



JUST 31 DAYS

**A month of Bible readings to
introduce you to the Christian faith**

Introduction

This booklet is intended to help you begin to read the Bible. It explains thirty-one key passages from the Old Testament (the part of the Bible written before the coming of Jesus Christ). If you study these passages carefully, you will get a clear view of the central message of the Old Testament. We hope eventually to produce a similar booklet introducing the New Testament (the part of the Bible written after the coming of Jesus).

This booklet is not intended to be read on its own! You will need to have a Bible open as you read. I suggest that you first pray asking God to help you understand. Then read the Bible passage for the day, then my notes, then work through the notes again, checking them against the passage as you go. When you feel that you have understood the passage, spend time thinking about it, asking yourself what God is saying to you. And then pray again: talk to God about the things you have learned.

The Old Testament is divided into thirty-nine books. You will find a list of them at the front of your Bible. Each book is divided into a number of chapters. Each chapter is divided into a number of verses. Normally, when we quote a Bible passage we write down first the name of the book, then the number of the chapter, then after a colon (:) the numbers of the verses. So, for example, the first passage you will study is Genesis 1:1-31. That is Genesis, chapter one, verses one to thirty-one. In the notes, if I refer to a passage but don't quote the name of the book, the passage is from the book you are studying on that day. If I refer to a passage from a different book of the Bible, I include the name of that book.

The notes were originally designed to be used with a particular translation of the Bible, the New King James Version (NKJV). But they can easily be used with other translations too. If you do not have a Bible, I recommend the NKJV, the New International Version (NIV), or the English Standard Version (ESV).

May God speak to you as you study the Bible - His infallible Word.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Rees

Pastor, Grace Baptist Church, Stockport

The names of God in the Old Testament

Often in our Bibles, God is spoken of as "the Lord". This is usually a translation of a Hebrew word *Adon*, meaning "Master", or *Adonai*, "My Master". But sometimes you will find the word written in capital letters - "the LORD". When you see this, remember that it is a translation of a different Hebrew word, *Yahweh* (or it can be written as *Jehovah*). This is God's holy name (the Jews thought it was too sacred to use). That's why the translators use the word LORD instead. The name *Yahweh* is explained in the notes for Day 8.

Genesis 1:1-31

DAY 1

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. These opening words of the Holy Bible are the key to understanding life, for if we leave God out of our thinking, we will certainly go wrong. Our universe did not come about by accident nor by chance! It is the handiwork of God.

Think firstly about the character of God as it is shown in this chapter. God is *eternal* (vs 1). He was there, in the beginning before anything was made. God is *Almighty*. He made the whole universe, in all its vastness, out of nothing. (vs 1). God is *wise*: he had a great plan, which he carried through step by step, stage by stage, over the six days of creation. God is *a God of beauty*: he filled his world with an astonishing array of beautiful and wonderful creatures (vs 11, 21, 25). (Just think of the variety of colours in the world - God could have made the whole world black and white! Or the variety of foods - God could have made just one type of edible plant for us to eat - instead he made millions, all different in taste and texture!) God is *kind*: he spoke words of blessing over the creatures he made - even the birds and the fish (vs 22). God is *holy* - he judged everything he had made, assessing it to see whether it met his perfect standard (vs 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25).

Think secondly about the wonderful privileges God gave to Man (vs 26-29). God created Man by a special act of creation. We are *different* from all other creatures (vs 26 cp 2:7). Man was the very last creature to be made - the climax of all creation. God created Man, both male and female, *in his own image*. We are made to reflect God's being and character - that is why every human being is infinitely valuable. God blessed Man in a special way and gave him authority to develop the resources of the world and to rule all other creatures (vs 28). How much we owe to our Creator God!

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

When God made the first man and woman, he put them in a garden full of delights and joys. He gave them his whole creation to enjoy freely (2:9, 16, 19-20). He gave them to one another to be companions and lovers (ch 2 vs 20-25). Best of all, he gave them his own blessing and favour.

God only withheld one thing from Adam and Eve. They were forbidden to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They did not need their own “knowledge of good and evil” - they could trust God to decide what was good for them and what was not. If ever they ate the fruit, it would be a way of saying that they were no longer willing for God to choose what was best for them. It would be a declaration of independence - or rather, rebellion. God warned them that if they disobeyed his command and took the fruit, it would bring death - the death of their bodies and the everlasting ruin of their souls (2:17).

How different the human story would have been if Adam and Eve had kept God’s commandment! But Eve listened to the serpent, through whom Satan spoke (2 Corinthians 11:3, 14). The serpent first suggested to her that God was unkind and unfair (3:1). Then he asserted boldly that God had lied to them (3:4). The serpent promised that if Adam and Eve ate the fruit, they could be like God themselves, no longer needing to submit to him.

What reason did they have to believe the serpent rather than God who had created them and given them so much happiness? None. Yet Eve took the fruit, ate it, and gave some to Adam who also ate. It was sheer ingratitude towards God and wilful rebellion.

The serpent had promised them freedom, dignity and God-like wisdom. But what they found was very different. The moment they ate the fruit, they were gripped with a sense of guilt, shame and fear. They found they hated even the sight of their own bodies. They were ashamed of their nakedness. And they were afraid of God. They tried to cover up their shame by making themselves garments of leaves, but they knew that their coverings were pitifully inadequate. So they hid from God among the trees.

Satan’s lies have not changed. He still tells people that disobeying God can lead to freedom and fulfillment. But God’s warnings are true. Sin leads to nothing but misery, shame and everlasting ruin.

People often talk of “Man’s search for God”. The Bible however, does not show us Man searching for God. It shows us Man hiding from God! (3:8) It was God who came searching for Man! God, in his mercy came to the garden to seek out the guilty couple who had wronged him so badly. He called first to Adam, for Adam was created first and was the Head over his wife, responsible for the whole human family. But Adam would not accept responsibility for his sin - he tried to blame Eve (vs 12). Eve, for her part, tried to blame the serpent (vs 13). How ready sinners are to find excuses for their sin!

God pronounced judgement on the serpent, on Eve and on Adam in turn. The serpent was cursed and forced to crawl on the ground (vs 14-15). Eve was warned that she would suffer great pain in child-bearing. Adam was told that because of his disobedience, all nature would be cursed, and he himself would suffer the penalty of death. This judgement would fall not only on Adam but also on all his descendants, who would inherit his guilt (see Romans 5:12-21).

How dreadful is God’s anger against sin! And yet, even within these words of judgement, there were also words of hope. Look again at the words God spoke to the serpent (vs 15). God declared that there would always be enmity between the *seed* (ie descendants) of the serpent and the seed (descendants) of the woman. Well, certainly most humans hate snakes! But there is much more than that here. God speaks of one “seed” - descendant - of the woman, particularly (vs 15). “*He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise his heel*”. God promised that one day a man would come, descended from Eve, who would crush Satan’s head, though in doing it, he himself would suffer greatly. This promise was to be fulfilled many centuries later when the Lord Jesus Christ came, born of a virgin. He defeated Satan and rescued mankind when he suffered and died on the cross.

God gave the promise and Adam believed it! He called his wife “Eve” which means “living” because he knew that through the coming Saviour he and his children could be saved from death and given eternal life (vs 20). And then God clothed Adam and Eve (vs 21). He stripped away their own useless garments of leaves and covered them with tunics made of animal skin. Some innocent creature died so that Adam and Eve could be fit to stand in God’s presence. Here we have a clear picture of the way that God’s Son Jesus Christ would save sinners from eternal death by dying in their place. Apart from the death of Jesus Christ, there could be no hope for any of us.

Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel. Both men wanted to be accepted by God. Cain succeeded in raising a crop “by the sweat of his face” from the cursed ground (see ch 3 vs 17-19). Then he brought some of the crops as a sacrifice. We can imagine Cain saying “I’ve overcome the curse by my own hard work. And now I’m giving God the fruit of my labour. Surely he’ll reward me.” Cain aimed to earn God’s favour by his own efforts. But God did not accept Cain’s offering (vs 4)

Many people will tell you that providing you are sincere, it doesn’t matter how you worship God. All religions, they say, lead to God. But we see here that God rejected Cain’s religion and his worship.

By contrast, God accepted Abel. Why? Abel brought lambs from his flock as his offering. Abel realised that he was a sinner and that he could never make up for his sin by his own efforts. But he came to God in the way God had already taught Adam - through the death of an innocent creature. Abel trusted that God could spare him because a substitute had died in his place. We can imagine Abel pleading with God: “I deserve to die - but please accept the life of this innocent lamb in my place”.

