (Luke 4:14-30).

Jesus obviously knew the Scriptures well; He not only often quoted them, and taught them, but also interpreted them on a number of occasions, and applied them to Himself as “the Messiah who was to come.”

Jesus prayed

Prayer, and relationship with His Father, were crucial to the life and ministry of Jesus. Fasting was also part of this; for example, immediately after His baptism with the Spirit, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness where He prayed and fasted for forty days, and was tempted by the devil. He overcame each of the devil's temptations by quoting the Scripture to the devil!

Jesus went up a mountain to pray alone (Mark 6:46); He prayed at His baptism (Luke 3:21-22); in deserted places (Luke 5:16); before choosing His disciples (Luke 6:12-13); He prayed with His disciples nearby (Luke 9:18); He was praying when He was transfigured on a mountain top (Luke 9:28-29).

It is interesting, however, to note that we have very little of what He prayed – simply, that He did pray.

Twelve times it is recorded that Jesus gave thanks. In fact, before He fed the 5000 and the 4000 people, every reference in the Gospels (6 times) it says He gave thanks for the loaves and the fish. He also gave thanks for the Passover bread and the cup.

Also it is interesting to notice that, with the single exception of the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:41-42) there is never any mention of Jesus praying before He healed the sick, raised the dead, delivered the demon-possessed, or performed a miracle! He did, of course, touch people or lay hands on them, and prayer may have been implied by this, but it is not specifically mentioned. However, Jesus lived a life of prayer and fellowship with His Father!

The Lord's prayer is given in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:1-4.

By far the longest prayer we have, that Jesus prayed, is found in John chapter 17, where Jesus prays for His followers and the Church – especially for unity between them! How critically important it must be, if the longest recorded prayer of Jesus (26 verses) is for unity between believers!

The first three Gospels all mention Jesus' prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane just before His arrest, but while He must have prayed for quite some time, the disciples fell asleep and very little is recorded (only two sentences) of what He prayed (Matthew 26:36-46).

We also have Jesus' three prayers from the cross: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). "Father, into Your hands I commit My Spirit" (Luke 23:46).

Finally, we have Jesus' blessing of the eleven disciples before He ascended back into Heaven (Luke 24:50-51)

Jesus' teaching on prayer

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught about prayer and fasting (Matt. 6:5-18) and He said, "When you pray ..." so prayer was assumed of every believer! He also told us to "Ask (and keep on asking), ... seek (and keep on seeking), knock (and keep on knocking), ..." (Matt. 7:7-11)

Jesus referred to some things only happening in answer to prayer with fasting (Mark 9:29)

He mentioned the need to agree in prayer, when we pray with one another (Matt. 18:19-20)

He said we need to pray with faith, and to forgive one another (Matt. 21:22; Mark 11:20-26). In fact, on a number of occasions when sick people came to Jesus, He saw their faith and responded to it.

Jesus called the Temple, God's "House of Prayer", so prayer is a primary purpose of God's people meeting together! (Luke 19:45-46)

QUESTIONS

1. How closely do you think Christians can follow Jesus' example of "seeing what the Father is doing" and seek to do likewise? (John 5:19-20)
2. How did Jesus learn the Old Testament Scriptures? (He probably didn't have a written copy of them)
3. In Luke chapter 4, why was the people's response so different in verses 28-29, compared with verse 22?
4. What are the main areas of Jesus' prayer in John chapter 17 (that is, the main things Jesus prayed, in this chapter)?
5. What are the main areas Jesus covers in the Lord's Prayer?
6. When should Christians fast as well as pray? What is the purpose of fasting as well as praying?
7. How much prayer is carried out in the Church, when Christians meet together? Are our meetings really times of prayer, or are they almost entirely other things?

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5. Jesus' interactions with people

Although Jesus' public ministry only covered about three and a half years, He met with, and inter-related with, thousands of people, from all sorts of different backgrounds.

With "ordinary" people

Jesus was very popular with ordinary people. On two occasions, He taught 5000 and 4000 people for most of the day, until they needed to go home; and Jesus didn't send them home hungry – either physically or spiritually!

When He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, a few days before Passover and His arrest and crucifixion, the crowds thronged around Him and worshipped Him with great praise and admiration – so much so that the much more conservative Jewish leaders were very concerned, especially since they wanted to silence Jesus. (Matt. 21:1-17)

Jesus loved the people who came to Him with open hearts, open ears and a hunger for what He had to say and do. He taught them in parables, healed the sick, and set free those who were in spiritual bondage. He loved the people, and they loved and followed Him.

Even though Jesus was a Jew, He still associated with Samaritans and Gentiles as well as Jews. And while most leaders would not have spent much time with children in general, and even His disciples tried to stop the children coming to Him, Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and don't stop them, because the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to ones such as these." (Matt. 19:13-15). Jesus was a "man's Man" but He was also a friend of little children, foreigners, lepers, other outcasts, and so on.

With His disciples

Jesus chose twelve disciples, specially to impart to them the good news of salvation, God's message to His people, and to demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit to heal, deliver those in bondage, set free people, and even raise the dead. He taught them, both by word and by example. He sent out the twelve to do as He had been doing (Luke 9:1-6). Later He sent out the 12 with 60 others (Luke 10:1-12), to teach them also the principles and demonstration of the Kingdom of God in their midst.

The group of twelve disciples who Jesus chose were a very interesting mixture of people – their backgrounds, occupations, ages and so on. He even chose one who would betray Him! Some of them we are very familiar with, from the Gospels, such as Peter, James and John; others we know a little about, such as Matthew, Thomas, Andrew, Philip, and Judas Iscariot; the rest (Bartholomew, Thaddaeus, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Canaanite Zealot) we know almost nothing

about from the Bible. Who were these latter disciples, and what did they do or say? (Matt. 10:2-4; Luke 6:14-16)

With the Sadducees, Pharisees, scribes, teachers, lawyers, and rulers of the synagogues

Even at the age of twelve, Jesus created quite an interest in the Temple amongst the learned teachers and priests as He asked leading questions, and also answered some of the questions! (Luke 2:41-51)

On the whole, the scribes, Pharisees, teachers and rulers in the Temple and synagogues had become quite legalistic, even going beyond what the Scriptures taught and making an issue of many minor things which Jesus showed were not the real meaning of, or behind, the laws they were supposed to support. For example, plucking grain and healing on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1-8, 9-14); forgiving sins (Matt. 9:2-7); eating with tax collectors and sinners (Matt. 9:9-13); fasting (Matt. 9:14-17); not washing hands (Matt. 15:1-9); Jesus' authority (Matt. 21:23-27); paying taxes to Caesar (Matt. 22:15-22)

Moreover, Jesus had no time for hypocrisy – people pretending to be spiritual and great “doers” of the Law, whose hearts were not set on truly worshipping and serving the Lord God (Matt. 23:1-36).

On one occasion, when He went into the Temple and saw what was being done regarding the animals for sacrifice, He “cleansed the Temple” and said to its leaders that they had turned God's House of Prayer into a den of thieves (Matt. 21:12-16).

