

JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

A Chronological Experience



by Magda Meechan

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I dedicate this book to my dear friends and family. May you all find salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord.

My inspiration to distribute this book:

Ezekiel 3:18 'When I say to the wicked, You will certainly die, and you do not warn him or speak out to tell him to turn from his wicked way to save his life, that same evil man will die in his sin, but you will be responsible for his blood.' – Holy Amplified Bible

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Chapter One

Beginnings of early mankind

Undated

The beginning

Creation

Our heavenly Father revealed Himself to mankind through His creation.

- Key verse: *Genesis 1:1 'in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'. – New Living Translation*
- First day: day and night.
- Second day: sky and water.
- Third day: land (with plants and fruit trees) and seas.
- Fourth day: sun, moon and stars.
- Fifth day: birds, fish and animals.
- Sixth day: a man called Adam and a woman called Eve. God blessed everything He created and instructed them to be fruitful and increase in number. He gave mankind authority over His creation.
- Seventh day: God rested and declared the day holy.

An interesting fact is that Jesus was with God all along.

Key verse: *Colossians 1:15-17 'He (Christ) is the exact living image (the essential manifestation) of the unseen God (the visible representation of the invisible), the firstborn (the preeminent one, the sovereign and the originator) of all creation. For by Him all things were created in heaven and on earth, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities; all things were created and exist through Him (that is, by His activity) and for Him. And He Himself existed and is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. (He is the controlling adhesive force of the universe.) – Amplified Holy Bible*

Adam and Eve

Adam and Eve lived in the garden of Eden. In the middle of the garden were two trees:

- The tree of life and
- The tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

They were not allowed to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The devil disguised as a serpent tempted Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and Eve gave Adam some of the fruit to eat as well.

We may wonder when the devil was created and by whom. The devil originated from a cherub that God created when He created the heavens with the heavenly beings and the earth. Something must have happened in the spiritual realm between Gen 1:1 and Gen 1:2, which caused the earth to be without form and void.

Some suggest a kind of judgement concerning Satan because he was jealous of God and out of pride, he wanted to be equal to Him. He convinced a third of the angels in heaven to follow him, and consequently he and his angels were thrown out of the third heaven to the second heaven, where they now reside. Today he is still busy on earth, encouraging the non-believers to go against God. Fortunately, he can't touch the believers, because God protects His children, but nothing stops him from tempting the believers with riches, pornography and other pleasures of the world.

Key verse: Isaiah 14:12-14 'How you have fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.' – New King James Version

The act of the sin Adam and Eve committed produced knowledge, but also shame, fear and blame.

- God cursed the tempter to crawl on his belly and eat dust.

- He also punished Eve by having great pain in childbearing.
- Adam's punishment was to labour for his food and return to dust when he dies.

Key verse: 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 'So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, Adam, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man, Jesus Christ. Everyone dies because all of us are related to Adam, the first man. But all who are related to Christ, the other man, will be given new life.' – New Living Translation

Adam and Eve were banished from the garden, which was guarded by angels lest they come back and eat from the Tree of Life. The Tree of Life was not the forbidden tree while they were in the Garden of Eden, but now it was forbidden to them and guarded by Cherubim.

Could it be that God cursed mankind to a life estranged from Him and from paradise because sin had entered their hearts? Was it their sinful nature and the death within their bodies that kept them out?

It was the first Adam who brought death and separation from God. The second Adam, Jesus, brought a means of being united with God and through Him we can eat of the fruit of life.

If God had granted them blessings, they were to live in the Garden again and then their bodies might not have had illness in them. But then they would possibly have been unable to tolerate holiness and perfection in the garden because they were now tainted with sin. They would have been full of shame.

They were condemned to a life of toil because they had not obeyed God. The sins of pride and rebellion are rooted here. Only when people confess these sins can they enter the Rest and Peace of God.

Adam and Eve had many sons and daughters and because their blood was pure, they were able to inter marry.

All the events in the history of God's interactions with His people were memorised and passed on to the next generation. This oral tradition of passing on historical events was used until the ninth generation from

Adam, that was when events were recorded and written down; the beginning of the written Word.

First three sons of Adam and Eve Cain, Abel and Seth

Cain was a farmer and Abel had flocks. When they offered some of their first fruits and first born, only Abel's offer found favour with the Lord. Cain got angry and killed Abel.

Key verse: Genesis 4:7 'You will be accepted if you respond in the right way. But if you refuse to respond correctly, then watch out! Sin is waiting to attack and destroy you, and you must subdue it.' – New Living Translation

The Lord punished Cain by cursing him to be a wanderer for the rest of his life. He went to live in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Cain married two wives: Adah and Zillah.

Adah's children:

- Jabal (lived in tents and raised livestock).
- Jubal (played the harp and flute).

Zillah's children:

- Tubal-Cain (made tools out of bronze and iron).
- Naamah.

Cain's descendants:

- Enoch
- Irad
- Mehujael
- Methusael
- Lamech (confessed to killing a man).

Seth had a son:

- Enosh

At that time men began to call on the Name of the Lord.

Descendants from Adam to Noah

Adam – 930 years

Seth – 912 years

Enosh – 905 years

Cainan – 910 years

Mahalalel – 895 years

Jared – 962 years

Enoch – 365 years and never died

Methuselah – 969 years

Lamech – 777 years

Noah – 950 years

The earth had become corrupt in God's sight, and it was filled with violence. Some say that the angels that God has sent to earth to guide mankind, called Nephilim (fallen ones), taught the humans the art of astrology and warfare, and had intercourse with their wicked daughters and produced giants as children.

Another theory is that the Nephilim were descendants from the murderer Cain who had intercourse with the righteous Seth's descendants.

After the Nephilim died in the flood, they became evil spirits and tormented people.

God instructed Noah to build an ark to save him and his family of eight people altogether, as well as animals, when the great Flood came.

The Ark of Noah came to rest upon the mountains of Ararat which means 'the curse is reversed'. Jesus Christ is like an ark for us; he is a

place of safety and rescue us from the dangers and hazards of the evil around us. If you choose to repent of your sins and accept Jesus Christ as your Saviour, then the tide of judgement is turned, and you will be reconciled with God.

Because Jesus suffered the pains of hell for us all and literally became a curse, as we come to Him, we are delivered from the curse of sin and death and made into a brand-new creation.

After the Flood God blessed them and told them to multiply and fill the earth.

Key verse: Hebrews 11:7 'By faith (with confidence in God and His word) Noah, being warned by God about events not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his family. By this act of obedience, he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith.' - Amplified Holy Bible

The rainbow that God placed in the sky after the Flood was a sign to the people that God would never destroy the earth again by a flood. Whenever we see the rainbow after the rain, we know that God will never again send so much water to destroy all life on earth.

We are currently living in the end times. We are eagerly waiting for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. The glorious return of Jesus was prophesied in *Matthew 24:37-39 'For the coming of the Son of Man (the Messiah) will be just like the days of Noah. For in those days before the Flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the very day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know or understand until the Flood came and swept them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be unexpected judgement.'* – Amplified Holy Bible

God pronounced judgement on the wicked, violent and immoral generation of that time. Just before God shed forth His divine wrath, the believers were taken away and secured in the safety of the ark. Only then did God turn his anger towards the sinners of that day and age. Noah and his family were thus saved from judgement.

The human condition remained sinful and in 2500 B.C. the people built a great city known as Babel with a high tower in rebellion against God.

God decided to intervene by confusing their languages and therefore scattered mankind throughout the earth. This supernatural event sets in motion the separation of human beings into different races, nations, and tongues.

Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. Abraham, David and Jesus descended from Shem. Ham's descendants settled in Canaan, Egypt and the rest of Africa. Japheth's descendants settled for the most part in Europe and Asia Minor.