Of course, the death of an animal could never really pay for Abel’s sins - or ours. But Abel’s sacrifice was only a picture of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ many centuries later. Abel was already looking forward to the Saviour whom God had promised (ch 3 vs 15).

People who believe they can earn God’s favour by their own good works often become very angry if they are told that God does not accept them. Cain became so angry that he murdered Abel. His “religion” produced no love for God or for his brother.

Cain was driven out from God’s presence (vs 16). His descendants had many accomplishments - they were the pioneers of scientific farming, the arts and technology (vs 17-22). But the civilisation they built was brutal and cruel. Lamech proudly boasted that he had slaughtered a mere lad for offending him (vs 23-24). Cain’s line was a line marked by godlessness and sin.

God gave Adam another son, Seth. We do not read that Seth’s descendants made any great inventions. But we do read that they called on the name of the LORD - Yahweh (vs 26). There was always a line of believers who worshipped God as Abel had done, and trusted that God would send the Saviour he had promised.

This chapter tells the story of a population explosion (vs 1) but also an explosion of wickedness. Remember, there was no machinery of government on earth, no police-force, no lawcourts or prisons. Human beings were free to live as they chose, to act according to their sinful nature. What was the result? Left to itself, without any restraint, the human race became unspeakably wicked (vs 5). Notice the three-fold emphasis in this verse: *Every* intent of the thoughts of his (Man’s) heart was *only evil continually*. Every human being, since Adam, is born with the seeds of every sin in his heart. Left to ourselves, there is no wickedness of which we are not capable.

God was watching (vs 5). And God was grieved (vs 6). Man’s wickedness causes God real pain. We even read that God was sorry he had made man on the earth. Often people talk as if God has wronged them and should be held to account. The truth is that we have wronged God - terribly.

One man was different. Noah - one of Seth’s descendants - was “a just man, perfect (ie blameless) in his generations.” (vs 9) Noah knew God personally. He was constantly aware of God’s presence and lived his life accordingly - “he walked with God”.

But what made Noah different? If human nature is so corrupt and evil, how could one man live a life of such godliness and courage? We are told in verse 8: “Noah found *grace* in the eyes of the LORD”. When the Bible talks of “grace” it means God’s mercy towards undeserving sinners. God had mercy on Noah. God chose him, changed his heart and made him a true believer. Noah was one more in that line of believers who looked forward to the coming of the Saviour.

Genesis chapters 8 and 9 describe the flood which God sent on the earth to punish Man’s wickedness. God sentenced the whole human race to death. But there was a way of escape. God instructed Noah to build the ark, and promised that those in the ark would be kept safe. Only Noah and his family (8 in all) escaped the disaster.

The Bible tells us that there will be another - and far more terrible - Day of Judgement, at the end of history (see 2 Peter 3:3-13). In Noah’s day, there was only one place of safety - inside the ark. How can you be safe when God’s final judgement breaks upon the world? Only by repenting of your sins and trusting Jesus Christ *now*.

Abram was a descendant of Shem, one of Noah's three sons. Abram lived in a city called Ur (in modern Iraq). God appeared to Abram and told him to leave his home and travel to a distant land. God promised that he would have many descendants and that they would become a great nation (vs 2). He promised that he would bless Abram and that Abram would be a blessing to others. In fact, all the families (or nations) of the earth would be blessed through Abram (vs 3).

Abram understood what the promise meant. When Adam sinned, God's curse fell on the whole earth (3:17). The whole human race became subject to misery and death. But now, Abram is told that one day, all the earth will be *blessed*. A way will be opened for people of all nations to escape from the curse and receive eternal life. God had promised (3:15) that one day a Saviour would come; now it was clear that the Saviour would be one of Abram's descendants. The great blessing of salvation would come to the world through Abram.

There was only one problem! Abram's wife, Sarai, had no children - she was barren (11:30). How could Abram become the father of a great nation? How could one of his descendants bring salvation to the world? It seemed impossible. Yet Abram believed God's promise. He was sure that God would send the Saviour in due time. Wherever Abram travelled, he built altars (vs 7-8) and offered sacrifices. Like Adam, Abel and Noah, Abram was looking forward to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The years went by. At times, Abram's faith faltered and he wondered if he would ever have a son. When Abram reached the age of one hundred and Sarai was ninety, it seemed utterly impossible (17:17). But at last a son - Isaac - was born. Isaac was the father of Jacob. Jacob (whom God renamed Israel) became the father of the whole Jewish nation. From that nation Jesus Christ, the promised Saviour at last came. Through Jesus Christ blessing has indeed come to all the families of the earth.

Millions of people from all nations have found forgiveness and everlasting life through him.

The Jewish nation is a great nation today. They are Abram's physical descendants. But there are far more people who are Abram's *spiritual* descendants. All who trust in Jesus Christ the promised Saviour, are children of Abram. That is why God changed Abram's name to *Abraham* which means *Father of many nations* (17:5). Are you one of Abraham's children?

Abraham's grandson Jacob had twelve sons. They were to become the ancestors of twelve tribes, which together made up the nation of Israel. Before he died, Jacob called his twelve sons to him. Jacob prophesied what would happen to each of his sons and the tribes that came from them. These prophecies all came true: we can trace through the Old Testament how each one was fulfilled.

Look carefully at the prophecy Jacob made about *Judah* (vs 8-12). Judah was singled out to be the leader among his brothers (vs 8). All his brothers would praise him and bow down before him. He would be their champion and defeat all his enemies. He is compared to a lion (vs 9) in his majesty and kingly power. This was true of Judah himself, but more so of the tribe that came from him. The tribe of Judah was the strongest of the tribes, and always led Israel into battle.

In verse 10, Jacob declares that "the sceptre shall not depart from Judah". Judah is to be the *royal* tribe. A line of kings and law-givers would come from Judah, each one carrying the royal sceptre. This prophecy came true. Eight hundred years later, David, a descendant of Judah, became king over Israel. He became the greatest of Israel's kings and father of a long line of kings.

But Jacob went on to say that there would be one last king from the line of kings. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah .. until *Shiloh* comes". The word "Shiloh" here means "the one to whom it belongs". Eventually a king would come to whom the sceptre really belongs - a perfect King. All the other kings of Judah's line were only a preparation for Him. "To him shall the obedience of the people be". All God's true people will submit to their true King.

In Genesis 3, we learned about the Saviour whom God promised - the Seed of the woman. In Genesis 12 we learned that he would come from Abraham's descendants. Now we learn that he will come from Judah's tribe: he will be a King, the last of a great line of kings. All this came true. Jesus came from the tribe of Judah. He was descended from King David (Matthew 1:1-17). He is the King who will rule the whole world for ever. He is the promised Saviour.

Jacob foresaw that the promised King would bring in a golden age of wonderful prosperity (vs 11-12). Imagine a world in which wine is as plentiful as water! Of course, the Bible is not encouraging drunkenness! This is a picture of endless rejoicing! The Lord Jesus has promised that his people will share his joy forever in heaven. Will you be there at that great celebration?

During a time of famine, Jacob decided to seek refuge in Egypt, where his son Joseph had great influence (Joseph's story is told in Genesis chs 37 and 39 to 50). So Jacob and his sons moved down to Egypt. The family stayed in Egypt four hundred years and there they grew in numbers. But towards the end of that time, a new ruler (or Pharaoh) arose. He hated and feared the Israelites (as Jacob's descendants were called) and planned to destroy them. He ordered all newborn boys to be killed, and enslaved the adult population. It was a time of great misery for the Israelites.

But God had a plan of rescue. He raised up a deliverer named Moses - an Israelite but brought up as an Egyptian in Pharaoh's court. When Moses was forty he fled from Egypt and became a shepherd in the desert (Exodus chs 1-2). There, he had his first real experience of God. *The angel of the LORD* appeared to him as a blazing fire within a bush (vs 2). As we read on, it becomes clear that this angel is God himself appearing for a little while in visible form. The angel told Moses that he must lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses was very reluctant but could not refuse. But he had one question. Who should he tell the Israelites had sent him? *What was God's name?* (vs 13).