With the poor and needy

Jesus showed great compassion for the poor and needy. For example:

- The widow of Nain whose only son had died (Luke 7:11-15).
- Healing the Canaanite woman's daughter (Matt. 15:22-28).
- The Samaritan woman who had been ostracized because of the many husbands she had had and the life she was living, and had to come to the well by herself in the middle of the day when the sun was at its hottest (John 4:1-42).
- The women who came and anointed His feet with perfume (Luke 7:36-50), and washed His feet with her hair (John 12:1-8).
- The woman who was about to be stoned for adultery (John 8:2-11).
- The lame man who had no-one to put him into the pool at Bethesda (John 5:2-18).
- The lepers who were outcasts from society because of their disease (Matt. 8:1-4).
- The thief dying on the cross next to Jesus (Luke 23:39-43).
- The Gadarene demoniac who had been bound with chains to restrain him, and who abused his own body because of his insanity (Mark 5:1-20).
- Matthew and Zacchaeus – Jewish tax collectors, despised by their own people for collecting taxes for the Romans, and also over-charging in order to profit from the gains (Matt. 9:1-13; Luke 19:1-10).

With leaders and people in authority

Jesus was just as much at ease with leaders as He was with the humblest and “lowest” of people. Apart from in the Temple where He spent time with the teachers and leaders, He also spent time with a Roman Centurion; Caiaphas, the High Priest; Herod, the Jewish leader; and Pilate, Caesar's Governor in Palestine.

With those who opposed Him

Generally speaking, Jesus showed great restraint and wisdom in dealing with those who opposed Him. The major thing that He spoke very strongly against was religious hypocrisy by those who claimed to be God's people. See, for example, Matthew 23. Hypocrisy, jealousy, lies, and deception can have no part in God's Kingdom which is built on truth, justice and God's love – not a general, wishy-washy “love” that tolerates almost anything, but true love which builds up, strengthens, and stands for what is good and right. Like God the Father, Jesus looks at and discerns, the motives and

intentions of people's hearts, so He could forgive sinners who repented and changed their ways of life; but He did not tolerate pride, stubbornness, and unrepentant hypocrites.

So He forgave the Samaritan woman at the well; the woman who was about to be stoned for adultery; the crippled man on the stretcher; the repentant tax collector; and so on, but not those who would not change their cold, stony hearts and become like little children in order to be born again into the Kingdom of God.

With John the Baptist

John and Jesus were cousins, but in many ways they had parallel ministries until John's ministry decreased, while Jesus' ministry increased. John was Jesus' forerunner. John was a prophet, and a preacher of righteousness, repentance and water baptism. In order to fulfill all righteousness, Jesus was baptised by John in the River Jordan, during which time He was also baptised with the Holy Spirit. From this time on, John's ministry became superseded by Jesus' ministry. Eventually, John was put to death – and Jesus didn't intervene, because the seed had been sown, and now the fruit was about to come as Jesus gave His life for all who have sinned but who believe in Him and repent. See Matthew 3:1-17; 14:1-12.

QUESTIONS

We have looked at many different ways in which Jesus related to many different groups and types of people. If Jesus' life demonstrated all these relationships with different people:

1. How does Jesus relate to *you*?
2. How do *you* relate to Jesus?
3. How can you share what *you* know about Jesus, and what you have experienced in *your* life, with other people?
4. What lessons have *you* learned from the Scriptures and from life's experiences, that have helped you most?
5. How do *you* relate to people who are very different from you?
6. How should we deal with people who oppose us, try to put us down, dislike us, or are jealous of us?
7. How do we receive God's grace, wisdom and patience to deal with difficult people and situations, as Jesus did?

His name is *J e s u s*

6. Jesus – facing temptation and testing

We all face temptations to do what is wrong, or not to do what God tells us to do. We also all face times when we are tested by the people or circumstances around us. Sometimes these trials seem impossibly long or difficult. Often we wonder if other people *really* face what we do, or even understand what we are going through. Surely we are going through situations that no-one else does, or even understands?

But the Bible says that “No temptation (or testing) has come to you that is not common to everyone, but God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted or tested beyond your own strength (to overcome), but He will, with the temptation, also provide a way of escape so you will be able to bear it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13)

That may seem only partly encouraging – to know that other people *do* face similar situations and temptations to what we do. But what about the Lord Jesus – does He really understand? After all, He had divine power on His side when He was on earth.

Sometimes we refer to Jesus' temptations by the devil, in the wilderness, and the three times Satan tempted Him – to turn stones into bread, because He was hungry; to get followers by doing something dramatic, like jumping off the pinnacle of the Temple and not being hurt when He hit the ground; or, to bow down to Satan and follow Him, then Satan said he would give Jesus all the nations of the earth –

a short cut to acquiring the nations of the earth as His Kingdom. But Jesus resisted every one of these temptations – to use His power to satisfy His own needs (self-centredness), the drawing of a crowd by doing a stunt (pride), and compromising with Satan.

These were not the only temptations Jesus faced. Luke 4:13 says that “When the devil had finished every test, Satan left Jesus *until an opportune time.*” So Jesus obviously faced other temptations and testing too, including later on in His ministry.

Now the above three temptations may not have much relevance to us, in the sense that even if we wanted to, we couldn’t turn a stone into bread, jump from a great height and not injure ourselves, or worship Satan and gain all the nations of the world. So does Jesus *really* identify with us and the testing, trials and temptations that we humans face?

Yes, He does! For the Bible also says that Jesus was “tempted or tested in all areas like we are, and yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Let us look at some of these areas where He identified with us, and we can identify with Him.

Satanic testing and temptation

We have already seen above that Jesus was tempted by Satan (cf. Job’s satanic testing in Job chapters 1 and 2). The devil even used Scripture when He tested Jesus, and Jesus reminded Satan of what the Scriptures really meant! Jesus knew God’s Word and simply quoted it; He didn’t argue! The devil tempted Eve (Genesis 3:1-6) in similar ways to how he tempted Jesus, by saying things like “Did God [*really*] say ...?” or “If you will ...” or “If you are ...” Misquoting Scripture or doubting what God has clearly said, are often tactics of the enemy. Jesus finally said, “Away with you, Satan!” (Matthew 4:1-11) – something we often need to say when we are tempted!

Traps and tricks

Questions, especially trick questions which are designed to trap us into a corner, or get us to say or do things which are wrong, are common tactics of the enemy and sometimes of other people.

On a number of occasions the Pharisees, Sadducees or others tried to get Jesus into a corner by their clever questions. See, for example, questions about plucking grain and healing on the Sabbath (Matt 12:1-8, 9-14); forgiving sins (Matt 9:2-7); eating with tax collectors and sinners (Matt 9:9-13); fasting (Matt 9:14-17); not washing hands (Matt 15:1-9); Jesus’ authority (Matt 21:23-27); paying taxes to Caesar (Matt 22:15-22).

Disappointment

Jesus was disappointed by a number of people who He called to follow Him, but, for various reasons, refused to do so. Some of these were people who had a lot of wealth and refused to lay that aside, or used excuses that they had other things to do “first”, before they followed Him.

Jesus knew sorrow at seeing His love and His invitation to people to “Follow Me”, etc., rejected.