Descendants from Noah to Abram

Noah – 950 years

Shem – 500 years

Arphaxad – 403 years

Shelah – 403 years

Eber – 430 years

Peleg – 209 years

Reu – 207 years

Serug – 200 years

Nahor – 119 years

Terah – 205 years

Abram (Abraham) – 175 years

Abram had two brothers: Nahor and Haran.

Haran's children:

- son Lot, and a
- daughter Milcah.

Haran died in Ur where he was born.

Abram's wife was

- Sarai and

Nahor's wife was

- Milcah (Haran's daughter)

Abram's father took him, his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot and moved to Haran from Ur.

We notice that, from Adam to Noah, people lived almost 1,000 years and from there on the ages decreased significantly.

Key verse: 2 Peter 3:8 '...one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like one day.' - Amplified Holy Bible

Key verse: Genesis 6:3 'Then the Lord said, My Spirit will not put up with humans for such a long time, for they are only mortal flesh. In the future, they will live no more than 120 years.' – New Living Translation

God gives people time to change their ways, in Noah's days they were given 120 years to repent and change, and this is still true today; He is giving us time to stop living our way and start living His way. We can't see the stopwatch of God's patience so we must change now as there is no bargaining for additional time.

Job

Job lived during this time. He was a righteous man who lived in Edom. He was unusually blessed with prosperity and was esteemed among his peers. When all his children were killed and he himself had a disease, he maintained his faith in God. All his wealth was restored, more children were born and he died a happy man.

Key verse: Job 23:10 'For He knows the way that I take. When He has tried me, I would come forth as gold.' – The Scriptures

Chapter Two

The Patriarchs

2100 B.C. – 1525 B.C.

Abram, Isaac and Jacob

Abram (lived 175 years)

God chose to bless all mankind through Abram. Through faith Abram packed up all his belongings and went wherever God guided him.

Key verse: Genesis 12:1 'The Lord had said to Abram, leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.' – New International Version

God's promise to Abram:

Key verse: Genesis 12:2,3 'I will cause you to become the father of a great nation. I will bless you and curse those who curse you. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you.' – New Living Translation

Abram was not perfect. He dishonoured himself in Egypt when he lied to Pharaoh by introducing his wife Sarai as his sister. So, Abram's faith was still a matter of personal struggle at that stage.

Abram's moral character was renewed when he decided to part ways with his nephew Lot and chose less fertile land for himself. He sacrificed personal gain in favour of maintaining an important family relationship. However, with Lot there was a hint of a serious character flaw when he accepted the lush valley of the Jordan. It was located near Sodom. Abram settled in Hebron, just south of Jerusalem.

When Lot was taken captive in a battle of various kings, Abram rescued him and his possessions. On his return, he encountered Melchizedek, the King of Salem, who blessed Abram and then Abram gave him one tenth of the spoils.

Melchizedek's name means 'King of Righteousness'. Some suggest that Melchizedek was a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus in human form.

Melchizedek was a type of Christ. He received his priesthood directly from God.

Key verse: Psalm 110:4 'The Lord has taken an oath and will not break his vow. You are a priest forever in the line of Melchizedek.'- *New Living Translation*

After living in Canaan for ten years, Ishmael was born to Hagar, the second wife of Abram. In centuries to follow, there was conflict in the Middle East between the Arabs who descended from Ishmael.

Thirteen years after this, Abram's name was changed to Abraham and his wife Sarai was changed to Sarah.

God instituted the rite of circumcision for all the males in Abraham's household, including servants. The circumcision foreshadows the purity of lineage through which all the world will someday be blessed.

Two angels appeared to Abraham and Sarah with the news that Isaac would be born within a year. The same two angels went to warn Lot and his family in Sodom.

At that time, Lot was residing in Sodom where there was wickedness, violence, and sexual perversion. Lot and his family were provided an opportunity to escape the destruction of the cities before judgement was served by way of burning Sulphur.

Committing incest, Lot had two sons by his daughters. They were called Moab and Ammon. Jesus Himself reveals that violence, wickedness and sexual depravity will not simply be in the world, but will fill the earth all at one time, in the days leading up to His return.

Key verse: Luke 17:28,30 'Likewise it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank...Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.'
– *New King James Version*

We are currently living in the end times, and before the 7-year Tribulation starts, the church of believers will be raptured to heaven to escape the Antichrist and all the terrible things that will transpire during that time of judgement.

Key verse: Luke 21:36 'Watch then at all times and pray that you be counted worthy to escape all this about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Adam (Jesus).' – *The Scriptures*

Abraham again committed deception by telling Abimelech that Sarah was his sister, but God intervened in his dreams and told him the truth.

Isaac (lived 180 years)

When Abraham was 100 years old, Isaac was born.

Today the focal point of the world is the crisis in the Middle East. Three major religions originated there: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Moses, Jesus Christ and Mohammed were the originators of these religions, and they were all descendants of Abraham. They all recognise Jerusalem as a holy city. For the Jews it is the city of David, for the Christians it is the place where Jesus was crucified and for Islam it is the place of ascension.

There are currently 22 nations in the Middle East, near East and North Africa. Most of them practice Islam and worship Allah.

Abraham's faith was tested when God told him to sacrifice Isaac, but the Lord intervened by providing a ram.

During his own personal struggle to obey God's extraordinary request, little did Abraham know that God was asking no more of him than at a future time God would ask of Himself when Jesus was to be crucified; we note the prophetic nature of the test.

Isaac married Rebekah who was Abraham's brother, Nahor's granddaughter.

Twin sons were born to Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Esau. Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of lentil stew. He had a red complexion and was very hairy. Esau's descendants were Edomites and Amalekites and they were a continuous source of friction for the Hebrew nation. He married two heathen wives, descendants of Ishmael.

Famine forced Isaac to migrate to Gerar, where he lied to Abimelech, the King of the Philistines, about Rebekah the same way his father lied about his mother.

Jacob (lived 147 years)

Jacob deceived his father Isaac and received his brother Esau's blessing. When Esau found out, he swore to kill Jacob. So, Jacob fled to Haran to stay with his uncle Laban.

Laban deceived Jacob by agreeing to let him work for 7 years in exchange for Rachel and gave him Leah instead of Rachel. After another 7 years he could marry Rachel.

Jacob had 12 sons and a daughter Dinah. The sons were Reuben (he defiled his father's bed), Simeon (cruel and wicked), Levi (cruel and wicked), Judah (the ruler), Dan (the judge), Naphtali (the eloquent), Gad (the harassed), Asher (the farmer), Issachar (the lazy one), Zebulun (the seaman), Joseph (the blessed), and Benjamin (the aggressor).

When Jacob settled north of Jerusalem, Dinah got raped by Shechem and wanted to take her as his wife. Jacob gave his consent to Shechem on the condition that they would circumcise all the males. On the third day after they were circumcised, while they were still sore, Dinah's brothers Simeon and Levi killed all the males of the city to bring justice for her.

Then God directed Jacob to move to Bethel and changed his name to Israel.

We can't fail to recognize God's hand in the history of this nation 4,000 years ago. They are being discriminated against even today, in every possible way. Every satanic and diabolic plan to wipe them off the face of the earth has failed.

On 14 May 1948 Israel gained independence. A nation was born after about 2,000 years. Israel's flag is the six-pointed star of David's shield.

God's prophetic clock is still ticking.

Key verse: *Romans 11:25-27 'For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from*

*Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.' –
New King James Version*

Joseph (lived 110 years)

One of Israel's son's names was Joseph. He was a dreamer, and his brothers were jealous of him. They sold him to the Ishmaelites for 20 shekels. The Midianites sold Joseph to Potiphar in Egypt. Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph and when he refused, he was thrown in jail. The butler and baker had dreams and Joseph was able to interpret them. Pharaoh also had a dream and Joseph was called to interpret it.

Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of Egypt to store the food in the first 7 years to compensate for the next 7 famine years. Joseph restored the family relations when he provided food to them, and they moved to Egypt.

Joseph had two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Israel blessed Ephraim as the firstborn.