God's name is Yahweh (translated in English Bibles as "the LORD" - see the note about God's names on page 1). God's people had always known this name (Genesis 4:26) but now Moses learned its full meaning. Yahweh means "He is". Whenever God's people called him Yahweh they were saying "He simply is - he is the one unchangeable Reality". When Moses asked God his name, God answered "I AM" (vs 14). God simply is Himself. His very name tells us that he can never alter. His character is unchangeable. And therefore, his promises are eternal.

In vs 15, he calls himself "Yahweh, *God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob*". Yahweh had chosen to link himself with certain people. Remember the promises God made to Abraham and his descendants? (Studies, Days 6 & 7). He promised that from their family the Saviour would come and bring blessing to all the world. That promise can never fail - because Yahweh himself cannot change. Whenever you find God's name, "the LORD" - Yahweh - anywhere in the Bible, the name reminds you that he is the Unchangeable One whose plan of salvation must be fulfilled.

In the NT, the name "Lord" is given to *Jesus*. Yahweh has taken visible form forever, not as an angel but as a true Man - Jesus Christ. If we trust his promises, one day we shall see Him face to face.

We have seen that God's personal name is Yahweh - "He is" - and that this is translated in our English Bibles as "the LORD". Up until now in these notes, we have usually spoken of "God". But from this point, we shall often speak of him as "the LORD". When you see this name in the notes, remember that it means "Yahweh - the unchanging God who keeps his covenant promises".

The LORD sent Moses to Pharaoh with a message: "Let my people go! (5:1). When Pharaoh refused, the LORD sent a series of nine dreadful natural disasters on the land of Egypt (chs 7-10). Yet still Pharaoh refused. So the LORD planned a final disaster. In one night, he himself would go through the land of Egypt and put to death the first-born child in every household.

The Israelites were not exempt. They were guilty of many of the same sins as the Egyptians. But there was a way to escape the disaster. Each Israelite family must take a perfect ("unblemished") lamb, kill it, and smear its blood around the doorway of the house (vs 6-7). The LORD promised "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (vs 13). He would spare the life of the child, because an innocent creature had died in his place.

The body of the lamb must be roasted with fire (vs 8-9). Then the family would feed on the roasted flesh of the lamb, along with bitter herbs - a reminder of the bitter life they were leaving behind. Notice that the same sacrifice which protected them from God's judgement, also gave them strength for what lay ahead. They were going to leave Egypt that very night. They ate their meal already dressed for the journey (vs 11). There was no time for delay!

At midnight, God's judgement fell - but the Israelites were safe. That very night, they set to begin their long journey back to Canaan - the Promised Land - their true home. The LORD had spared them from judgement, given them strength and set them free from slavery - all because an innocent lamb had died in their place.

Once again, God was giving his people a picture of the salvation he had planned for us. The New Testament speaks of Jesus as the Passover Lamb who was sacrificed for us (1 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Peter 1:19). He died at Passover-time in the place of all who trust themselves to him. They are shielded from God's judgement; they are given strength to live holy lives; they are set free from the slavery of sin, and they begin a pilgrimage to heaven.

Three months after leaving Egypt, the Israelites arrived at a mountain in the desert, called Sinai (19:1). The LORD himself came down to the top of the mountain. His presence was shown in thick cloud, smoke and fire. There were crashes of thunder and flashes of lightning. The whole mountain shook and the people heard the sound of a trumpet which grew louder and louder (19:16-19). The LORD was reminding the people that those who break his law are in terrible danger.

The LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and there he gave him ten commandments. The first four concern our relationship to God. *You shall have no other gods before me* (vs 3). God must be supremely important in our hearts and lives. Nothing must be allowed to compete with him. *You shall not make for yourself any carved image* (vs 4). We are forbidden to make any picture of God (even in our minds). We must worship God as he really is - the infinite, holy, perfect Lord who is revealed in the Bible. *You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain* (vs 7). God will certainly punish anyone who speaks to him or about him carelessly or irreverently. *Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy* (vs 8). All our days belong to God by right. But from the very beginning (Genesis 2:3) God commanded that one day in seven should be set aside and kept as a holy day for his worship and service.

The other six commands are about the way we treat other people. *Honour your father and your mother* (vs 12). God gave us our parents. We are to love them, care for them and treat them with great respect. *You shall not murder* (vs 13). Human life is sacred because God made Man in his own image (Genesis 1:27). Jesus taught that anyone who hates or despises someone else has already committed murder in his heart (Matthew 5:21-22). *You shall not commit adultery* (vs 14). God ordained marriage (Genesis 2:24) - one man and one woman united to one another for life. To use our sexuality in any other way is an insult to God. *You shall not steal* (vs 15). God commanded that we should live by honest work (Genesis 3:18-19). I steal if I take anything that is not mine by right. *You shall not bear false witness* (vs 16). God hates lies and liars. *You shall not covet.. anything that is your neighbour's* (vs 17). God is concerned not just about outward actions but inward desires. He will punish discontent, jealousy and greed as surely as murder or theft.

Which of us can say we have kept God's law? The more we study these commandments, the more we realise that we need a Saviour to save us and keep us from sin. Jesus Christ is the only Saviour.

At Mount Sinai, the LORD made a *covenant* with the Israelites. A covenant is a binding agreement between two (or more) persons, bringing them into a special relationship. Each party promises to fulfil their responsibilities to the other parties. In the Sinai covenant, the Israelites for their part, had to promise as a nation to obey the LORD. They must make his laws the law of their land. For his part God would give them a home in the promised land of Canaan; he would protect them there and provide for all their earthly needs (cp 23: 25-30). The LORD would be their God and they would be his chosen nation on earth.

This covenant was *conditional*. If the nation of Israel obeyed God's law, they would be blessed. If an individual Israelite rejected God's law he would be cursed and "cut off from the people". If the whole nation rejected the law, the LORD would bring terrible disasters on them and drive them as slaves into exile (cp Deuteronomy 28).

The Israelites were confident that they could keep their side of the covenant (vs 3, 7). How foolish they were! Even before they had left Sinai, they had broken the covenant (cp 32:1-6). Fallen human beings with sinful hearts are not capable of keeping the law of God.

God knew that the Israelites were not capable of true obedience. That was why the "young men" of Israel had to offer sacrifices (vs 5). Whole oxen were killed and then burned on the altar that Moses built. The Israelites were being taught to understand the idea of a *substitute*. When a man offered a burnt offering, he was saying "We ought to give ourselves - our whole lives - completely to God in perfect obedience. And we can't - our hearts are too sinful. Lord, please accept the life of this creature in our place". Half the blood of the sacrificed animals was sprinkled on the altar; half was sprinkled on the people (vs 8). It was a sign of the LORD's mercy towards them as a nation. When he looked at their blood-stained clothes, he would remember that a substitute had been offered in their place. Once again, the Israelites were being taught to look forward to the true substitute - the Lord Jesus Christ, the promised Saviour. He offered his whole life in perfect obedience to God his Father, and then died as a sacrifice for his people. Because of Jesus's perfect life and his sacrificial death, God can accept sinners as his covenant people. In a later study, we shall look at the "new covenant" God has made through Jesus Christ. In that covenant, God promises repentant sinners not earthly prosperity, but something much more wonderful: spiritual blessings and everlasting life.

We have seen that when the LORD made his covenant with the Israelites, they made sacrifices to atone (pay for) their sins. But of course, the sacrifice of an animal could never really take away human sin. So they had to offer further sacrifices every day, as a constant reminder that their sins had not finally been dealt with (Hebrews 10:3-4). There were always more sins to be atoned for, always more sacrifices needed. Every sacrifice was another reminder that they must look forward to the coming of the Saviour who would deal with the problem of sin once for all.

The most important sacrifices of all were offered on the *Day of Atonement*. The details may seem complicated but we will pick out the main points. On that day each year, the High Priest of Israel (Moses's brother Aaron was the first) had to sacrifice a bull as a sin offering - a sacrifice for his own sins (vs 6, 11). Then he had to take two young goats as a sin offering for the sins of the whole nation of Israel (vs 5, 7). He would choose one of the goats by casting lots (vs 8), and he would slaughter that goat as a sacrifice (vs 9), burn its body in the usual way, and sprinkle its blood before God (vs 15). But then he would take the other goat and lay his hands on its head (vs 21). He would confess aloud the sins that the Israelites as a nation had committed against God during the past year - all the ways that they had broken the covenant. As it were, the priest transferred the sins of the nation to the goat - the substitute. Then the goat was driven away into the wilderness where it would wander alone, carrying their sins, until it died a lonely death.