Rejection

Love – divine love – being rejected! People tried to push Jesus over a cliff; they tried to stone Him; because they did not like what He was saying and who He said He was. Many of the scribes and Pharisees rejected Him; many of the Jews; His own people in Nazareth (Matt. 13:54-58).

Judas betrayed Him; Peter denied Him three times; His disciples forsook Him and fled; many of the Jews rejected Him at His crucifixion, and the Romans put Him to death, even though the Governor of the land, Pontius Pilate (the Roman Emperor’s representative in the land) said, “I find no fault in this man.” (Luke 23:4).

Jesus wept

Jesus felt deeply, just as we do. Jesus wept when Lazarus died (John 11:35-36); He cried over Jerusalem (Matt. 23:37-39); He was moved by compassion on a number of occasions. He knew and felt sorrow and grief and loneliness and rejection.

He felt anger when He saw how the Temple was being used to make money from animal sacrifices; when the House of Prayer had become a “den of thieves”.

Jesus humbled Himself

Even though He is the Son of God, Jesus humbled Himself and identified with us. He came into our world, making Himself “a little lower than the angels” and living as a man. He humbled Himself even to the point of death – death on a cross by brutal crucifixion, as well as the other brutalities He faced – all for us! “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in *every respect* has been tested as we are, yet without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15. See also Philippians 2:5-11 and Matthew 16:24-28).

Jesus’ suffering

Jesus agonized in the Garden of Gethsemane for hours as He faced His arrest and death. In His agony He prayed, as any human would, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me ...” but His Spirit prayed “... nevertheless, not what I want, but what You want!” (Matthew 26:39).

Peter says, in 1 Peter 2:20b-21, “If you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God’s approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in His steps.”

Jesus knows what it is like, because He has been through situations just like us. He understands, He cares, He loves – and He will support us through them!

So, “Beloved, *do not be surprised* at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to *test you*. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, so that you may also be *glad and shout for joy* when He is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory, Who is the Spirit of God, is resting upon you!” (1 Peter 4:12-14).

Remember: Jesus suffered. Jesus died. But He also rose again to live forever – and so will we! Hallelujah!

QUESTIONS

1. What does this study show you, is one of the major reasons why Jesus came to earth?
2. In what ways can Jesus identify with you in your trials, temptations and weaknesses?
3. In what ways does Jesus demonstrate to us His incredible love, compassion and understanding?
4. How do we “deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus”? (Matthew 16:24)
5. What are some ways in which Jesus has helped you to face satanic attacks, traps which have been set for you, disappointment, rejection, suffering or being humbled?
6. Jesus **wept** when He came to Lazarus’ tomb? What does this tell you about Him?
7. How can Hebrews 4:15 help you in a difficult time or situation?

His name is *J e s u s*

7. Jesus and moral issues

The greatest commandments

A lawyer asked Jesus a question to test Him: “Teacher, which commandment in the Law is the greatest?” Jesus replied, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. The second commandment is

like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the prophets.” (Matt 22:34-40. See Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18)

In the Old Testament, the Israelites were given hundreds of laws, and sometimes people think of the Ten Commandments as the “main” laws. But Jesus summed it all up in two commandments – love God and love other people.

If we truly love someone, we will want to do what is good and right and best for that person.

If we truly love God, we will not worship other gods. If we truly love God we will not allow idols in our lives. If we truly love God, we will honour His name and not use it in vain – we will not blaspheme His name, or dishonor Him in any way. So, we will keep the first three of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-7)

If we truly love other people, we will honour our parents; we will not murder; we will not commit adultery; we will not steal; we will not lie about other people; and we will not covet what they have but will be satisfied with what God has given us. So, we will keep the last six commandments (Exodus 20:12-17)

If we truly love ourselves (Jesus said to love our neighbour *as we love ourselves*), then we will have regular sabbaths (days of rest) – so we will also keep the fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8-11; Mark 2:27-28; 6:30-32)

Thus, all the Ten Commandments are summed up in the two greatest commandments.

Other moral issues

Jesus, in His teaching recorded in the Gospels (and especially in His Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew chapters 5 to 7), speaks particularly about the following issues. This may seem to be a rather exhausting list, but it is not an exhaustive list! The following references are largely based on Matthew and Mark’s Gospels, with a few references to Luke and John. [Don’t feel obliged to look up all the references unless you want to!]

1. Honouring authority over us – especially God

Jesus taught us that we should be law-abiding people – not rebellious, or speaking evil of those in authority. The only possible exception would be if the laws of the land contradicted what God has said to us in His Word (see Acts 5:29, for example).

Matt 4:10; 5:17; 22:15-21; 23:2-3; Mark 12:13-17.

2. Honouring our parents, and loving our children

We are also to respect our parents, even if we may differ from them in what we believe or do. Children also are to be respected – Jesus welcomed them to come to Him, and also said we needed to become like them in the simplicity of their faith, if we were to enter His Kingdom.

Matt 15:3-6; 18:1-6, 10, 14; 19:13-15; Mark 7:9-13; 10:13-16.

3. Respecting other people

Similarly, with *all* people – we are to love, not hate, them. No matter who they are, or what they have done, even though we may totally disagree with them, and what they have done may be wrong, we are to still pray for them, and show love to them, and respect them as people.

Matt 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-31; John 13:34-35.

4. Honouring marriage

Marriage is, of course, and always has been, between a man and a woman – this is how God created us and intends us to be. Marriages are to be honoured, respected and encouraged.

Matt 5:31-32; 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18.

5. Sexual purity

Followers of Jesus are called to purity of life in all areas, including sexually. Jesus specifically speaks against fornication, adultery and lust.

Matt 5:27-28; 15:18-20; Mark 7:20-23.

6. Generosity

Christians are called to be generous; to give generously, and not to steal!
Matt 6:1-4, 19-21; 19:21-22; Mark 10:17-31.

7. Right heart attitudes

Our lives should not need to be “controlled by the Law” but by God transforming our heart attitudes in such a way that we *want to be* what God wants us to be, and *want to do* what God wants us to do. Love and respect towards all people, including strangers and people who differ from us, should become our natural desire and action. For example:

Being just and fair with people. Not being biased or prejudiced against some people.

Exercising self-control, controlling our thoughts, being patient, content – being satisfied with what we have, rather than being covetous.

Forgiving; not having anger, hatred, murderous thoughts; or being violent, jealous, judgemental or wanting to retaliate.

Matt 5:21-24, 38-42; 6:12-15; 7:1-5, 12; 18:21-22, 35; Mark 11:25-26.

8. Honesty

As followers of Jesus we are to be truthful, faithful, trustworthy, not deceiving, dishonest, telling lies, bringing false accusations, or breaking promises.

Matt 5:33-37; 12:33-37.

9. Repentant

Jesus calls all of us to “Repent” – to be genuinely sorry for all wrong things we have done; to ask forgiveness and receive forgiveness.

Matt 4:17; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 13:3, 5.

10. Righteous

We are also called to be righteous – to do what is right and to resist what is wrong; to live lives that honour God and His ways, and are a blessing to other people. In other words, living the “right” life – as defined by the Lord!