Judah

Judah was also a son of Israel and known to be a ruler.

He married a Canaanite woman and had three sons, Er, Onan, and Shelah. Er married Tamar, but Er was wicked so God put him to death. Onan married Tamar but he was wicked as well, so God put him to death as well. Then Tamar went back to her family.

Judah mourned the death of his wife and went to Timnah. Tamar deceived Judah and had twin boys with him, Perez and Zerah.

Through Perez the Messiah was born.

Chapter Three

Establishment of a Nation

1525 B.C. – 1400 B.C.

Moses (lived 120 years)

After the death of Joseph, all Abraham's sons were in Egypt. It was Abraham who fathered the nation through faith. This nation would become God's chosen people.

Abraham's descendants multiplied and became too numerous for the Egyptians. The new King Pharaoh had all the newborn boys killed, and when that didn't work, he had the boys thrown into the Nile.

A couple from the house of Levi had a son and decided to hide the boy for three months, whereafter they left him in a basket where Pharaoh's daughter found him and brought him up as her own.

When Moses was grown up, he killed an Egyptian and fled to Midian where he married Zipporah. They had two sons, Gershon and Eliezer. The King of Egypt died, and the Israelites suffered in their slavery and cried out to the Lord.

God called on Moses from a burning bush and told him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt into Canaan, the land of milk and honey. Aaron would be his spokesman.

The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart when Moses pleaded with him to let the people go and the Egyptians suffered 10 plagues: water to blood, frogs, lice, flies, dead animals, boils, hail, locusts, darkness and death of firstborns. We celebrate Passover every year in celebration of God having brought the Israelites out of slavery with a mighty hand.

God led them through the desert with a cloud by day and fire by night. When they reached the Red Sea, the water divided, and they continued on dry land. When the Egyptians pursued them, the water flowed back, and they all drowned.

Key verse: Exodus 15:20,21 'Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine and led all the women in rhythm and dance. And Miriam sang this song: I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously; He has thrown both horse and rider into the sea.'- New Living Translation

On guidance from the Lord, Moses threw a stick into bitter water, and it became sweet. God also sent them quail (meat from game birds) and manna (bread) from heaven. On another occasion Moses struck the rock and water gushed out.

The Amalekites attacked the Israelites, and they destroyed them by Moses holding his hands up in the air, and when he let down his hand, Amalek won, and needless to say, the Israelites won the attack.

Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came to visit and advised him to appoint leaders and subleaders to decrease his workload.

The Lord gave the people the 10 commandments on the mount of Sinai. It entailed:

- No other gods.
- No idols.
- No blasphemy.
- Keeping the Sabbath.
- Honouring your parents.
- No murder.
- No adultery.
- No thieving.
- No false testimony.
- No coveting.

These Laws form the framework of all the other Laws ranging from altar worship, proper treatment of slaves, crimes against persons or property, punishing by death those guilty of sorcery, bestiality and idolatry.

Numerous ethical instructions to encourage honesty, justice and assistance in emergencies. Sabbath rests, three yearly festivals: Feast of Unleavened Bread, Feast of Harvest and the Feast of Ingathering.

God invited Moses to go up to Mount Sinai where He gave him instructions to build a tabernacle and everything that went with it. The meeting was going to take 40 days, but after a while the people asked Aaron to make a golden calf to worship. God was very angry, and Moses broke the two tablets with the Laws written on them. He commanded the Levites to kill 3,000 people that day. Moses pleaded with the Lord and so He mercifully replaced the two stone tablets.

When the tabernacle was built, the Levites were chosen for spiritual service. For the next 40 years, God gave Israel numerous other Laws to abide to. So, Israel became a Nation under the Law.

A census was done according to each tribe. Joseph's tribe were split in two – Ephraim and Manasseh. Israel was two million strong of which over 600,000 could fight.

Miriam, Moses' sister, judged him for taking a Cushite wife and consequently the Lord punished her and she became a leper.

Just before the Israelites were to enter the promised land, Canaan, they sent one leader from each tribe to go and explore the land. Ten of the spies came back with a bad report and the people were fearful and discouraged. The descendants of Anak from the Nephilim who were probably giants, the Amalekites, the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites as well as the Canaanites lived there. Two of them, Joshua, and Caleb, encouraged them to put their faith in God.

Apart from Joshua and Caleb, only people younger than 20 years old were allowed to cross over to the promised land. As punishment for their lack of faith, God condemned them to wander in the wilderness for 40 years.

Key verse: Numbers 14:24 'But my servant Caleb is different from the others. He has remained loyal to me, and I will bring him into the land he explored. His descendants will receive their full share of that land.' – *New Living Translation*

Korah, Dathan and Abiram were rebels, and were therefore swallowed up by the earth, together with their households. Two hundred and fifty

men who offered incense, also died by fire. Burning incense was a holy act of worship and could only be used by Aaron and his descendants.

One hundred and forty-seven thousand people died because they grumbled against Moses and Aaron. Miriam died at Kadesh, in the Desert of Zin.

There was no water for the people at Meribah, so Moses struck the rock twice in anger, and then the water gushed out. Aaron died on Mount Hor because he rebelled at Meribah. Because Moses sinned, he was barred from entering the Promised Land.

Edom refused to let the Israelites pass through their country, so they had to turn away. The King of Arad from Canaan's towns were destroyed by the Israelites. God sent snakes to bite the murmurers on the way from Mount Hor to the Red Sea. Sihon and the Amorites were defeated, as well as Og and the Bashanites.

Moab's ruler summoned a soothsayer to curse the Israelites, because he knew how many tribes they had already defeated and was scared that the same would happen to them. When Balaam the soothsayer went to Balak, riding his donkey, an angel of the Lord stood in front of them. The donkey rebuked Balaam when he hit him twice. Balaam blessed instead of cursing the Israelites three times, because that was the command he received from the angel of the Lord.

Israel indulged in sexual immorality with the women of Moab and then sacrificed to their gods. God brought a plague on them and 24,000 died.

Joshua was named the new leader of Israel. Moses blessed the tribes and then ascended Mount Nebo to view the promised land.

Key verse: Deuteronomy 34:4 'Then the Lord said to Moses, this is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and I told them I would give it to their descendants. I have now allowed you to see it, but you will not enter the land.' – *New Living Translation*

Then Moses died and was buried, but no one knows where his grave is.

Key verse: Jude 1:9 'But Michael the chief messenger, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, presumed not to

bring against him a blasphemous accusation, but said, Yahweh rebuke you!' – The Scriptures

As Abraham taught a family about faith, Moses had taught a nation about Law. And in centuries to come, Jesus Christ will teach them about love and grace.

Chapter Four

Conquering a Land

1400 B.C. – 1100 B.C.

Joshua (lived 110 years)

In Joshua God chose a righteous and courageous leader for the people; he led them into the promised land, a land of milk and honey. He was in almost every respect a forerunner of Jesus Christ who would lead all believers into an even greater promised land. As Joshua was a saviour of the nation, the Messiah would be the Saviour of the world.

Rahab, a prostitute in Jericho, played a key role in the initial invasion of Jericho when she saved the spies from being caught, because she had faith in the God of the Israelites. Rahab became an ancestor in Jesus' lineage.

Upon God's instruction the people marched around Jericho 7 times while blowing their trumpets, and the 7th time, the walls collapsed and they gained entry and conquered it. They went on and conquered Ai as well.

The Gibeonites tricked Joshua and made a treaty to live in peace with them. When the five Kings of the Amorites – Jerusalem, Hebron, Jamuth, Lachish, and Eglon heard this, they joined forces and attacked Gibeon. God intervened and sent hailstones and prolonged the day so they could pursue the enemy and kill them.

Joshua defeated 31 Kings in all. Then he divided the promised land among the tribes, so the Lord's promise was fulfilled.

Joshua's first address to the eastern tribes: He reminded them to keep the commandment and the Law that Moses gave them:

- To love the Lord their God.
- To walk in all His ways.
- To obey His commands.
- To hold fast to Him and

- To serve Him with all their heart and soul.