All these details were ordered by God to help us understand how Jesus died for the sins of all those who trust him as Saviour. Both goats in different ways give us a picture of the death of the Lord Jesus. The first goat reminds us that Jesus's life was cut short by a bloody execution. The fire that burned up its body is a picture of God's burning anger against our sins. That anger was poured out on Jesus our substitute. The second goat reminds us that Jesus died in terrible loneliness. He was abandoned by his friends but he was also forsaken by God his Father. As he hung on the cross in darkness, he cried out *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* (Mark 15:34). Why? Because our sins were transferred to him. *He himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree* (1 Peter 2: 24). God his Father had to treat him as if were a guilty sinner and drive him from his presence. All human sin must be paid for. Has Jesus Christ carried away your sins? Or will you carry them yourself, driven out into the lonely darkness of hell, under God's wrath forever?

Back in study no 7, we saw that the LORD promised that he would raise up a line of kings from the tribe of Judah. But he did not do it straight away. As we have seen, the Israelites had to spend four hundred years in Egypt. When Moses had led them out of Egypt, they had to spend forty years wandering in the wilderness. After Moses' death, they entered Canaan, the promised land, where they had to contend with many enemies. The LORD raised up a series of warriors to lead them - they were known as the *judges* because they fought for justice. But still the Israelites had no king. In the end, the Israelites insisted on having a king - they wanted a great soldier like the kings of other nations. The LORD gave them what they asked - he gave them the sort of king they wanted - a giant of a man, called Saul. But Saul was neither godly nor wise and it was soon clear that he was not fit to be the king. Saul could never have been the right king for Israel - he was not from the tribe of Judah.

Then the LORD sent his prophet Samuel to Bethlehem (1 Samuel 16) There Samuel found a young lad - a shepherd boy - called David. Samuel anointed David - poured oil over his head - as a sign that he was to be the next king, and that God's Spirit would rest on him.

Not long after, the Philistines attacked Israel. Their champion Goliath was a huge man - even bigger than Saul. He challenged the Israelites to find a man who would fight on their behalf. But none of the Israelites - not even Saul - were willing to volunteer. None of them was prepared to risk his life to rescue God's people.

It so happened that David was visiting the battle-front. The moment he heard Goliath's challenge, he stepped forward. He knew that as God's chosen king, he must save his people from slavery, even if it cost him his life. He went into the battle without armour, carrying only a stick and a sling-shot but sure that he had been chosen to stand for God (vs 45). He looked weak and helpless, certain to be defeated. Yet he overcame Goliath and rescued the people from his tyranny.

A king must be willing to die for his people. Many centuries later, the Lord Jesus, the true king from David's line, fought a much greater and more painful battle. In his lonely struggle on the cross, he fought to rescue us from sin and Satan. He became weak and helpless, and seemed to be defeated. He died in shame and agony. But by dying he overcame our terrible enemy. He rose again on the third day to show that Satan, sin and death were defeated for ever. Praise his name!

After many years of waiting, David finally became king over Israel, as the LORD had promised. He built a beautiful palace for himself ("a house of cedar" - vs 2) in Jerusalem.

But he was troubled. Ever since the time of Moses, God had been worshipped in a tent. Was it right that he himself should have a grand palace while the ark of God (the holy box that was the sign of God's presence) was kept in a tent? He consulted the prophet Nathan who at first encouraged him in his wish to build a house - a temple - as a dwelling-place for God.

But then the LORD spoke to Nathan and gave him a message to pass on to David. He reminded David firstly, that he had never asked anyone to build a temple for him (vs 5-7). He reminded him, secondly, of all the kindnesses he had done for David (vs 8-9). And thirdly, he gave him a promise (vs 10-17). The LORD promised that he would make a house *for David!* (vs 11). The word house can be used in two ways - it can mean a building, or it can mean a family, a dynasty. David wanted to put up a building for God - God promised he would establish a dynasty - a line of kings, from David. When David died, his *seed* - his descendant, would rule after him (vs 12). This seed would build a house for God (vs 13). The LORD warned that if David's descendant fell into sin, he would be punished (vs 14). Yet God would never completely reject David's line. In fact, David's house, kingdom and throne would last for ever! (vs 16).

Once again, The LORD's promise was becoming clearer. Jacob spoke of a line of kings from Judah's line ending in the one True King (Study no 7). Now David is told that the line of kings will be his descendants. The first "seed" - descendant - of David to rule was his son Solomon. He built a temple for God in Jerusalem, just as God had said (vs 13). Solomon was followed by many more kings and royal princes. And finally the line led to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was a true Son of David, but he was also God's Son. That is why his throne will last for ever. His kingdom can never be defeated!

Today, Jesus Christ is building a temple - a dwelling-place - for God. But it is not a temple made of stones. It is made up of people! Those who trust Jesus Christ as Saviour are joined to him - and they are linked to one another like stones in a building. Together they make up the true Church. And God lives among them (Ephesians 2:19-22)

The temple that Solomon built was destroyed long ago. But the temple that Jesus Christ is building will last for ever!

The book of Psalms is a collection of 150 hymns written in Old Testament times. Many of them are about the king of Israel - the king descended from David. (In fact, many of them were written by David himself.) When the Israelites sang about the reigning king, they remembered the LORD's promise that one day, the everlasting King would come. Whatever they sang about the present king would be true in a fuller way of the last and greatest King. They spoke about the promised King as the *Messiah*, which means "The Anointed One". Each king of David's line was anointed with oil when he was crowned but the Messiah would be anointed with God's Holy Spirit.

Psalm 2 is a *coronation psalm*. It was probably sung whenever a new king was crowned. As they sang it, the Israelites looked forward to the day when the Messiah would be crowned. No other king could really match up to the words of this psalm!

In vs 1 to 3, we see the nations raging, trying to oppose the LORD and his Anointed One. They are determined to shake off Messiah's rule. But God is not troubled by their plans - he laughs at them! (vs 4-5). Since God has set Messiah as King, who can defeat him? (vs 6)

In vs 7-9, the Messiah himself speaks. He remembers his coronation, when the LORD officially gave him the title "my Son" (vs 7). The Messiah will not only reign over Israel. As God's Son, he will inherit the nations (vs 8) - he will be king over the whole world! Nobody will be able to thwart his will. Anybody who opposes him will be smashed by his iron rod (vs 9).

Finally, the author speaks (vs 10-12). He addresses the kings and judges of the earth. Be wise! he says. Serve the LORD with fear! Be reconciled to his Son the Messiah (vs 12). Otherwise the day will come when he will be angry with you and you will perish.

Jesus is the Messiah spoken of in the psalm. When was his coronation? When he was baptised, God's voice from heaven declared him to be God's Son (Mark 1:11). From that time, he took up his official work as God's king. The nations opposed him furiously. Jewish leaders and Roman rulers joined together to destroy him. They thought they had succeeded when he was crucified. But no! He rose again. He went into heaven. Now he is reigning. People from all nations are becoming his willing subjects. One day he will return to judge the world. Are you a friend or an enemy of Jesus the Messiah? There is no middle way.

King David wrote this psalm in a time of terrible mental and physical pain. He felt that God had forsaken him (vs 1). He cried out to God again and again, but it seemed that God was not interested (vs 2). No answer came. He thought of other believers - God had rescued them! Why was he different? (vs 3-5). People mocked him (vs 6-8) and were sure that God would never help him.

Yet David could not stop praying. He had lived his whole life depending on the LORD - he could not stop now! He had no-one else to turn to, so he clung on to God (vs 9-11). He was surrounded by enemies, savage as bulls or lions (vs 12-13). He was at the last stage of physical weakness, close to death (vs 14-15). His enemies had wounded his hands and feet (maybe by putting him in fetters). They were already planning what they would do with his clothes, when he died (vs 16-18). But still David prayed on, crying to God for rescue. He calls God "My God (vs 1); my Strength (vs 19). In his weakness, the only strength he had was his unconquerable trust in his God.

The words of this psalm are a true description of king David's suffering. But they came true in a much fuller way in the suffering of Jesus Christ, the last King of David's line, the true Messiah. Read verses 6-18 again and see how perfectly they describe the agonies he suffered when he was crucified - the mockery he endured; the way his body was twisted out of joint; his desperate thirst; the piercing of his hands and feet; his nakedness; the dividing up of his clothes. Read Matthew ch 27 and see how exactly every detail was fulfilled.