Matt 3:15; 5:6, 8, 10; 6:33; Luke 2:52.

This includes:

Kindness, gentleness, mercy.

Matt 9:10-13, 35-38; 23:23.

Goodness.

Matt 5:16; 25:35-40.

Peace-loving; being a peace-maker.

Matt 5:9.

A humble servant – serving both the Lord, and other people.

Matt 20:25-28; Mark 9:33-37; 10:35-45.

... all the above are illustrated and personified in Jesus’ life, as well as His teachings.

Paul also mentions many of these issues in Galatians 5:16-26, where he talks about the fruit of the Spirit in contrast to the works of the flesh. We, as Christians, are called to “walk in the Spirit” and produce the fruit of the Spirit.

The whole of the New Testament speaks about these issues too, and the way in which Christians are called to follow in the steps of Jesus (1 Peter 2:21; 1 John 2:6) and become His disciples. After all, Jesus did say, on several occasions – “Follow Me!”

QUESTIONS

1. Does Jesus *really* expect me to live up to all of this? How can I?
2. Which things, out of the 10 points above, do I find hardest to live up to? What can I do about them?
3. Meditate on the words of Jesus: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength” (Mark 12:30). Ask the Lord to show you how you can better live up to what He asks. What is He saying?
4. “You shall love your neighbour as yourself”. Who is our “neighbour”? Who, did Jesus show us, is our neighbour? (Luke 10:29-37)
5. What can I do to be a “better neighbour”? What is the Lord saying?
6. “As you love yourself”? Do you really love yourself? Do you treat your mind and body and soul kindly? Do you get the rest and relaxation that is referred to as the “sabbath rest”? (Mark 2:27-28; 6:30-32)
7. Read Galatians 5:16-26. Which tares (weeds) do I need to root out of my life? Which fruit do I need to put more time and effort into cultivating?

His name is *J e s u s*

8. Hebrews – the Gospel of Jesus the Messiah

INTRODUCTION

The book of Hebrews is the only New Testament book whose author is not known with a fair degree of certainty. The author does not identify himself, and various suggestions have been made, such as Paul, Barnabas, or Apollos. Obviously, in one sense it doesn't matter or the author would have been revealed. However, there is some good evidence it might have been Paul.

Before Paul became a follower of Jesus, he was an ardent Jewish Pharisee and a persecutor of the early Church – arresting and imprisoning those Jews who followed Jesus. In no way did Paul believe that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. Then, on the road to Damascus, he had an encounter with the risen, resurrected and ascended Jesus! This encounter, recorded in Acts 9:1-19, must have had an incredible impact on his life and thinking about Jesus. From an ardent persecutor of Christians, he became an ardent follower of Christ!

Paul describes what happened after his encounter with Jesus, in Galatians 1:11-24 and Philippians 3:4b-10. He spent some time in Arabia, without even consulting with the apostles first. It seems very likely that during that time he had to totally rethink what he believed, and especially: **How could Jesus be the Messiah, the Son of God – a Prophet, Priest and King?**

In one sense, it looks as if the book of Hebrews could be Paul's “Thesis” on this subject – the revelation God gave him about His Son. His conversion involved a traumatic change from a persecutor of the early Church to one of its most ardent proponents – one who eventually gave His life for the Gospel he once so hated. How could Paul reconcile his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, with what he had always believed – the Old Testament Scriptures? Paul must have “searched the (Old Testament) Scriptures to see if these things could be so” (John 5:39; Acts 17:11). Paul had to be convinced from the Jewish Scriptures that Jesus was the prophesied Messiah – the One Who was to come.

The book of Hebrews contains 38 quotes from the Old Testament (there is *at least* one quote in every one of its 13 chapters), and these quote 60 verses in total from the Old Testament, showing how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures and prophecies. Most of the first 10 chapters of Hebrews

quote the Old Testament to demonstrate that God has a unique, only begotten Son (John 1:1-5, 14-18; 3:16; 1 John 4:9), whose name is Jesus (Saviour), who is God's promised Messiah (the Anointed One).

In another sense, Hebrews is Paul's "Gospel for the Jews", just as Romans is Paul's "Gospel for the Gentiles". Hebrews assumes the reader has an intimate knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures, and deals with God's revelations to the Jews; while in Romans, Paul speaks about God's revelations to the Gentiles through Creation and Conscience – see Romans chapter 1 and 2 (though, of course, the ways God revealed Himself to Jews and Gentiles are not mutually exclusive).

The book of Hebrews largely consists of demonstrating that God has a unique, only begotten **Son** (a radical concept to the Jews), God's Son's name is **Jesus** (which means **Saviour**), He is the **Messiah** (Christ), He is the **Mediator** between God and people, He is the last great **Prophet**, the last **High Priest**, **King** of kings and **Lord** of lords, ruler over the **Kingdom of God**.

It is interesting to notice the way this is gradually revealed through the book of Hebrews:

- God has a **Son** – first mentioned in 1:2.
- His name is **Jesus (Saviour)** – God's Son is not named until 2:9.
- He is the **Messiah** – first mentioned in 3:6. "Christ" is the Greek word for the Hebrew word "Messiah", which means "the Anointed One".
- He is the **Mediator** of the new Covenant – 8:6.
- He is referred to as **Prophet** in 1:1-2; **King** in 1:8; **High Priest** in 2:17; **Lord Jesus** and **Jesus Christ** in 13:20-21.
- Jesus is given more than 20 titles or names in Hebrews!

Notice that the writer *first* refers to God having a Son! (1:2). *Then*, after 22 verses, he mentions His name – Jesus (2:9). *Finally*, after 37 verses, he says (3:6) that Jesus is the Messiah (Heb.); or Christ (Gk.). This was revolutionary: God has a Son; He was born into this world; His name is Jesus; and He is the promised Messiah! (that is, the Anointed One – see Psalm 2:6-8 and Daniel 9:24-27).

Interposed in this revelation concerning the Messiah, Hebrews has several warnings to believers concerning the days in which they live. The book was probably written sometime before the fall of Jerusalem and the final destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, because this is alluded to in Hebrews 8:13. It is interesting to note that while Jesus died, rose again and ascended to Heaven in 30 AD, God allowed one generation (40 years) to pass until the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD – there was no further need of the Temple or sacrifice for sins, for the Son of God, the Messiah, had died and paid the full price for the salvation of all who believe in Him.

The early Church faced severe persecution and parts of Hebrews were written to encourage Jewish Christians not to give up their faith and go back to Judaism. The Romans tolerated the Jews as long as they kept to their Temple and synagogues, and obeyed the Roman law, but the Romans were threatened by the rapidly growing Church and the spread of this "new religion". Christianity was, of course, the continuation of God's revelation through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel) and his descendants, and the fulfilment of God's promised Messiah, whose name was **Jesus**.

In times of oppression, especially, Hebrews speaks of "better things"; and superlatives like better, higher, superior, greater, beyond, etc., occur 15 times in the book – for example, we now have a "better Covenant" than the Old Covenant. See 1:4; 7:7, 19, 22, 26; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:35.