His second address was to the western tribes: A stern warning against involvement with pagan people and their idolatry.

The last address was to call the people to renew their covenant with God, and they vowed to be faithful. But it was easier said than done.

Joshua and Eleazer, Aaron's son, died and were buried. They also buried Joseph's bones that they brought up from Egypt at his request.

Although the land was divided between the tribes, they had to drive out the current inhabitants first. The longer they took to drive them out, the greater the risk of intermarriage and worshipping of pagan gods. And it indeed happened.

Judges (for over 325 years)

The Israelites went through repeated cycles of sin and oppression, but fortunately of repentance as well. God raised up judges to lead them.

Society has many rewards to offer those who compromise their faith: wealth, acceptance, recognition, power and influence.

God used evil oppressors to punish the Israelites for their sin, to bring them to the point of repentance and to test their loyalty to Him.

The Military failure of Israel:

Judah and Simeon attacked the Canaanites. The Israelites cut off the thumbs and big toes of Adoni-Bezek to humiliate him and make him ineffective in battle. But according to God's instructions for conquering the promised land, he should have been killed.

The tribes had compromised God's command to drive out the inhabitants of the land. Incomplete removal of evil often means disaster in the end. We must beware of compromising with wickedness.

The rescue of Israel by the judges:

- Othniel judged for 40 years.

The Spirit of the Lord became upon Othniel, and he went to war against the King of Aram and defeated him.

- Ehud judged for 80 years.

Ehud was from the tribe of Benjamin and was left-handed. He stabbed King Eglon with a dagger in his fat belly. He also conquered Moab.

- Shamgar (duration unknown).

He killed 600 Philistines with an ox goad (spiked stick).

- Deborah and Barak reigned for 40 years.

With the help of Zebulun and Naphtali, they defeated Sisera and the Canaanites and later sang a victory song with Barak.

- Gideon judged for 40 years.

Key verse: Judges 6:15 'And he said to Him, O Yahweh (God), with what do I save Israel? See, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.'- The Scriptures

He destroyed his family idols, used a fleece to determine God's will, raised an army of 10,000 and defeated 135,000 Midianites with 300 soldiers.

From this we learn that God can use us despite our limitations and failures.

Abimelech, Gideon's illegitimate son, appointed himself as ruler and killed his 69 half-brothers. In the end he was killed by a woman throwing a millstone on his head when he tried to set the tower on fire.

- Tola judged for 23 years.

He was from the tribe of Issachar and lived in the hill country of Ephraim.

- Jair judged for 22 years.

He had 30 sons, and they rode around on donkeys. They owned 30 towns in the land of Gilead.

- Jephthah judged for 6 years.

He was a brilliant strategist who negotiated before he acted. But he made a rash vow to the Lord that if He gives him victory, he will burn the first thing that comes out of his house. His daughter was the first person who came out and he had to burn her.

- Ibzan judged for 7 years.

He lived in Bethlehem and had 30 sons and 30 daughters.

- Elon judged for 10 years.

He was from Zebulun.

- Abdon judged for 8 years.

He had 40 sons and 30 grandsons, each of whom had his own donkey.

- Samson judged for 20 years.

Key verse: Judges 13:5 'You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and his hair must never be cut. For he will be dedicated to God as a Nazarite from birth. He will rescue Israel from the Philistines.' – *New Living Translation*

Samson received extraordinary strength from the Lord and began to free Israel from Philistine oppression. He killed a lion with his bare hands, burned the Philistine wheat fields, killed 1,000 Philistines with a donkey's jawbone, tore off an iron gate, was betrayed by the greedy Delilah and destroyed thousands of Philistines in one last mighty act.

The Moral failure of Israel:

- Idolatry in the tribe of Dan.

Micah lived in the hill country of Ephraim. He and his mother seemed to be good and moral and might have sincerely desired to worship God, but they disobeyed God by following their own desire instead of doing what God wanted. Because there was no King, the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.

Micah made idols out of silver coins and when a young Levite was looking for a place to live, he made him his personal priest and gave him a salary. Meanwhile the tribe of Dan was looking for a place to settle and ended up stealing all Micah's idols and his priest.

From there they went to a town whose inhabitants lived peacefully. They killed them and rebuilt the town as their own. This shows how far some of the tribes wandered away from God.

- War against the tribe of Benjamin.

A Levi from Bethlehem travelled with his concubine, when they stayed overnight, evil men raped her and she died. The Levi cut her up in 12 pieces and sent it to the other tribes, urging them to do something about it.

They asked for God's help and defeated Benjamin with the third try. The tribe of Benjamin recovered eventually. Saul, Israel's first King, was from this tribe.

- Samuel

He was the last judge. Samuel's life was the transition from theocracy (led by God) to monarchy (led by a King).

Ruth

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. Elimelech, Naomi and their two sons went to live in Moab. When Elimelech and his two sons died, we find the extraordinary faithfulness of the daughter-in-law Ruth to Naomi. Her choice to accompany her to

Judah brings her the blessings of both a new husband and a son. Ruth became the great-grandmother of David.

Key verse: *Ruth 1:16,17 'But Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me.'* – New King James Version

Chapter Five

Israel as a Monarchy

1100 B.C. – 930 B.C.

Samuel (lived 59 years)

One of Elkana's wives, Hannah, was barren, so she prayed to God for a child and vowed to dedicate him to serve the Lord. Samuel was born and lived with Eli, the priest, to be taught by him. Eli had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who were wicked. God let them die on the same day.

Samuel was used by God to assist Him in the transition from a theocracy (led by God) to a monarchy (led by a King). The Israelites desired a human King just like the nations around them. God didn't agree with it because He knew that humans have a sinful nature. So, although Samuel was the last judge in Israel, he was also the most effective of them.

Key verse: 1 Samuel 3:19,20 'As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him, and everything Samuel said was wise and helpful. All the people of Israel from one end of the land to the other knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord.' – New Living Translation

Samuel wore a linen tunic in a variety of colors, called an ephod. Attached to it was a breastplate with 12 gemstones, one for each tribe. Samuel was recognised as a prophet by all the people.

The Philistines captured the Ark, but it only brought trouble, so it was returned to the Israelites.

Saul (lived 59 years)

Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin. When Saul was sent to look for lost donkeys, he went to Samuel to enquire where the donkeys were. The Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he prophesied.

Samuel anointed Saul as the first King of the Israelites. But Saul was impulsive by nature and overstepped his bounds.

God's instruction was to kill and destroy everything when Saul and his son Benjamin defeated the Amalekites, but Saul spared the King's life as well as some of the best animals to sacrifice them.

Key verse: 1 Samuel 15:22,23 'But Samuel replied, What is more pleasing to the Lord: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to His voice? Obedience is far better than sacrifice. Listening to Him is far better than offering the fat of rams. Rebellion is as bad as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as bad as worshipping idols. So, because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has rejected you from being King.' – New Living Translation

Samuel rebuked Saul, and when he turned to leave, Saul grabbed the hem of his robe to stop him, and it tore.

Key verse: *1 Samuel 15:28,29 'So Samuel said to him, The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to your neighbour, who is better than you. Also, the Splendour and Glory and Eminence of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind.'*- Amplified Holy Bible

David (lived 70 years)

The Lord sent Samuel to anoint David, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power. The Spirit of the Lord left Saul and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him. David played the harp for Saul until the evil spirit left.

Goliath from Gath was over 9 feet tall, and challenged anyone who was willing to come against him. David killed Goliath by slinging a stone at his forehead.

Saul became jealous of David and wanted to kill him. His son Jonathan sided with David and helped him to elude Saul many times.

David fought many battles. The Amalekites captured his two wives, Ahinoam and Abigail. David used the priest's ephod to enquire of the Lord whether he should pursue the raiding party and then recaptured them.