But most of all, think about vs 1 again: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* Jesus cried those bewildered, agonised words as he hung on the cross (Matthew 27: 46). David may have felt God-forsaken, but the Lord Jesus really *was* forsaken by God his Father. He felt unimaginable horror, confusion, loneliness as he hung in the darkness. Why? He was being punished as we deserve to be punished. The King was suffering for the sins of his people. Our sins were placed on him, the true and final sacrifice.

It hurts us to think of the sufferings of Jesus. Yet the cross was not a tragedy. It was a triumph! Through all his sufferings, the Lord Jesus clung on to his Father in obedience and faith. Even when he was forsaken, he still cried "My God!" And his prayers were answered. The Father raised him from the dead to be the Saviour of the world. Read the second half of the psalm (vs 22-31) and see the wonderful blessings that have come to the world through the suffering of Jesus!

King David committed a terrible crime. (The story is told in 2 Samuel chs 11 & 12). He seduced a woman called Bathsheba while her husband Uriah was away serving in the army. When she became pregnant, he arranged Uriah's death and then married her.

David believed he had hidden his sin. But God sent a prophet called Nathan to him. Nathan showed David the wickedness of his deeds. David was filled with horror and shame as he looked at himself and his sin. He began to pray for forgiveness. Here we have his prayer.

David has no excuses to make - he can only appeal for *mercy* (vs 1). David sees nothing but wickedness in himself - but he knows that God's character is *loving-kindness* and *tender mercies*. So he prays "Blot out my transgressions.. wash me.. cleanse me". David cannot forget his sin for a moment. It seems horrible to him - "my sin is ever before me" (vs 3). Of course, he has wronged Bathsheba and Uriah, but the most dreadful thought for him is that he has wronged *God* - "Against you, you only have I sinned (vs 4). He admits that God would be absolutely right to judge and punish him terribly - "that you may be found just when you speak.." (vs 4). Some men in David's place might have said "What I did was out of character" but David knows that his wicked deeds sprang from his wicked heart - "I was brought forth (born) in iniquity.." (vs 5). David looks back on his whole life and and realises that from his earliest childhood, his nature has been evil and depraved.

David feels dirty (vs 7) and longs to be clean. He feels wretched to the point of physical pain (vs 8). And he knows that only God can cleanse him and give him peace. So he prays for pardon (vs 9). But more than that, he prays that his whole nature may be changed - he wants "a clean heart", a "steadfast spirit" (vs 10). He wants to live in God's presence and to have God's Holy Spirit with him. He wants to be *saved*, not just from his guilt, but from his own sinful nature (vs 12). He wants to tell others of his sin and God's forgiveness, so that they too may return to God (vs 13-15).

This is true repentance. This is true prayer. God hears prayers like this, prayers that come from *a broken and contrite heart* (vs 17).

David knew that no animal sacrifice could pay for his sin (vs 16). Yet God forgave him. How *could* God forgive a man like David? Only through the sacrifice of Jesus. He was punished in David's place and in the place of all who pray as David prayed. Have you made David's prayer your own?

Psalm 72 is headed "A psalm of Solomon". It may have been written by King David about his son and heir, King Solomon. Or it may have been written by Solomon himself.

Either way, it is another psalm about *the King*. When the Israelites sang this psalm they knew that they were singing not just about the present king, but about the perfect King whom God had promised - the Messiah

Section 1 of the psalm is *prayer* (vs 1). The psalm-writer *prays* to God to give his justice (NKJV - "judgments") and righteousness to the King. The Messiah must rule as God's representative and exercise justice on God's behalf.

Section 2 is a *prophecy* (vs 2-17). The psalm-writer lists out the blessings that the Messiah will bring to God's people and to the world. He will *judge* God's people - that is, he will bring them justice and rescue them from oppression (vs 2-4). He will bring everlasting prosperity and peace to the righteous (vs 5-7). He will rule the whole earth; all rulers will bring him tribute, all nations will serve him (vs 8-11). He will deliver his people from all their suffering (vs 12-14). He will be loved and praised; people everywhere will pray for him (vs 15). He will remove the curse from the earth so that even the mountain-tops are covered with grain (vs 16). (Look again at the words of the curse in Genesis 3:17-19).

Messiah's reign will go on for ever. He will bring blessing to all nations (vs 17). The promise that the LORD gave to Abraham (Genesis 12: 1-3, see study no 6) will be fulfilled through the Messiah, Abraham's descendant. So people from all nations will heap blessings on the Messiah's name.

Section 3 of the psalm is *praise* (vs 18-19). The writer cannot wait for Messiah to arrive! He longs for the day when God's glory will fill the whole earth (vs 19). But he begins *now* to bless the LORD who has promised such a Saviour and King!

The OT writer looked forward to the day when Jesus the Messiah would begin to reign as King. That day has come! Jesus is ruling from heaven today, saving his people from their sins, bringing them wonderful blessings. But his kingdom is not yet complete. One day Jesus will return to earth, destroy all his enemies and rule forever over a world of endless joys, set free from the curse. Those who love Jesus Christ wait eagerly for that day. The thought of it fills them with joy and praise. Are you looking forward to the coming of Jesus?

King David died and was followed by a long line of kings, his descendants. The tenth in the line was King Uzziah. In the year that Uzziah died (742 BC) the LORD called a young man called Isaiah to be a prophet. Isaiah was allowed to glimpse God's glory in a vision (vs 1). In his vision, he found himself standing at the foot of a vast throne in a colossal temple. Looking up, he could see a figure, far above him, sitting on the throne. Isaiah does not describe the figure he saw at all: he can only describe the garment he was wearing. A king wore a royal robe: the longer and fuller its train, the more majestic he appeared. The train of God's robe cascaded down from the throne and filled the whole temple! *Seraphim* flew to and fro - the word means "burning ones": angels who seemed to Isaiah like flames (vs 2). As they flew, one of them cried out to the other, praising God. He spoke of God's *power*, calling him the LORD of hosts - Yahweh who has at his command all the heavenly armies. He spoke again and again of God's perfect *holiness*: "Holy, holy, holy!" He spoke of God's *glory*. God is high above us, enthroned in heaven, but his glory fills the earth, just as the train of his robe filled the temple in Isaiah's vision (vs 3).

The sound of the angel's voice was terrifying. The doorway where Isaiah was standing began to shake - the temple began to fill with smoke (vs 4). In the Bible, smoke is often a sign of God's anger and judgement (eg Genesis 19:28). Isaiah was aware that he was in deadly danger. And he knew why. He knew that he was a man "of unclean lips" (vs 5). The way he talked was offensive to God. Maybe he had told lies. Or gossiped. Or spoken spiteful words. In the past such "little sins" had not troubled him. But now that he had glimpsed God's holiness, these sins of speech seemed horrible. He felt dirty. He deserved to be burned up under God's wrath. And he knew he was not alone. The whole nation was equally guilty. God had reason to be angry with them all. So Isaiah cried: "Woe is me!"

God is merciful. In the temple stood an altar, where a sacrifice had been offered. One of the seraphim went to the altar and picked up a burning ember - part of the remains of the sacrifice. He touched Isaiah's lips and declared that Isaiah's sin was forgiven - his lips were clean! (vs 6-7). Then Isaiah was sent to speak to others - no longer unclean words but words of truth and holiness (vs 8).

Once again we see the picture. *Only the sacrifice of an innocent substitute can take away sin*. Isaiah could never have met the standards of God's perfect holiness. Nor can we. Only the sacrifice of Jesus can cleanse our lips and make us fit to speak for God.

When Isaiah wrote this chapter, Uzziah's grandson Ahaz was on the throne. It was a time of international crisis. Foreign invaders swept across the land, bringing havoc and misery. King Ahaz was a weak and foolish man who failed to give godly leadership to the nation in its time of need. No wonder many people despaired. Some turned away from God to seek help from mediums and spiritualists (8:19). They found no help there! The nation sank into ever deeper darkness and gloom. (8:20-22).

Yet Isaiah looked forward to a bright future! He was sure that the gloom would not last for ever (9:1). A light would break through the darkness (vs 2). Where would the light shine first? In the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, Galilee of the Gentiles. These are the northernmost parts of the land of Israel - the direction from which the foreign invaders had come. These places had been "lightly esteemed" and "heavily oppressed" in the past. But now, in these very places, God's light would break through.

Isaiah was looking forward to the coming of the Messiah. He foresaw a day when the numbers of God's people would be multiplied (vs 3). Instead of misery, God's people would be filled with joy like the joy of harvest-time. They would no longer be enslaved and oppressed (vs 4). Indeed, Messiah would bring an age of world-wide peace. Every weapon and blood-stained garment would be destroyed (vs 5).