The theme of Hebrews is that Jesus the Messiah is absolutely supreme and all-sufficient as the One who reveals, and is Mediator of, God's grace. He is the full and final revelation of God. It is also a call to all Christians, to hold firm to their confession of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

It was written principally to the Hebrews (Israelites) to show that the Law in the Old Testament (Old Covenant) has been fulfilled through the life and death of Jesus, Who raised up a New Covenant which far exceeds the Old.

So, Hebrews shows from Scripture that Jesus is the Messiah; far above all angels, principalities and powers; Son of God and Son of Man, in Whom we put our faith, and through Whom we have salvation.

People who wrote books of the Bible didn't necessarily write them over a short period of time; and others may have added to them (e.g., after Moses' death! Deuteronomy 34). So, Hebrews 11 & 12 are different from chapters 1-10, and chapter 13 is different again. The last chapter may have been written by Paul later – it is much more like Paul's other letters – or it may have been written by another apostle. *It is, of course, still divinely inspired!*

QUESTIONS

1. What totally changed Paul's thinking about the Old Testament Scriptures and the Messiah?
2. In the OT, the people who were anointed were either kings, priests, or prophets. What was unique about Jesus' anointing?
3. Why does Hebrews quote the OT so much?
4. How do the books of Hebrews, and Romans, differ in their presentation of the Gospel to Jews, and Gentiles, respectively?
5. Why is there no further need for another physical temple to be built in Jerusalem?
6. Why, after Pentecost, did the Romans persecute Christians rather than Jews?
7. What are some of the "better things" that Christians have today, compared with OT times?

His name is *J e s u s*

9. Hebrews – chapters 1-2

In the last *Bible Study*, we looked at an overview of the book of Hebrews. Because no author is associated with this book, it was suggested that it may have been written by Paul – a Jew, and an ardent follower and teacher of the OT – as a "Thesis" which he wrote, explaining from the OT how Jesus could, in fact, be the only begotten Son of God, and the Messiah (Christ). (For simplicity, instead of writing "the author of the book of Hebrews", we shall say "Paul" even though he may not have been the actual author).

Chapters 1 and 2

Chapters 1 and 2 of Hebrews show that:

1. God has spoken through His Son – that is, that the Almighty God *has* a Son, and has chosen to speak to the world through Him (1:1-3a)
2. God's Son brings a superior revelation (1:1-4), and He is superior to the angels (1:3b-14)
3. There is a warning for Christians to pay attention to His message (2:1-4)
4. God's Son was exalted by being humbled – a seeming contradiction, but the Son of God humbled Himself and came into this sinful, fallen world as a human being – yet without sin (2:5-18).

1:1-3a

God spoke in OT times through various prophets but in these last days He has spoken through His **Son** – the greatest of all the prophets. He is not only the greatest **Prophet**; He is also the Creator of all things.

More than that, He is the reflection or radiance of God's glory, and the exact imprint or representation of God's very being. So, what is God like? Look at His Son!

1:3b-14

God's Son made purification for our sins! Now in OT times the people's sins were *covered* by the blood of the lambs sacrificed for the people's sins. But in these last days, God's Son *Himself* (the Lamb of God) shed His blood for the *removal* of our sins – "as far as the East is from the West" (Psalm 103:11-12); "buried in the depths of the sea, never to be remembered anymore!" (Isaiah

43:25; Jeremiah 31:34). When we are washed clean of our sins, they are forgiven and forgotten by God!

No angel could do this; only the sinless Son of God could, and did, die for the sins of the world! He is as much superior to the angels as His name – Son of God – is to theirs (“angels” means “messengers” – servants).

Besides, to which angel did God ever say, “You are My Son; today I have begotten You”? (Psalm 2:7). Or, “I will be His Father, and He will be My Son”? When He was born, God said “Let all God’s angels worship Him” (Luke 2:8-14)

God said about His Son, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The righteous scepter is the scepter of Your Kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness, so God has anointed You God with the oil of gladness [the word “Messiah” means the Anointed One] far above Your companions” (Psalm 45:6-7; Isaiah 61:1-3). And Jesus is **King** over the Kingdom of God!

God also says to His Son, “In the beginning, Lord, You founded the earth and the heavens – they will perish but You remain. ... Your years will never end” (Psalm 102:25-27)

And all that (and more) is in the 14 verses of chapter 1!

A warning – Warning 1

2:1-4

Chapter 2 begins with a warning about the seriousness of this message, and the danger of hearing it but drifting away from what we have heard. It is easy – but dangerous – to hear what God says, acknowledge its truth, and then slowly drift away from it!

Every message – even from God’s angels (messengers) was important and would be punished if there was disobedience (think of the Israelites during the 40 years they were under Moses’ leadership). Then how can we escape if we neglect the message of salvation which comes through God’s very Son Himself? The Lord Jesus declared the way of salvation; it was confirmed and preached by His followers; God confirmed what His Son said by signs, wonders, miracles and gifts of His Holy Spirit. If we neglect all this we are in great danger! But praise God for the gifts of His grace and mercy; faith and hope in the glorious promises He has given us of eternal life!

Exalted by being humbled

2:5-18

The worldly ways of being exalted, praised, worshipped, and looked up to, are usually through (supposed) power, authority, wealth, a great following of people, pride, and so on.

But note what God did. He didn’t subject the coming world to angels. David said (Psalm 8:4-6; cf. Genesis 1:26-31) that though God made us, for a little while, lower than the angels, He has crowned us with glory and honour, putting everything under our feet. God left nothing on earth, outside our control.

At the moment we do not see everything in subjection to us. However – and here comes the second great revelation – not only does God have a Son, but His name is **Jesus!** (2:9). For a little while, as a Man, He also was made lower than the angels too, but **now** He is crowned with glory and honour because He allowed Himself to be put to death – for our sakes – He tasted death for everyone, that we might be saved (Ephesians 2:8)

Wow! The Son of God – Jesus – through whom everything exists, humbled Himself as the Pioneer of our salvation, by suffering for our sins, in our place!

Jesus said, “Here I am, and the children the Lord has given Me” (Isaiah 8:17-18)

Since we share flesh and blood, Jesus Himself likewise shared the same things (flesh and blood) so that *through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death – that is, the devil – and set*

free those people who, all their lives, were held in slavery by the fear of death! (2:14-15). What incredible words – read them again!

Therefore, Jesus had to become like us in every respect, so that He might be a merciful and faithful **High Priest** ... to make a sacrifice of atonement for our sins.

Jesus is able to help those who are being tested – that's us! – because He Himself was tested by what He suffered.

So: Jesus the is last and greatest of the Prophets; He is King over the Kingdom of God, and the greatest and final High Priest. There is no Prophet like Him. There is no King like Him. There is no further need for any priest or High Priest. He is the fulfillment of all these roles – the Prophet, Priest and King – and His name is Jesus – the Son of God, and Messiah (as we shall see in a later Bible Study).

APPLICATION

1. Knowing who Jesus really is, and what He has done for us, should:
 - Increase our **faith**, our **hope**, and our **love** for Him.
 - Increase our **worship of God** – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
2. Knowing who Jesus really is, should affect our lives:
 - He is our **Prophet** (Mouthpiece of God) – so we must listen to Him!
 - He is our great **High Priest** – so we need to thank Him for offering up His blood and life for us!
 - He is our **King** and **Lord** – so we need to obey Him!