Meanwhile Samuel died. Saul was desperate and although he expelled all mediums and physics from the land, he went to the Witch of Endor and asked her to call up the spirit of Samuel. Samuel was angry that Saul had disturbed his rest and informed him that he and his sons would die. And it came true in a battle against the Philistines.

After Saul died, the mantle of responsibility was David's. He had to rule over Judah until all civil conflict was resolved and he was accepted by all the people, and later he ruled over all of Israel.

Key verse: 1 Samuel 13:14 '...Yahweh shall seek for Himself a man after His own heart, and Yahweh shall command Him to be leader over His people...' – The Scriptures

Under David's leadership, Israel's kingdom grew rapidly. With the growth came many changes; from tribal independence to centralised government; from the leadership of judges to a monarchy; from decentralised worship to worship in Jerusalem.

The Ark of God was Israel's national treasure and was ordinarily kept in the Tabernacle. David decided to bring the Ark to Jerusalem to ensure God's blessings on the entire nation.

Saul's daughter, Michal, was brought to David as wife. She allowed herself to become bitter and hated David for loving God.

Key verse: 2 Samuel 6:16 'And it came to be, when the ark of Yahweh came into the City of David, that Michal, daughter of Saul, looked through a window and saw Sovereign David leaping and dancing before Yahweh, and she despised him in her heart.' – The Scriptures

David expressed his desire to build a Temple for the Ark of God, but that task fell on his son, Solomon.

David battled constantly with Israel's enemies. After restoring the nation to peace and great military power, David's personal life became entangled in sin. He committed adultery with Bathsheba and then ordered her husband to be killed in an attempted cover-up.

David deeply regretted what he had done and sought God's forgiveness, but the child of his sinful act died. We may be forgiven by God for our

sins, but we will often experience harsh consequences.

There was more turmoil in David's family. His son, Amnon raped his sister Tamar, so Absalom, his half-brother, had Amnon murdered.

Absalom plotted against his father and declared himself King. He would have made an excellent King, and the people loved him, but he lacked the inner character and control needed in a good leader.

Key verse: *2 Samuel 15:10 'But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, as soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, you shall say, Absalom is King in Hebron.'* – *Amplified Holy Bible*

Absalom died, caught in the branches of a tree when he passed underneath a tree on horseback.

Satan revolted against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel. There was no reason for a census because there was peace for the past 400 years. So, the Lord sent a plague against Israel and many people died.

When David realised that he acted out of pride, he confessed his sins to God. David committed his life to God and remained loyal to him throughout his lifetime. The Book of Psalms gives an even deeper insight into David's love of God.

The Book of Psalms

There are a total of 150 songs in the Book of Psalms. It includes:

- Psalms for the troubled soul.
- Key verse: *Psalm 121:1,2 'I lift my eyes to the hills; where does my help come from? My help comes from Yahweh, maker of the heavens and earth.'* - *The Scriptures*
- Psalms about righteousness and wickedness.
- Key verse: *Psalm 1:1,2 'Blessed is the man who shall not walk in the counsel of the wrong, and shall not stand in the path of sinners, and shall not sit in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the Torah of Yahweh, and he meditates in His Torah day and night.'* - *The Scriptures*
- Psalms of joy and praise.
- Key verse: *Psalm 146:1,2 'Praise Yah! Praise Yahweh, O my being!*

While I live, I praise Yahweh; I sing praises to my Elohim while I exist.'
– *The Scriptures*

- Psalms expressing a variety of sentiments.
- Key verse: *Psalm 12:1,2 'Save, Yahweh, for the lovingly – committed one is no more! For the trustworthy have ceased from among the sons of men. They speak falsehood with each other, they speak with flattering lips, a double heart.'* – *The Scriptures*
- Psalms of the Messiah.

Key verse: *Psalm 2:1,2 'Why do the nations rage, and the peoples meditate emptiness? The sovereigns of the earth take their stand, and the rulers take counsel together, against Yahweh and against His Messiah.'* – *The Scriptures*

Solomon (lived 60 years)

David was blessed with the birth of his son Solomon, who was a completely different character from Absalom.

When Solomon became the King of Israel, he was blessed with the gift of wisdom, so God gave him wisdom, riches, and honour. If he obeyed the Lord, he would also receive a long life.

Solomon's wisdom was demonstrated with the dispute over an infant's true mother. When he threatened the mothers that he would cut the baby in two and give them half each, the true mother emerged.

Solomon was given the task to build the Temple of God. It would become a national monument symbolic of Israel's special relationship with God. The old Tabernacle was moved to the new Temple.

The Temple was dedicated to God in a special ceremony where Solomon blessed the people and praised the Lord. When Solomon finished praying, fire came down and consumed the burnt offering, and the glory of God filled the Temple.

Key verse: *2 Chronicles 7:3 '...He is so good! His faithful love endures forever.'* – *New Living Translation*

Solomon married Pharaoh's daughter and they lived in the royal palace.

Key verse: *2 Chronicles 7:13,14 'At times I might shut up the heavens so that no rain falls, or I might command locusts to devour your crops, or I might send plagues among you. Then if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and heal their land.'* – *New International Version*

When the queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's great success as King, she visited him and asked him hard questions, which he answered with the wisdom he received from God.

Proverbs of Solomon

He has written 1,000's of proverbs:

- Introduction to wisdom.
- Key verse: *Proverbs 9:10 'The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Set-apart One is understanding.'* – *The Scriptures*
- Sayings of the wise.
- Key verse: *Proverbs 3:5 'Trust in Yahweh with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.'* – *The Scriptures*
- Sayings of Agur.
- Key verse: *Proverbs 30:5 'Every word of Eloah is tried: He is a shield to those taking refuge in Him.'* – *The Scriptures*
- Sayings of King Lemuel.
- Key verse: *Proverbs 31:4 'It is not for sovereigns, O Lemuel, not for sovereigns to drink wine, nor for princes to desire strong drink.'* – *The Scriptures*
- The wife of noble character

Key verse: *Proverbs 31:10 'Who does find a capable wife? For she is worth far more than rubies.'* – *The Scriptures*

Songs of Solomon

The songs deal more with love than with wisdom, prayer, or praise. The language is unusually graphic and sensual in description, but there is no hint of improper lust. For many Jews it presents God as the lover and

the nation of Israel as the beloved. With the coming of the Messiah, it will be seen by many as the hidden meaning of Christ and His Church. Whatever else its purpose may serve, it expresses unrestricted joy in a relationship of love.

Solomon's glory fades

Solomon entered forbidden marriages with women of foreign extract and was soon influenced to worship their foreign gods.

Ecclesiastes

Solomon is portrayed as the Teacher and makes observations about life drawn from his own experiences. It is a critical essay of life's true meaning. This is from someone who had it all – tremendous intellect, power, and wealth.

Key verse: Ecclesiastes 12:13,14 'When all has been heard, the end of the matter is: fear God (worship Him with awe-filled reverence, knowing that He is almighty God) and keep His commandments, for this applies to every person. For God will bring every act in judgement, every hidden and secret thing, whether it is good or evil.' - Amplified Holy Bible

People are still searching, yet the more they try to get, the more they realise how little they really have. No pleasure or happiness is possible without God. Without Him, satisfaction is a lost search.

The cure for the feeling of emptiness is to focus on God. His love can fill the emptiness. Work done with the wrong attitude will leave us empty. But work accepted as an assignment from God can be seen as a gift.

Key verse: Ecclesiastes 8:12,13 'Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and his life (seemingly) is prolonged despite his wickedness, still I know that it will be with those who reverently fear God, who fear and worship Him openly, realising His omnipresence and His power. But it will not be well for the evil man, nor will he lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God.' – Amplified Holy Bible

Chapter Six

The divided kingdom

930 B.C. – 725 B.C.

After Solomon's death, his son Rehoboam became King of Israel. Rehoboam ruled with an iron hand. Because Solomon excessively taxed the people and drafted them into a labour and military force, an assembly of Israel pleaded with the new King to lighten the yoke that his father had put upon them, but Rehoboam preferred to follow the advice of his young friends and the people of Israel started to rebel against him.