Messiah will be born here on earth (vs 6), says Isaiah. He will carry the weight of government on his shoulder. He will be filled with *wisdom* - "Wonderful Counsellor"; *power* - "Mighty God"; *tenderness* - "Everlasting Father"; *peace* - "Prince of Peace". In all these ways, how different he will be from Ahaz!

Notice that Isaiah speaks of Messiah as a *man* - born as a human baby - but he also speaks of him as God! His reign of peace will continue for ever (vs 7). All the other kings descended from David fell short of their God-given duty, but Messiah will rule from David's throne in perfect justice for all eternity.

Jesus Christ, "the Mighty God" was born as a human baby here on earth. He began his work in Galilee - there the light first broke through, just as Isaiah said. Through him, millions of people from all nations have become *God's people*. They have been freed from the oppression of sin and found lasting joy. Christ's reign has begun! Soon he will return to bring in the age of eternal justice and peace.

Jesse (vs 1) was King David's father. We can think of the line of kings descended from David as a great tree, with Jesse as its root. Isaiah foresaw the future of that royal line. He prophesied that the "tree" would be cut down to a stump (the NKJV speaks of the "stem of Jesse", meaning the *stump* of Jesse's tree). But Isaiah knew that one day a "rod" or "branch" would spring up from the old stump.

Isaiah's picture is not difficult to understand. The line of kings would come to a sad end, like a tree sawn down. But then, when all hope seemed to have gone, a new king would arise from the royal line, like a branch from a sawn-off stump. And this king would be greater and more glorious than any before him. Once again, Isaiah is speaking of the Messiah!

The prophecy came true in every detail. Twenty kings in turn, descended from David, ruled in Jerusalem. But then the line was cut short. The Babylonians defeated the twentieth king, Zedekiah and dragged him off to prison. For six hundred years, there was no king of David's line. The royal family sank into obscurity and poverty. In fact, the rightful heir to David's throne - a man called Joseph - spent his life working as a village carpenter. Who would have expected the line of David to flourish again? Yet Joseph's wife Mary gave birth to Jesus Christ the Messiah: King of Kings (Matthew ch 1; Luke ch 2).

Isaiah gives us a very full picture of the person and work of the Messiah. Vs 2: The Spirit of the LORD will rest upon him, filling him with wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge - and the fear of the LORD. Vs 3-5: He will be a perfect ruler, judging the world with perfect justice, punishing the wicked, defending "the meek of the earth" - his humble people. Vs 6-9: He will rescue the world from all the effects of Man's Fall. The curse (Genesis 3:17-19) will be abolished. All creation will be at peace again, under his Kingship. The earth will be like the garden of Eden - free from conflict, sorrow and death. Through Jesus the Messiah, the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD. Vs 10-12: He will call people from all nations; Jews and Gentiles alike will seek him and be brought back to God through him.

Some parts of Isaiah's prophecy have already been fulfilled. Jesus the Messiah came as promised. Other parts are being fulfilled today. People from all nations are being drawn to him! Other parts are still to be fulfilled. The earth will only be delivered from the curse when he comes again in glory. We can be sure that everything Isaiah foresaw will come to pass. God's Word will not fail.

Over the next few days, we shall look at four passages from the book of Isaiah which speak of the LORD's servant. (They are often referred to as "the four Servant-Songs"). As we study them, we shall see that each is a wonderful prediction of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Each of the songs shows us a different aspect of the Servant's character and work. This first passage emphasises that the Servant has been chosen (vs 1 - "Elect") by God for a special task. He is destined to set people free from darkness and ignorance.

The key word in vs 1-4 is *justice* (vs 1, vs 3, vs 4). The servant must bring forth *justice to the Gentiles*. The word justice looks back to ch 41 where God calls the nations to come together for *judgement* (vs 1). He protests that they have failed to honour him and have worshipped idols instead (ch 41:21-29). The Servant's task is to "bring forth justice for truth" (vs 3) - to make people admit the truth that they have wronged God. He must turn them from their idols to the true God. The LORD who upholds him, and delights in him, has put his Spirit on him to equip him for that task (vs 1). Compare Matthew ch 3 vs 16. The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus at his baptism to equip him for the work to which God his Father had called him.

How will the Servant go about his task? *Quietly and calmly* (vs 2) - he will not draw attention to himself by noisy boasting. *Gently and patiently* (vs 3) - he will not deal harshly with damaged or hesitant people. *Resolutely and with great determination* (vs 4) - he will not give up the task till it is done. When we read the story of Jesus in the gospels we see how perfectly Isaiah was describing his character.

God the Creator and Sustainer of all (vs 5), speaks words of promises and reassurance to his Servant (vs 6-7). God has *called* him and will be with him, *holding his hand* as he performs his task. God will *keep* him, protecting him till his task is done. He will be given to the people (ie Israel) as a *covenant* - God will make a new covenant with them through him. He will be given to the Gentiles as a *light*, to bring them out of the darkness and bondage of false religion. This is the work of Jesus Christ - to rescue us from our blindness and to bring us into a covenant relationship with God.

The LORD is determined that he will not share his glory with "graven images"- with any false god (vs 8). Is there anything in your life more important to you than God himself? Jesus the LORD's Servant calls you to turn from every idol and to make your peace with Yahweh, the living God.

In the second "Servant Song", the Servant himself is speaking. He calls us (vs 1) to listen to him. He has a message that is relevant to all people everywhere. He speaks with all the authority of God.

Even before the Servant was born, in his mother's womb, he knew he had been called by the LORD to be his servant. He was always conscious of God's voice speaking to him, addressing him by name (vs 1). All through his life, God was preparing him to be his spokesman. Just as a man sharpens a sword, or polishes an arrow, so the LORD was preparing the Servant to speak for him. Yet the Servant remained *hidden* (vs 2), like an arrow which an archer keeps hidden in his quiver, waiting for the right moment to use it.

It is the Lord Jesus who is speaking in these verses. Even as a baby in Mary's womb, he was conscious of God his Father, listening to his voice. All through his life, he knew his Father was preparing him to do his work. Yet for many years, he remained hidden, unknown by the world, working in a carpenter's shop in Nazareth, waiting patiently for the day when God would send him to be his messenger.

Israel was supposed to be God's servant, bringing him glory. Israel had failed. So God speaks to the Lord Jesus (vs 3): "*You are my servant, O Israel*". He must do the work Israel had failed to do. Through him, God's glory must be displayed to the world.

Yet when the Lord Jesus at last took up his work, what happened? He was rejected by the great majority of people. He had to experience frustration, disappointment, what seemed like failure. No wonder he said (vs 4) "*I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing*". He finished his life on earth, naked and helpless, nailed to a cross. But still he was confident that in the end God his Father would reward his obedient service.

And he did! The Lord Jesus was raised from the dead, glorious and strong (vs 5). He has saved many Jewish people, gathering them back to God. But (vs 6) he is also a light for the Gentiles, bringing salvation to the ends of the earth. Yes, he was despised by man, abhorred by the nation of Israel (vs 7), but one day he will be honoured and worshipped by kings and princes everywhere. God his Father has *heard* him, *helped* him, *preserved* him and *given* him as a covenant to the people (vs 8). He will restore the earth from the curse, and set free the prisoners of ignorance and sin (vs 9).

Jesus the Servant says "*Listen to me*". Are you listening?

In the third “Servant Song” the Servant speaks again. Notice five things about him.

Firstly, he has a wise (vs 4: *learned*) tongue. He knows exactly how to speak to every struggling, weary soul. The Lord Jesus had a perfect knowledge of the human heart. He was able to speak to men and women, young and old, religious people and criminals, illiterate folk and intellectuals. He knew just what each one needed to hear. He was able to say “Come unto me *all* you who you who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Secondly, he is always listening to God. Morning by morning (vs 4) the Servant wakes up and *listens*. His ear is always open to God. The Lord Jesus lived his whole life in perfect fellowship with God his Father, listening to him every moment, ready to know his will. (see John ch 8 vs 28-29; 12:49-50).

Thirdly, he obeys God perfectly, never rebelling, never turning away from God’s command (vs 5). The Lord Jesus was indeed a perfect servant. From his birth to the moment of his death, he obeyed his Father totally. He could say, “I always do what pleases him” (John 8:29). “Father.. not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22:42).