QUESTIONS

1. Why do we sometimes still feel guilty of sins we have confessed, and which have been forgiven? (1 John 1:9). What should we do about this guilt?
2. Why do some people, who appear to have been genuine Christians, born again, followers of Jesus, sometimes seem to give up their Christian faith?
3. In what ways did Jesus “humble Himself” when He came into this world?
4. Read Hebrews 2:14-15 and say what these verses mean to you.
5. What encouragement is it to us, to know that “Jesus was tempted in all points like we are, yet without sin” (see Hebrews 2:18 and 4:14-16)?
6. If Jesus is the final great Prophet, our great High Priest, and King of kings, what implications does this have for us?
7. Is there any need for another Temple to be built in Jerusalem? Why, or why not?

His name is *J e s u s*

10. Hebrews – chapters 3-6

Chapters 3 to 6

These four chapters in Hebrews deal with six major themes, as follows:

3:1-6 Moses is God's servant, but Jesus is God's Son.

3:7-19 Warning, number 2.

4:1-13 The rest that God promised.

4:14 – 5:10 Jesus, the great High Priest.

5:11 – 6:12 Warning, number 3.

6:13-20 The certainty of God's promise.

3:1-6 MOSES AND JESUS

Jesus is both the Apostle (the one sent from God the Father to the earth) and also the great High Priest, the mediator of the New Covenant.

Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honour than the house itself. Every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is Jesus, God's Son, who is the Creator of all things – in Heaven and on earth, and even under the earth!

Moses was a faithful servant in God's House, but Christ was faithful over God's House as His Son. We are God's House – His people, His Church, belonging to His Household of faith – as long as we continue to the end.

3:7-19 WARNING 2

This is a warning against unbelief and rejection of the Lord. The Holy Spirit says, "If you hear God's voice, do not harden your heart like the Israelites did during their times of rebellion (e.g., worshipping the golden calf; about their need of food and water; and when they heard the spies report of 'giants' in the Promised Land). Because of their rebellion, God said, "They will not enter My rest" – the Promised Land, which God only gave to those under the age of 20 (the 'age of accountability') plus Joshua and Caleb (the spies who believed that God would give the Israelites victory over the 'giants' already in the land).

We need to take care that we do not end up with an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. We need to exhort one another to be faithful and not allow our hearts to be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Those Israelites who sinned by being rebellious, disobedient and unbelieving, never entered into the land of God's promise. Therefore, we also need to take heed of this warning!

4:1-13 GOD'S REST

What was the 'rest' that God promised? For the Israelites it was the rest of faith – trusting God for all their needs during their time in the wilderness, so that they didn't need to worry, but by trusting God they rested by faith in a faithful God, Who always keeps His promises!

The rest God promised was also the Promised Land – a land previously described as a 'land flowing with milk and honey' – the land of promise, and hope of peace and security.

For God's people today, we are to have faith for God's provision in every way. Paul said, "My God shall supply all your needs, according to His riches in glory [which we have] in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). This is an amazing statement of faith, from someone who was tested in almost unbelievable ways (see 2 Cor. 11:23-28).

How do we rest? By trusting God that through Jesus we will have everything we need, even though we may face difficult periods in our lives.

The rest God has also promised Christians (our 'Promised Land') is our hope that one day we shall live in a glorious place, with our Lord God – forever!

The good news comes to us, just as it did to Israel, but the message didn't benefit them because, while they *heard* the message, it was not accompanied by *faith*, as it was by those who listened and obeyed. Likewise, we enter God's sabbath rest, by resting by faith in Him.

Some people, in Moses' time, entered God's rest but many failed to enter because of disobedience. Similarly for people today. "Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fail to find it because of disobedience like theirs [Israel's]."

"The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing and dividing between soul and spirit, and between joints and marrow. It can judge the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. Nobody is hidden from God's sight, but all are naked and bare to the eyes of the One to whom we must give an account."

4:14 – 5:10 JESUS, THE GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Jesus, the Son of God, is our great High Priest. Christians no longer need priests or High Priests, because Jesus is the greatest and only perfect and all-powerful High Priest that has ever lived on earth.

But our great High Priest, even though He is the Son of God, can sympathize with our weaknesses because He came into our world from Heaven, and has been tempted and tested just as we are, and yet He never sinned. Even the High Priest in Old Testament times had to offer up sin offerings for his own sins, as well as the sins of the people; but Jesus doesn't! He is the perfect High priest *and* Son of God!

He ascended back to Heaven and sits on the 'throne of grace'. Therefore we can approach the throne of grace with boldness, and find mercy and grace to help us in our times of need (including temptation and sin).

Jesus didn't glorify Himself by becoming a High priest – He was appointed by His Father, the One who said, "You are My Son, today I have begotten You" (Psalm 2:7). The Father also said of Jesus, "You are a Priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4).

In the days of His flesh, Jesus prayed with loud cries and tears, to the One who was able to save Him from death, and God sent an angel to strengthen Him. Thus He prayed to His Father, in the Garden of Gethsemane, "not My will, but Yours be done"! (Matt. 26:36-46).

As a Son, Jesus learned obedience to His Father through what He suffered and became the source of eternal salvation to everyone who obeys Him.

5:11 – 6:12 WARNING 3

Don't become dull in your understanding, but grow day-by-day and year-by-year, so that you can teach others the ways of God. If we have been Christians for some time, we should not need to be fed with milk but with solid food. Solid food is for the mature – those who have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil. So let's go on towards perfection.

We do not need to go over the basics again – we should know and practice them. Things like:

- Repentance from dead works (we should be doing good works!)
- Faith towards God.
- Instructions about baptisms – by water, in the Holy Spirit, and by fire (Matt. 3:11).
- The laying on of hands – for healing or ordination to ministry.
- Eternal judgement – to eternal life, or eternal death.
- The resurrection of the dead – to Heaven, with the Lord; or to hell, with the devil.

It is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once:

- Been enlightened, and
 - Tasted the heavenly gift of salvation, and
 - Shared in the Holy Spirit, and
 - Tasted the goodness of the Word of God, and
 - Tasted the powers of the Age to come, and ...
- ... then have fallen away, since, on their own, they are 'crucifying the Son of God' again, and showing contempt for Him, His Word and His ways.

Ground that responds to the rain falling on it and produces a crop which is useful, receives a blessing from God. But if it produces thorns and thistles instead, it is useless, on the verge of being cursed, and will be burned.

God is not unjust. He will not overlook what good things we have done, and are still doing, including loving and serving other Christians.

Show diligence, realise the full assurance of hope, don't become sluggish, but become imitators of those who, *through faith and patience, inherit the promises of God!*

6:13-20 THE CERTAINTY OF GOD'S PROMISE

God's promises are certain. He not only promises, but also gives His oath, that He will do the things He has promised. Consequently, it is impossible that God would prove to be false; so we can, with absolute assurance, seize the hope that He has promised – the rest of faith, both here and now, and in eternity to come.