For this reason, the kingdom was split into two, Rehoboam ruled Judah and Benjamin in the South, and Jeroboam ruled the 10 tribes of Israel in the North. Jeroboam was appointed by God himself. The northern tribes of Israel refused to be ruled by a descendant of David to this day.

Key verse: 1 Kings 14:7 'Give your husband, Jeroboam, this message from the Lord, the God of Israel. I ripped the kingdom away from the family of David and gave it to you. But you have not been like My servant David, who obeyed My commands and followed Me with all his heart and always did whatever I wanted him to do.' – New Living Translation

Rehoboam worshipped God, and Jeroboam worshipped idols. Jeroboam did not learn from Israel's previous mistakes when he had a golden calf made in Bethel. He intended to compete with Jerusalem, and this led to Israel's eventual downfall.

Civil war continued between the kings of the nations.

Judah:

- Rehoboam was defeated by Shishak from Egypt.
- Abijah defeated Jeroboam from Israel.
- Asa defeated Zerah the Ethiopian and harassed Baasha.
- Jehoshaphat made Judah prosper with strong military power.

Israel:

- Jeroboam was defeated by Abijah from Judah.
- Nadab continued idolatry and was assassinated.
- Baasha killed Nadab and was harassed by Asa from Judah.
- Key verse: *1 Kings 16:2 'I lifted you out of the dust to make you ruler of My people Israel, but you followed the evil example of Jeroboam. You have aroused My anger by causing My people to sin. So now I will destroy you and your family...they will be eaten by dogs, and those who die in the field will be eaten by vultures.'* – New Living Translation
- Elah was killed by Zimri.
- Zimri killed Baasha's family and friends.
- Omri defeated Tirzah, Israel's capital and built Samaria.
- Ahab married the evil Jezebel and worshipped Baal in Samaria.

Elijah

Jezebel killed all the prophets in Samaria, except one, Elijah. God sent Elijah to Ahab with a message that it would not rain for the next three years. Then Elijah went into hiding, where he was fed by ravens. A miracle happened when a widow and her son's flour and oil were never used up, so they continued to provide shelter and food for them and Elijah. The widow's son died, and Elijah brought him back to life.

Obadiah, who oversaw the palace, was a believer in God. He met Elijah and they arranged a meeting on Mount Carmel with Ahab and 850 priests of Baal and Jezebel. An offering was prepared, and God demonstrated His power by sending fire on Elijah's offering. Baal did not respond to Ahab and his people's prayers. All the people had to admit that the Lord is God. Elijah commanded that all the priests be killed.

Elijah prophesied to Ahab that it would start raining again, and fled to Mount Horeb when Jezebel threatened his life. The Lord sent him to anoint a few kings and then appoint Elisha to succeed Elijah as prophet.

Elijah was taken up in a whirlwind at the Jordan river. The only other person that was taken up by God, was Enoch, the 7th patriarch. Elisha

received double Elijah's spirit on his request. Elisha also performed many miracles.

Judah:

- Jehoram married a wicked daughter of Ahab and compelled the people to worship idols and killed all his brothers. He received a mysterious letter from Elijah, who predicted that he would be struck ill.

The prophecy of Obadiah

Obadiah prophesied against Edom. Obadiah means 'servant of God'. He expressed his concerns about the pride of the Edomites whose mountain strongholds in Mount Seir, south of Judah, had given them a false sense of security.

Pride is one of the most dangerous sins because it causes us to take advantage of others. God would judge the Edomites for taking advantage of God's people.

Edomites are the descendants of Esau, one of Isaac's twin sons, and had struggled for supremacy. Edom had a history of adversity. They refused Israel passage on their march to Canaan, and both Saul and David fought Edom. So, when the Edomites liberated themselves from Judah's control during the reign of Jehoram, and gave aid to foreign enemies, it was a cause for angry reaction.

- Ahaziah was a friend of Joram of Israel.
- Athaliah (queen) killed all her grandchildren except Joash who was hidden, and she ravaged the Temple to furnish Baal's Temple.
- Joash promoted peace and prosperity, repaired the Temple, and smashed the altars of Baal, but abandoned God after Jehoiada died, and had Jehoiada's son killed.

The prophecy of Joel

God called the prophet Joel to cry out against Judah, using a locust infestation as a basis for a stinging attack and a bold warning of God's

judgement. Joel warns that anything less than total devotion to the One true God will result in punishment. He also warns that the day of the Lord is coming when God will bring all mankind to account for their lives and deeds. Joel urges the people to pray, fast and repent to be saved in the end.

- Amaziah was basically good but did not completely wipe out Baal worship.
- Azariah (Uzziah) owned many farms and vineyards, constructed water reservoirs and fortified towers, reorganised the army, but violated laws for priestly function – so God struck him with leprosy.

Israel:

- Ahaziah proposed a joint venture with Judah.
- Joram suffered famine and war during most of his reign.
- Jehu was responsible for the deaths of Joram, Ahaziah, the King of Judah, and Jezebel.
- Jehoahaz had an evil reign which included the worship of Asherah, which is usually called detestable.
- Jehoash was evil but he recognised Elisha as prophet.
- Jeroboam II was very evil but politically powerful. His nation enjoyed economic prosperity and military peace.

The prophecy of Jonah

God selected Jonah to take a special message to the heathen Assyrians in Nineveh. Nineveh was established by the great warrior Nimrod. Jonah tried to evade his responsibility and was swallowed by a large fish which God provided for the occasion. So, Jonah proceeded and delivered the message that Nineveh is about to be destroyed and that they should repent.

This demonstrated God's universal grace and divine concern that, despite Israel being God's chosen people, their failure to repent lowered them to a level of spiritually beneath pagans.

The prophecy of Hosea

This is a reminder that the people of Israel had not been willing to put away their idols or forget their pagan Baal. God called upon Hosea to bring the message and warnings in a most unusual way. The Israelites sinned against God, the same as an adulterous wife sin against her husband.

Hosea had to marry a woman whom God knew would be unfaithful and bear children. Jezreel, the firstborn, predicted that the people of Israel would be scattered by God. Foreign invaders would take them out of the land of Canaan. The second child warned that when the time came, God would be without mercy. And the third child signified God's total rejection of Israel, of whom He would say, 'not my people'.

When Hosea's wife Gomer consorted with other lovers, it typified Israel's unfaithfulness in playing the harlot with other gods. Just as Hosea redeemed Gomer from slavery, God always stands ready to redeem His people from sin.

The prophecy of Amos

In the days of Jeroboam II, God called a lowly shepherd from Judah to prophecy against several nations, but mainly Israel. Amos came during a time when great military successes had brought prosperity, and with it selfishness, greed and immorality. He called for consistency in one's religious exercises and daily ethical conduct and cried out against a people who honour deity with their many sacrifices yet refused justice and mercy to the oppressed and needy.

Believing in God is more than a personal matter; God calls all believers to work against injustices in society and to aid those less fortunate.

The prophecy of Elisha

Some of Elisha's miracles:

- Purified water by adding salt to it.
- 42 youths were killed by two bears for jeering at Elisha.
- Increased oil to pay off a woman's debt.
- Promised a son to a Shunammite couple who gave him accommodation.

- Added flour to stew to take away poisonous wild herb.
- Fed 100 men with 20 loaves of bread.
- He raised the dead son of the Shunammite couple.
- He foretold a famine that would last 7 years.
- He made a lost axe head float on the water.

Judah:

- Uzziah reigned with great success, but his pride went to his head and he attracted leprosy.
- Jotham took charge of the palace and governed the people of the land.

The prophecy of Isaiah

Isaiah's message began with a condemnation of Judah's many sins. He insisted that Judah's sins would bring severe punishment.

His prophecy was of:

- The sin of religious formalism.