Fourthly, he submits willingly to suffering. Read verse 6 carefully. What a heart-breaking picture of the suffering of Jesus!.. flogged, humiliated, spat on. He endured it all without complaint - knowing it was his Father’s will. He *gave* his back to those who beat him.

Fifthly, he trusts God through it all. The Servant knows that on the other side of suffering is deliverance and victory. He knows God will help him - he will not finally be left, disgraced and ashamed (vs 7). Men may contend against him and condemn him (vs 8/9) but God will *justify* him - declare him to be in the right (vs 8). Jesus knew his death would not be the end. He was sure that God his Father would raise him from the dead to rule as Judge and King over the whole world (Matthew 25:31). The Lord Jesus lived and died trusting his Father. And his trust was rewarded.

If we truly fear the LORD, we will obey the voice of Jesus his Servant (vs 10). Even when we walk in darkness, not knowing where Jesus is leading us, we will trust and obey him. Some people prefer to light their own fire - to look for security elsewhere. They will “*lie down in torment*” (vs 11). The Lord Jesus may lead us through dark ways but he leads us to everlasting joy and peace.

We shall spread our study of the fourth “Servant Song” over two days. It gives us perhaps the clearest picture of the Lord Jesus in all the Old Testament. Pray now that God will open your eyes to see the glory of Jesus as you read it.

The passage begins with a puzzle. The LORD’s Servant (52:13) will be *exalted, extolled* (ie lifted up), *very high*. He has a glorious future ahead of him! He is a King! Yet he will also be *marred more than any man* - tortured, disfigured to the point where he hardly looks human. People will be utterly *appalled* when they see him (vs 14). But how can both be true? Other figures in history rise to greatness by winning battles or seizing political power. But the Servant will come to his kingly position through dreadful suffering and defeat. No wonder that the nations are amazed by him (“sprinkle” in vs 15 could be translated “startle” - see the footnote in the NKJV). No wonder that kings shut their mouths in bewilderment (vs 15). They have never heard such a thing before!

Isaiah asks, “Who has believed this extraordinary story?” (53:1). Who will recognise that this mutilated figure is “the arm of the LORD?” (vs 2). Think about the Servant’s “career”. He sprang up *as a root out of dry ground* - in other words, he came from the most unpromising background. There was no glamour, no special attraction about his appearance - none of the qualities people look for in a great leader! (vs 2). In fact, he was *despised*, and *rejected* (vs 3). His life was a life of pain and grief. People looked away from him in disgust or embarrassment - they hid their faces from him. “*We did not esteem him*” says Isaiah. This was *our* reaction to God’s Servant.

Remember, Isaiah wrote these words seven hundred years before the Lord Jesus was born! How strange it must have seemed to his first readers! If God’s Servant is to be exalted across the world, how could he be treated in such a way? And why would God allow it?

It came to pass just as Isaiah foresaw. Jesus the Servant grew up in the peasant village of Nazareth (John ch 1 vs 45-46). He looked like any other working-man. People sneered at him. In the end he was rejected - condemned as a common criminal, crucified, mutilated horribly. Yet today, millions of people worship him as the exalted King! How puzzling it all seems! Why must the Servant suffer?

Isaiah has the explanation. Read through verses 4-6. (We shall look at them again tomorrow). Have you understood why Jesus Christ had to suffer and die? What a price he paid to save sinners!

Isaiah has set us a puzzle. Now he explains it (53: 4-6). Why must the LORD's Servant be "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (vs 3)? Because he bore *our* griefs and carried *our* sorrows (vs 4). He suffered as we deserve to suffer. He was *stricken, smitten, afflicted by God*, in our place, taking the punishment for the sins of all those who trust him. Why was he wounded? Because we had *transgressed* (broken) God's law. Why was he bruised? Because we were full of *iniquities* - evil attitudes and thoughts and traits of character. Why was he chastised (punished)? Because we had become God's enemies - he was suffering *for our peace*. Why was he flogged? So that we could be *healed* - set free from the consequences of our sins (vs 5). We had gone astray like wayward sheep - the LORD laid our waywardness on his own Servant (vs 6).

See how exactly Isaiah describes the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. He submitted silently to injustice (vs 7). He was put on trial and treated as a criminal (vs 8). No-one could "declare his generation" - ie talk of his descendants - he died unmarried and childless (vs 8). He was buried in a grave borrowed from a rich man (vs 9). His death was no accident. It was God's will that he should suffer and die (vs 10). His death was planned as a sacrifice, *an offering for sin*. Isaiah saw it all!

But Isaiah also saw that Jesus's sufferings would lead to triumph! In vs 8, we saw that the Servant would die childless. But now (vs 10) Isaiah tells us that the Servant will *see his seed* (his offspring). Millions of people will receive spiritual life through him and look to him as their spiritual father. We were told that the Servant would be *cut off* (vs 8) - he would die suddenly. But now (vs 10) we read: "he will prolong his days" - he will live forever! *The pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand* - the strong hand of the Servant will make sure that God's will for the earth is accomplished.

Two words are missing from verse 11 in the NKJV. It should read: "He shall see *light, after* the travail of his soul". After the struggles and pain of the cross, the Lord Jesus was raised from the dead to see the light of life again. Now he is at work *justifying* many people - setting them free from the guilt of sin. Jesus, who was innocent was treated as guilty - he *bore their iniquities*. Now God can treat these sinful people as if they were innocent. He has won the victory and now can receive his reward (vs 12). He was *numbered with the transgressors*, bearing their sin. Now he can pray for them. Jesus, on the cross cried, "Father forgive them, they don't know what they're doing!" There is only one way for sinners to be forgiven - through the suffering, death and intercession of Jesus the Servant.

Jesus Christ speaks again through the mouth of Isaiah. Remember, "*Christ*" is a Greek word meaning "Anointed". The Hebrew word "*Messiah*" means the same thing. Why do we call Jesus the Messiah or Christ? Because he was *anointed* with the Holy Spirit. When any king of Israel was crowned, he had oil poured upon him. When Jesus, the ultimate King, took up his kingly work at his baptism, God the Father poured out the Holy Spirit on him. So Jesus can say, "*The Spirit of the LORD God is upon me.. the LORD has anointed me*".

The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus to equip him to be a *preacher*. Jesus came to *preach good tidings to the poor*. The "poor" may include those who have no money, but not just them! It means all who feel their need of God's forgiveness and help. The good news (the "gospel") is that God is willing to forgive freely those who repent and trust Jesus Christ. Jesus came to *heal the broken-hearted*. All who feel crushed and helpless may find comfort and peace through him. He came to *proclaim liberty to the captives*. Prisoners of guilt, trapped by the power of evil, can be set free. He came *to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD*. Sinful people may now be accepted by God, because of the work of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus's message is not only good news. He also preaches *the day of vengeance of our God*. Jesus often spoke about the Day of Judgement when God would punish the guilty (see, eg, Matthew 25: 31-46). That Day is still future. But today, Jesus offers forgiveness freely to all. He is ready to *comfort all who mourn*. Sin brings sorrow into human lives. But when we turn from sin to Jesus Christ, he provides a remedy for our misery. This is pictured in vs 3. In OT times, a man overcome by sorrow might wear a garment of sackcloth and sprinkle ashes on his head. The Lord Jesus can transform such a man. He gives *beauty* - radiant delight - instead of ashes. He gives joy - like a fragrant perfume - instead of mourning. He gives *the garment of praise* instead of heaviness. Christ's people find themselves praising God from the heart. Praise is like a garment wrapped around them, wherever they go. They are like deep-rooted trees, planted by God, able to stand firm through all life's storms.

They find strength to rebuild what has been broken and spoiled (vs 4). They have God's blessing on their life and labour (vs 5). Like the OT priests, God's servants, they are able to enter God's presence and worship him (vs 6). They receive spiritual riches, glory, honour, and everlasting joy (vs 6-7). Jesus offers all this to the "poor" - those who know they have nothing to offer God. Those who come to him have nothing to lose; everything to gain. Hear the good news!

Jeremiah was called to be a prophet sixty years or so after Isaiah's death. During those years, the nation had gone from bad to worse, turning to false gods and living in the most depraved ways. But now a new king, Josiah, was on the throne. During his reign, the long lost book of God's law was found (see 2 Kings 22). Josiah resolved to call the nation back to God's covenant. At his command, the Israelites destroyed their idols and promised that they would keep God's commandments from that day on (2 Kings 23:3). Outwardly, all seemed well. But of course, nothing had really changed. The people still loved their old ways, and secretly they carried on in their sins. The covenant told people how they ought to live, but left their hearts unchanged. (See Jeremiah 17:1-2, 9).