We have this **hope** as a *certain* and *immovable* anchor of the soul. Hallelujah!

APPLICATION

WARNING 1

- Pay attention to God's Word and what He says (2:1-4)

WARNING 2

- Don't harden your heart, rebel or have an unbelieving heart. Instead, be aware of the deceitfulness of sin, and obey God by being faithful to Him. (3:7-19)
- Enter God's promised rest by faith – hear and obey (4:1-13)

WARNING 3

- Beware of backsliding and losing your faith. Continue to live for God – and be patient! Don't give up! (5:11 – 6:12)
- The foundation of our hope is God's promise of blessing and eternal life.
- Jesus is our High Priest and Mediator – forever! (6:13-20)

QUESTIONS

1. Why is Jesus "our great High priest"?
2. What can Christians do if they realise they have hardened their hearts towards God?
3. What was "God's rest" for Israel in OT times, and for Christians in NT times?
4. God's Word judges our thoughts, and the intentions of our hearts. What is the difference between our *thoughts* and what we *intend* to do?
5. How can Jesus, the Son of God, possibly understand and sympathise with what we go through? How can He help us?
6. Is it impossible to restore again to a relationship with God, a backslidden Christian who truly repents and wants to follow God again?
7. What are some of God's promises to us?

His name is *J e s u s*

11. Hebrews – chapters 7-10

Our Great High Priest

In Old Testament times, the only person who was allowed to go into the Holy of Holies (the Holy Place) in the Tabernacle or, later, the Temple, was the High Priest. Even the High Priest was only permitted to go in, one day each year – on the Day of Atonement. The High Priest was the person who came between, or represented, the people and Almighty God (El Shaddai).

He came "into the presence of God", as represented by the Ark of the Covenant, and sprinkled the blood of a goat on the Mercy Seat, which was the gold-plated top of the Ark. He also sprinkled the blood on the corners of the Altar of sin offering.

Forty years after Jesus died and shed His blood, God allowed the Temple to be destroyed, and no-one knows what happened to the Ark of the Covenant. After Jesus died, rose again and ascended into Heaven, God allowed one generation of Jews (40 years, to 70 AD) who were alive at the time of Jesus' death, to come to recognise Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of

the world. The Old Covenant had passed away; the New Covenant had arrived with the death, resurrection and ascension of the Messiah, Whom God had sent into the world to be our final offering. There is no longer any need for Temple or sacrifice, for Jesus, the great High Priest, has taken away the sins of the world – forever! When we repent, confess our sins, and receive Jesus the Messiah (Christ) as Lord and Saviour, our sins are washed away by Jesus' blood. He became our sin-bearer Who removed our sins as far as the East is from the West, and buried them in the depths of the sea, never to be remembered any more. Praise His wonderful name!

7:1-10 The priestly order of Melchizedek

Melchizedek is a forerunner, or type or example of Jesus, our great High priest. Verse 1 describes Him as "King of Salem, Priest of the Most High God." So he was both a priest and king. Under the Mosaic law, no-one could be both priest and king – until Jesus came!

Verse 2 says that his name Melchizedek means "King of Righteousness"; and he was also King of Salem ("King of peace").

Genesis 14:18-20 tells us that he met Abraham and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tithe of everything. The only other Old Testament reference to Melchizedek is Psalm 110:4. Hebrews is the only New Testament book which mentions him (8 times).

There is no mention of his genealogy (father or mother), when he was born or died, but "resembling the Son of God, he [Melchizedek] remains a priest forever" (Heb. 7:3). Jesus also, of course, is both our great High Priest and King of kings. So Melchizedek was a forerunner, or type, or example of Jesus.

7:11-28 Another priest, like Melchizedek

If perfection could be obtained through the Levitical priesthood, why would Psalm 110:4 speak of another Priest who would come, "according to the order of Melchizedek"? If the priesthood is to be changed, then the law must be changed too (Heb. 7:12). For example:

- Jesus came from the tribe of Judah, not from the tribe of Levi.
- Priests were appointed by physical descent; Jesus came through the power of an indestructible life ("You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek"). Jesus had no human ancestry – He existed before the worlds were created; He had no beginning of days, nor end of life. He was God, and the Son of God.
- The Levitical priesthood was repealed because it was weak and ineffectual – the law made nothing perfect, but the New Covenant introduced a better hope, through which we can approach God.
- When priests were chosen, there was no oath of confirmation, but when Jesus came as a Priest there was an oath because "the Lord has sworn, and will not change His mind, 'You [Jesus] are a Priest forever'." (Psalm 110:4).
- There were many Levitical priests because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but Jesus holds His High Priesthood because He lives for ever.

So Jesus, and Jesus alone, is the guarantee of a better covenant:

- He is always able to save those who come to God through Him.
- He always lives to make intercession for us.
- He is the only High Priest who is holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.
- He doesn't have to offer sacrifices every day because He offered His life for our sins – once and for all – on the cross!

8:1-13 Jesus – the Mediator of a better Covenant

- We have a High priest seated at the right hand of God in the heavens – a Minister in the Heavenly sanctuary and the true Temple that the Lord (not man) has created.
- Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry, and is Mediator of a better covenant, which came through better promises than any Levitical/Mosaic covenant and Tabernacle.

- If the first (Old) Covenant had been faultless there would be no need for a second (New) one. See Jeremiah 31:31-34.
- In speaking of a “New Covenant”, God made the first one (the Old Covenant) obsolete, and what is obsolete and growing old, will soon disappear (Hebrews 8:13). The second Temple had not been destroyed at the time this was written – that is, prior to 70 AD when the Temple was destroyed.

9:1-22 The Earthly and Heavenly Sanctuaries

The first (Old) Covenant had regulations about worship, and an earthly sanctuary (Tabernacle or Temple). Once a year the High priest went into the Holy of Holies, taking the blood of a lamb that he offers for his own sins, as well as the sins of the people. But these sacrifices cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper – they were temporary, only lasting until the time came to set things right.

The New Covenant was established when Jesus came, and He, as the great High Priest, entered once and for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of animals, but with His own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption for us. (Hebrews 9:14). Jesus is the Mediator of the New Covenant – the only way by which people can be reconciled to God – without the shedding of His blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.

9:23-28 Christ’s sacrifice takes away our sins

It was necessary for the forerunners of the heavenly things to be purified by these rites, but the heavenly things themselves need better sacrifices than these. Jesus did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands, but entered Heaven itself. He did not offer Himself again and again (year after year). He appeared once and for all to remove sin by the sacrifice of Himself. (See Hebrews 9:27-28).

10:1-18 Christ’s sacrifice was once and for all

The Old Testament Law was only a shadow of the good things to come. Its continually-offered sacrifices could not make people perfect, so they still had a consciousness of sin. It is impossible for the blood of animals to take away sins. (See Psalm 40:6-8).

Jesus abolished the old way of sacrifice and established the new way – His own death and shedding of blood, once and for all. (See Psalm 110:1). By a single offering (of Himself), He has made perfect for all time, those who are sanctified. (See Jeremiah 31:33-34).