Isaiah compared Judah with Sodom and Gomorrah. To hear what God wanted to say, the people had to listen and be willing to obey.

The sacrifices became empty without faith. Many people today place more faith in the ritual of their religion practices than in the God they worship. Gifts and sacrifices mean nothing to God when they come from someone with a corrupt heart. God wants us to love Him, trust Him and turn from our sin. After that He will be pleased with our sacrifice of time, money, or service.

- Sin of injustice.
- Key verse: *Isaiah 1:21,23 'See how Jerusalem, once so faithful, has become a prostitute. Once the home of justice and righteousness, she is now filled with murderers...Your leaders are rebels, the companions of the thieves. All of them take bribes and refuse to defend the orphan and the widows.'* - *New Living Translation*

- Sin of idolatry.

The people were following the practices of the Assyrian Empire. Divination meant claiming to know and control the future by interpreting omens. These practices were forbidden by God. The Philistines worshipped Dagon, Ashtoreth and Baal-sebub.

- Sin of pride.

- Key verse: *Isaiah 2:11,12 'The eyes of the arrogant man will be humbled, and the pride of men brought low; the Lord alone will be exalted that day.'* – *New International Version*

- Sin of the leaders.

The leaders were responsible for helping people, but instead they stole from the poor. Corruption will bring God's wrath, especially if others follow your example.

- Sin of the women.

The women of Judah had placed their emphasis on clothing and jewellery rather than on God. They dressed to be noticed, to gain approval, and to be fashionable. Instead of being concerned about the oppression around them, they were self-serving and self-centred. When God blesses you with money or position, don't flaunt it.

- Sin of greed.

Key verse: *Isaiah 5:8,9 'Destruction is certain for you who buy up property, so others have no place to live...But the Lord Almighty has sealed your awful fate. With my own ears I have heard Him say, many beautiful homes will stand deserted, the owners dead or gone...'* – *New Living Translation*

- Sin of revelry.

These people spent many hours drinking and partying, but Isaiah predicted that eventually many would die of hunger and thirst. If our pleasure doesn't have God's blessing, it may destroy us. Leaving God out

of our life allows sin to come in. God wants us to enjoy life but to avoid those activities that could lead us away from Him.

- Sin of arrogance.

Arrogant people live by their own values rather than God's. Many of today's media and sports heroes are idolised because of their ability to live as they please. Are your heroes those who defy God or those who defy the world to serve God?

- Sin of rationalisation.

When people can see no distinction between good and evil, destruction soon follows. It is easy for people to say: No one can decide for anyone else what is right or wrong. If people don't take the Bible as their standard, soon all moral choices become fuzzy. Without God, they are headed for a breakdown and much suffering.

- Sin of drunkenness.

Key verse: Isaiah 5:22 'Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks.' – New international Version

Isaiah challenged the people to come to their senses before it is too late, and to look forward to the last days, when there will be a spiritual renewal and everlasting peace.

Israel:

- Zechariah ruled in Samaria and was assassinated by Shallum.
- Shallum was assassinated by Menahem.
- Menahem killed the entire population and ripped open the pregnant women.
- Pekahiah continued idolatry.
- Pekah assassinated Pekahiah.
- Hoshea assassinated Pekah.

Judah:

- Ahaz followed Israel in idolatry. He sacrificed his own son in the fire.
- Hezekiah instigated civil and religious reforms.

Another Prophecy and vision of Isaiah

Isaiah had a vision where he found himself in the presence of God. He was told to go to the people of Judah with a message from God. Isaiah was told to keep preaching until their rejection had brought utter ruin.

During the vision Isaiah's lips are touched with a burning coal by a seraph who told Isaiah that his sin was forgiven. Then the Lord asked:

Key verse: Isaiah 6:8,9 '...Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us? Then I said, Here am I, send me! And He said, Go and tell this people.' – Amplified Holy Bible

Prophecy of Micah

The prophecy of Micah is very similar to Isaiah's. Micah warned the people of Judah, Jerusalem and Samaria. God's message through all His prophets is the same message – of sin, destruction, exile, restoration and the coming of a Messiah to save the world.

Micah predicts the fall of Samaria, the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib, the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple, the exile to Babylon, the return from captivity to peace and prosperity, and the birth of the Messiah in the city of Bethlehem.

Micah preached God's delight in faith that produces justice, love for others, and obedience to Him. We can please God by seeking these attributes in our work, our family, our church and our neighbourhood.

Key verse: *Micah 7:18-20 'Where is another God like you, who pardons the sins of the survivors among His people? You cannot stay angry with Your people forever because You delight in showing mercy. Once again You will have compassion for us. You will trample our sins under Your feet and throw them into the depths of the ocean! You will show us Your faithfulness and unfailing love as You promised with an oath to our ancestors Abraham and Jacob long ago.'* – *New Living Translation*

Early beginnings of captivity

The warnings of the prophets that Israel would fall into Assyrian captivity were already starting to come true.

Key verse: 2 Kings 15:29 'In the days of Pekah, King of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser King of Assyria came and took Ijon, Abel Beth Maachah, Janoah, Kadesh, Hazor, Gilead and Galilea, all the land of Naphtali; and he carried them captive to Assyria.' – New King James Version

Syria and Israel became scared of Assyria and tried to convince Judah to side with them against Assyria, but they refused, and Israel and Syria turned against Judah.

Another prophecy of Isaiah

Isaiah prophesied the capture of Syria and Israel, and that Assyria would be destroyed, and a remnant of God's people would be brought back to re-establish a Jewish nation.

Then a messianic prophecy that the Saviour would be called Immanuel at His birth. He will be a descendant of King David, who will establish a kingdom and draw Himself a remnant of those who love God. And in the last days there will be justice, peace and rejoicing in the Saviour's kingdom.

Judah

- **Ahaz** didn't understand Isaiah's prophecy and only trusted in his own military strength. The Lord handed Judah over to the King of Aram. The Arameans took many of his people as prisoners and brought them to Samaria.

The prophet of the Lord **Oded** advised them to return the captives and they listened to him. The Lord was humbling Judah because King Ahaz had encouraged them to sin. King Ahaz took some items from the Lord's Temple and closed the doors so no one could worship there.

Another prophecy of Isaiah

Isaiah prophesied against the nations. Although Isaiah knew that invasion by foreign nations was part of God's plan for punishing Judah, he was also aware that these nations were acting from their own wicked motivations, and that God will ultimately bring about their destruction as well. Babylon was singled out because it was the nation which would carry Judah away in captivity in just a few years. Isaiah predicted that Babylon would be conquered by the Medo-Persian empire.

It was not long before some of the judgements began to be fulfilled, just as Isaiah had prophesied. Isaiah warned the Israelites against a relapse, but the hardness of their hearts kept them from hearing it.

- **Hezekiah** had a personal relationship with God. He demonstrated his obedience by destroying the idols with the help of the Levites and restored Temple worship. Passover was reinstated as a national holiday, and he even offered it to the Israelites. There was a revival in Judah!

Key verse: 2 Kings 18:5 'Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. There was never another King like him in the land of Judah, either before or after his time. He remained faithful to the Lord in everything, and he carefully obeyed all the commands the Lord had given Moses.' – New Living Translation

Israel

- **Hoshea** was attacked by the King of Assyria, who found out that Hoshea was a traitor. Hoshea was jailed. The King laid siege to Samaria for three years.

Israel was taken captive.

Chapter Seven

Judea after Israel's fall

725 B.C. – 585 B.C.

The Prophecy of Isaiah

Isaiah warned Judah against Egypt and Ethiopia. He was displeased with the thought that God's people rely on Egypt's horses and chariots, instead of relying on God's unlimited power.

Isaiah goes about naked for three years to disgrace himself as a sign and symbol that Assyria will disgrace Egypt and Cushite by leading them away in captivity. But Judah rejected the truth.

Isaiah prophesied that God would punish Assyria, and the nation would be restored if only they would repent and return to the Lord.