So Jeremiah looked forward to the day when God would make a *new covenant* with his people (ch 31 vs 31). It would be very different from the covenant which he made with Israel at Mount Sinai when he brought them out of Egypt (vs 32). Look back at study no 11, and then note five differences between the old covenant and the new.

The New Covenant is *unconditional*. It does not depend upon our capacity to keep God's law. The LORD says "I will.. I will.. I will" (vs 33-34) God promises that he will do *everything* necessary to make the covenant work! He himself underwrites the promises. The New Covenant is *internal*. The LORD will write his laws, not just on stone tablets but on minds and hearts (vs 33). He promises to change the hearts of God's people so that they *love* God's law and *want* to obey it. The New Covenant is *spiritual*. The LORD promises his people not a physical land and material prosperity, but a far greater blessing - they will know *him*, personally, intimately (vs 34). The New Covenant is *personal*. It is made not with a nation but with individuals. Every one of the LORD's new covenant people, even the youngest, has this personal knowledge of God (vs 34). The New Covenant is *final*. The LORD promises that he will forgive his people once and for all. They will not need to offer repeated sacrifices. "Their sin I will remember no more" (vs 34).

We saw in study 11 that the Old Covenant was sealed by the blood of sacrifices. When the Lord Jesus died as a sacrifice for sin, his blood sealed the New Covenant (see Matthew 26:28). Because Jesus has been punished in the place of sinners, God can make these New Covenant promises unconditionally to all who belong to him. God's people today ("the house of Israel and the house of Judah" vs 31) is made up of all who have been saved through Jesus's death. They know God. They love his law. Their sins are forgiven forever.

Jeremiah served God as a prophet for around forty years. About the time that Jeremiah's work ended, the LORD raised up another prophet named Ezekiel. In this passage, the LORD commands Ezekiel (whom he calls "Son of Man" vs 2) to preach against the "shepherds" of Israel - ie the political and religious leaders who should have cared for his people. They are guilty of three crimes.

Firstly, they have abused their position. They have enriched themselves at the expense of the people (vs 2-3). Secondly, they have failed to care for the weak and the vulnerable - instead, they have treated them cruelly (vs 4). Thirdly, they have allowed the people to be scattered and failed to protect them from danger (vs 5-6). God promises that he will sack these greedy, uncaring, irresponsible "shepherds" and punish them (vs 7-10).

So who will care for God's scattered sheep? "I myself will search for my sheep (vs 11).. and deliver them (vs 12).. and feed them (vs 13).. and make them lie down (vs 14).. and bind up the broken and strengthen the sick.. (vs 16). The LORD promises that he himself will shepherd his people and meet all their needs. He will also judge them (vs 16-22), and punish greedy sheep who oppress the rest! The LORD will not allow selfishness among his people.

How will the LORD shepherd his people? Through a perfect representative. The LORD promises to raise up a true shepherd who will feed them (vs 23), "my servant David". Once again the LORD is promising to send the Messiah. King David himself had been dead for many centuries - the promised shepherd is David's great descendant, the final king, the Messiah.

Notice that the LORD can first say "I will shepherd them" and then say "my servant will shepherd them". Whatever the Messiah does, God himself does. The Messiah, Jesus Christ, is more than just a man. He is God himself, taking human nature, appearing on earth (compare Isaiah 9:6).

List out the blessings that the LORD will give to his "sheep" through his "shepherd", Jesus Christ (vs 25-31). He will make a new covenant with them (vs 25 & see study 27). He will give them perfect safety (vs 25). He will send them "showers of blessing" (vs 26). He will remove the curse from the earth (vs 27). He will deliver them from slavery (vs 27) and fear (vs 28). He will bring them back to a restored Eden (vs 29). In short, he will be their God, with them forever (vs 30-31). No wonder Jesus is called the *good shepherd*!

During Ezekiel's time, the army of Babylon invaded Israel three times and took prisoners back to Babylon. (Ezekiel was captured in the second invasion). In the first invasion, a young man called Daniel was taken (Daniel ch 1 vs 1-6). In Babylon, Daniel had a series of dreams about the future. In one dream he saw four frightening beasts coming out of the sea (ch 7 vs 1-3). Each beast represented an empire. The first was like a winged lion. It stood for the empire of Babylon (vs 4). The second was like a bear, humped up on one side. It stood for the two-sided empire of the Medes and Persians (the Persian side was the more powerful) who had just captured Babylon. The third was like a winged leopard with four heads. It stood for the next great empire of history - the Greek empire with its swift-moving armies (vs 6). The fourth was not like any earthly animal - it was "dreadful and terrible, exceeding strong." (vs 7). It represented the Roman empire which after the fall of Greece, ruled the world. (The horns on the beast's head are the Roman emperors, vs 8).

All of these empires - and their rulers - had one thing in common. They were like beasts - inhuman, savage. Their rulers claimed to be more than human - they demanded to be worshipped as gods. But they behaved like animals. Whenever human beings have tried to build empires for their own glory, those empires have become bestial.

In his dream, Daniel is allowed to see how human history will end. "Thrones were put in place" (vs 9) - God takes his place as the real King, the true Emperor! He is called "the Ancient of Days" - the Eternal One. He appears to Daniel as a figure of awesome purity - his royal robe and his hair are dazzling white. A river of fire flows out before him. He is surrounded by countless angels. He is the Judge of all the world (vs 11). He strips all power away from these bestial kingdoms. The last of them is utterly destroyed (vs 11-12).

So who will rule the world? John sees another figure approaching God's throne - he is "like the Son of Man" - a human figure - but wrapped in clouds of divine glory (vs 13). At last a Man has come who is worthy to be worshipped as God! He receives "dominion, glory and a kingdom". He is to be honoured by all nations. His kingdom will last for ever (vs 14). He shares the throne of God.

Who is this Son of Man? When we read the gospels, we are left in no doubt. Jesus often spoke of himself as "the Son of Man" (see eg Matthew 26:63-64). All the empires of earth will pass away. The kingdom of Jesus will never end!

In our Bibles, the book of Micah is found further on than Ezekiel or Daniel. But in fact, Micah lived earlier than either, back in Isaiah's day. Like Isaiah, Micah looked forward eagerly to the coming of the Messiah. But Micah tells us one important detail about the coming king that Isaiah did not mention. *Where will Messiah be born?*

It could only be one place! The LORD addresses Bethlehem: *You are little.. yet out of you shall come forth.. the one who is to be ruler in Israel - the Messiah* (vs 2). Why Bethlehem? Because it was King David's home-town! The "goings-forth" (ie the family line) of the Messiah are "from of old" (vs 2). He comes from the ancient line of David. (The phrase "From everlasting" may also be translated "from ancient times"). The Messiah, David's great descendant, will be born in the same place as David himself!

David was born in Bethlehem Ephrathah, an insignificant little village a few miles from Jerusalem. (Ephrathah is the name of the district round the village: people had to use the full name because there was another Bethlehem elsewhere). David lived and worked among the shepherds of Bethlehem before the LORD raised him up to be the "shepherd", the King over his people. So, just like David, King Jesus will be born in that obscure place and will be welcomed into the world by shepherds (Luke 2:1-20).

Micah foresees the circumstances of the Messiah's birth. It will be at a time when it will seem that the LORD has given up - abandoned - his people (vs 3). When the Lord Jesus was born, the land of Israel was occupied and oppressed by Roman forces. Micah uses a very graphic picture to illustrate the way God's people would be suffering, waiting and praying for Messiah to come. They would be like a woman in labour, desperate for the coming of her child (vs 3 - compare ch 4 vs 8-10). But at last the child is born! Messiah comes. And then, many brothers follow. *His brethren shall return.*

Who are Messiah's brothers? All who trust Jesus Christ as Saviour are counted as his brothers and can call God their Father. And Jesus the Messiah shepherds them. Just as David became the shepherd of Israel, the Lord Jesus shepherds God's flock, with God's strength, acting in God's name, clothed in God's majesty (vs 4). His people are safe in his care: *they shall abide* (vs 4). David's son, born in a stable in despised Bethlehem, *shall be great to the ends of the earth. This one shall be peace.* One day, the whole universe will be at peace under the rule of Jesus Christ. May he bring peace to your heart.