Where there is forgiveness, through the shed blood of Jesus, there is no longer any offering of sin. Our sins are not merely covered, they are washed away – forever! So we have confidence to enter the sanctuary – the Holy of Holies – by the blood of Jesus.

10:19-39 WARNING 4: A call to persevere

- Hold fast to the confession of our hope – God who promised all this, is faithful!
- Stir one another up to love and good deeds.
- Don’t wilfully persist in sin.
- Endure!

(See Hebrews 10:32-39 and Habakkuk 2:3-4).

We are not amongst those who shrink back and so are lost, but amongst those who have **faith** and so are **saved!** Praise God!

QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance of the curtain which separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple, being torn apart from top to bottom when Jesus died on the cross?
2. Why was there 40 years between Jesus’ resurrection and the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD?
3. Do two covenants still apply today – the Old and New covenants? Which is “the better covenant” and why? (Compare them).

4. Briefly summarise in your own words, the main points of what Paul says in Romans chapters 9, 10, 11.
5. In what ways was Melchizedek similar to Jesus?
6. Compare Jesus' death with the sacrifice of lambs in Old Testament times.

His name is *J e s u s*

12. *Hebrews – chapters 11-13*

Hebrews chapters 11-13

These last three chapters of Hebrews no longer directly mention or compare: the Old Testament with the New Testament; the Old Covenant with the New Covenant; priests and their sacrifices, with Jesus and His sacrifice; or whether the Covenant is temporary or permanent. These things have been dealt with in the earlier chapters of Hebrews.

Chapter 11

11:1-3 Faith. Faith is the assurance or substance of things hoped for; the conviction or evidence of *unseen* things – i.e., not physical or material.

- How do we know there is a God Who we can have friendship and relationship with? By faith!
- Creation and conscience are two major evidences of the reasonableness of our faith (see Romans 1:18 – 2:16)

Some of the Jews' ancestors "received approval" for their faith. They had the example of Creation – the worlds were made out of nothing that can be seen; God spoke, and they were created! They also had God's Law to guide them.

11:4-40 Examples of people of faith

Abel was a man of faith and he offered "a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain" (Gen. 4:1-16). Heart attitude is very important! Abel offered an animal sacrifice; but Cain offered grain. Adam and Eve clothed themselves with fig leaves; but God clothed them with an animal skin, involving the shedding of blood and giving up of a life. Some people try to earn salvation by works (Cain and the fruit of his labours) versus Jesus Who gave His blood and His life for us. Our salvation is not by works but by faith; we can't do anything to earn our salvation. Good works come as a **result** of our salvation, and the change the Holy Spirit brings to our lives when we are born again.

"By **GRACE** we are saved, [and this grace is received] through **FAITH**, which is not our own doing, but the gift of God. It is not [earned] by **works**, or we could boast. We are what He has made us, created in Christ Jesus to **do** good works, which God prepared beforehand, to be our way of life." (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Enoch – "pleased God". Do we, and our lives, please God?

Verse 6 says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever wants to come to Him must believe that God exists and that He rewards those who diligently seek Him".

Noah – obeyed God by building an ark as God instructed him – without which we would not be here today!

Abraham:

- Obeyed God and set out, not knowing where he was to go. He simply obeyed God; he looked forward to the land God had promised him.
- He had a son, Isaac, even though both he and Sarah were "too old" to have children (they thought!)
- Abraham was prepared to give up Isaac (see Genesis 22:12-14). He believed he would receive Isaac back (even by resurrection, if necessary!) – and he did!
- Abraham believed God was faithful to His promises – see Genesis 22:15-18; 32:12. He had faith, *even without receiving the promises*, but saw and welcomed the days to come, in the city that God had prepared for them.

Isaac prophesied over Jacob and Esau.

Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph.

Joseph had faith for the exodus from Egypt (Genesis 50:24-26)

Moses – His parents' faith saved him from death.

He was not afraid of the king's edict! He left Pharaoh's courts and suffered abuse in order to be with his own people. He looked ahead to God's true reward. He left Egypt in spite of the king's anger, because of God's leading. He kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the first-born of Israel were not destroyed.

Israel – Passed through the Red Sea on dry ground, and saw the walls of Jericho fall, after doing what God told them.

Rahab – Received the spies in peace – which saved her life!

Others (unnamed) – who received rewards (v 32-35a), but suffered greatly for their faith (v 35b-38)

All these people, even though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided *something better* so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.

“Something better” – heavenly rewards are much better and greater than earthly rewards! The promised Messiah, His death for us, and eternal life, were yet to come!

APPLICATION – chapter 12

1-3 Lay aside every weight and sin; run with perseverance; and look to Jesus our perfect Example.

4-13 God's discipline: see Psalm 94:12; Proverbs 3:11-12.

- Take notice of God's discipline but **don't lose heart** or become discouraged – it is for our good, and for the good of others.
- Human parents discipline us as seems best to them, **but ...**
... God our Father disciplines us for our good, and to share His holiness.
- Discipline always seems painful at the time – but it produces righteousness!

14-17 Pursue ... the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

- Don't fail to obtain the grace of God.
- Cut out every root of bitterness.
- Don't become immoral and Godless like Esau.

18-29 We have *not* come to something physical that can be touched (see Exodus 19:12-13, 16), but we *have* come to ten things mentioned in Hebrews 12:22-24.

Don't refuse to listen – God is our Judge, and is a “consuming fire”, Who destroys the trash but leaves the gold! (see Deuteronomy 4:24). So let us give *thanks*, and offer to God acceptable *worship*, with *reverence* and *awe*.

APPLICATION – chapter 13

1 Let us continue to love one another.

2 Be hospitable to strangers (some may be Angels!)

3 Remember those in prison for their faith, as if you were in prison.

4 Honour marriage – yours and others!

5-6 Don't love money; use it as God leads, and be content with what you have, for God will not forsake us. (See Deuteronomy 31:6-8; Joshua 1:5; 1 Chronicles 28:20)

7-8 Remember your leaders – especially Jesus!

9 Be strengthened by **GRACE**, not by “Food Regulations!” or other strange teachings.

15 Continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, through Jesus; confess His name!

18-19, 22-24 Paul may have been in jail in Rome at this time, writing to Jewish Christians in Israel.

Paul's blessing to faithful believers (v 20-21):

“Now may the God of peace, Who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do His will, working among us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to Whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen!”

FINALLY ...

“**Faith**” occurs 34 times in Hebrews, including 26 times in chapter 11.

- Ultimately, who **will be** in glory with the Lord; and who will not be there – and why? Will I?
- Aren't you glad we live under the New Covenant, not the Old one – after Jesus has come, not before?
- All this is because we have FAITH in God's MERCY and GRACE! *Praise God!*

QUESTIONS

1. What does “faith” mean?
2. Who were some Old Testament people who suffered for their faith?
3. Who were some New Testament people who suffered for their faith?
4. Why does God discipline us? Doesn't He *love* us? How should we react to God's discipline?
5. In chapter 13, there are 11 things we should do or not do (verses 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 15, 16, 17, 18). Which 3 of these speak to you most, as things you need to do?
6. What is “grace” (13:25).