Judah was invaded by the King of Assyria who captured them. The current King of Judah, Hezekiah, gave all the silver and gold of Judah to the King of Assyria to persuade them to withdraw from them.

God extended 15 years to Hezekiah's life, after he wept bitterly when Isaiah told him that he was going to die. Hezekiah had great riches and honour, and his pride did not respond to the kindness that was shown to him.

Although Hezekiah was very successful in reforming the country, he also made the mistake of showing all his wealth to messengers from Babylon.

Key verse: 2 Chronicles 32:25 'But Hezekiah did nothing for the Lord in return for the benefit bestowed on him, because his heart had become proud; therefore, God's wrath came on him, on Judah and on Jerusalem.' – *Amplified Holy Bible*

Judah:

- Manasseh turned the nation to paganism.

Another Prophecy of Isaiah

Isaiah predicted the restoration of Israel, their return from captivity to a prosperous nation and to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. God revealed the name of Cyrus, the Persian King, who 150 years later would be God's instrument in bringing about the restoration. Isaiah even prophesied about the new kingdom for believers.

Key verse: Isaiah 55:6,7 'Seek the Lord while He may be found; call on Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him, and to our God, for He will freely pardon.' – *New International Version*

Isaiah emphasized the promise of eternal life after death.

Key verse: Isaiah 66:22-24 'For just as the new heavens and the new earth which I make will remain and endure before Me, declares the Lord, so your offspring and your name will remain and endure, and it shall be that from New Moon to New Moon and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all mankind will come to bow down and worship before Me, says the Lord. Then they will go forth and look upon the dead bodies of the rebellious men who have transgressed against Me; for their worm (maggot) will not die, and their fire will not go out; and they will be an abhorrence to all mankind.' – *Amplified Holy Bible*

Some people will reject the Message because:

- They are wilfully stubborn.
- They are caught up in material pursuits.
- Of pleasurable diversions.
- Of false religious worship.
- The message can be hidden from religious leaders.

Tradition holds that Isaiah was sawn in two by his enemies.

- Manasseh was taken captive to Babylon, but he repented, and the Lord re-established him on the throne of Judah. He built the outer wall of the City of David, and he removed the foreign gods from the Temple of the Lord.

The prophecy of Nahum

Nahum, like Jonah, prophesied against Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. The Assyrians took great pride in maiming their enemies, and even boiling them in tar or skinning them alive. This was disappointing because 125 years before they had received God's mercy but didn't show their appreciation for it. So, Nahum prophesied against Judah's archenemy and predicted her fall.

Anyone who remains arrogant and resists God's authority will face His anger. No ruler or nation will get away with rejecting Him. No individual will be able to hide from His judgement. Yet those who keep trusting God will be kept safe forever!

- Amon, the evil King was assassinated.
- Josiah had a Godly character.

Key verse: *2 Kings 23:25 'Never before had there been a King like Josiah, who turned to the Lord with all his heart and soul and strength, obeying all the Laws of Moses. And there has never been a King like him since.'* – *New Living Translation*

The prophecy of Zephaniah

Zephaniah's mission and message is the same as that of the prophets before him – bringing judgement against immorality, injustice and pagan idolatry – and yet his central theme is the coming of 'the day of the Lord'.

Key verse: *Zephaniah 1:3 'I will sweep away both people and animals alike. Even the birds in the air and the fish in the sea will die. I will reduce the wicked to heaps of rubble, along with the rest of humanity, says the Lord.'* – *New Living Translation*

The day of the Lord will be accompanied by salvation of God's faithful remnant. If we remain faithful to Him, He will show us mercy. The people of Israel who survive will do no wrong to each other, never telling lies or deceiving one another. They will live peaceful lives, lying down to sleep in safety; there will be no one to make them afraid.

The prophecy of Jeremiah

Jeremiah's call:

Key verse: *Jeremiah 1:4,5 'Now the word of Yahweh came to me, saying, Before I formed you in the belly I knew you, and before you came out of the womb, I did set you apart – I appointed you a prophet to nations.'* – *The Scriptures*

Jeremiah had 2 visions:

- The branch of an almond tree: God explains that he is 'watching' while Jeremiah is serving Him on earth. (The word for almond tree in Hebrew sounds like 'watching').
- A boiling pot: is a symbol of war.

Jeremiah brought God's judgement against the people for their lust for foreign gods and called them to repentance. He questioned God, who reaffirms that there will be peace in the end, but not before judgement and terrible destruction for Judah.

All this 'hard preaching' brought violent reaction, and the people plotted to kill Jeremiah, but God exposed the plot and saved Jeremiah. Jeremiah was both angry and scared, and to give Jeremiah assurance, God gave him a linen belt as a sign. He had to hide the belt and later retrieve it, but it was ruined.

Key verse: *Jeremiah 13: 9 'Thus says the Lord: In this manner I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem.'* – *New King James Version*

Strengthened and encouraged by this demonstration, Jeremiah continued his difficult mission. God knows that many people who have sincerely turned to Him for a time, will later backslide and turn away. Jeremiah was also instructed not to marry, attend funerals, or join in festive celebrations.

The people of Judah mocked and taunted Jeremiah because the destruction and fall of Judah did not happen immediately and Jeremiah pleaded with God for the swift execution of what he predicted. Jeremiah

also reminded the people to keep the Sabbath holy. The people called him 'the weeping prophet'.

God gave Jeremiah the sign of the potter and his clay to explain the relationship between the people and God. As the potter has power over his clay, so God as the Creator of the universe has unlimited power over man and nations.

Jeremiah was beaten and imprisoned.

Key verse: Jeremiah 20:4 '...I will hand the people of Judah over to the King of Babylon. He will take them captive to Babylon or run them through with the sword.' – *New Living Translation*

The nation was now on the brink of spiritual revival. Perhaps Jeremiah's preaching had been more effective than he realised.

There was foreign unrest everywhere. Assyria, Babylonia and Egypt were all vying for supremacy. Now, years later, the prophecies of Nahum and others regarding Nineveh's fall, were fulfilled. Babylonia began to rise to world supremacy.

Judah became corrupt again, and Jeremiah prophesied against Jerusalem, only to be confronted by the priests, but they released him eventually because he was only bringing the Word of God to them.

Jeremiah also prophesied against Judah's oppressors like Egypt and the Philistines of Gaza. He predicted that Babylon would subdue Egypt.

We gain several insights about God and His plan for this world.

- Although God chooses Israel for a special purpose, He loves all people and wants all to come to Him.
- God is holy and will not tolerate sin.
- God's judgement is not based on prejudice and a desire for revenge, but on fairness and justice.
- God does not delight in judgement but in salvation.
- God is impartial – he judges everyone by the same standard.

The prophecy of Habakkuk

Habakkuk posed a profound theological question:

- How can a righteous and holy God use a wicked nation like Babylonia to bring punishment against God's own people, rebellious and sinful though they may be?
- How can God permit these unrighteous nations to succeed in their evil oppressions?
- How can God permit the wicked to prosper at the expense of the righteous?
- How can a righteous God permit evil to exist at all?

God addressed the central question. His answer is that evil, wherever it is found, always bears within the seeds of its own

destruction. Judah's sins have condemned it to inevitable destruction. The evil oppressors will face their own destruction in the end. Only in righteousness there is life; sin always brings death.

Habakkuk accepted God's answer and was waiting patiently for the punishment of the wicked oppressors.

Key verse: *Habakkuk 3:2 'O Lord, I have heard the report about You and I fear. O Lord, revive Your work amid the years, amid the years make it known; in wrath earnestly remember compassion and love.'* – *Amplified Holy Bible*

Judah:

- Jehoahaz was an evil King who was banned to Egypt.

First exile to Babylon

King Nebuchadnezzar from Babylon besieged Jerusalem and took some of the people captive. A young man called Daniel was included among the people of Judah who were deported, along with confiscated Temple articles.

Second exile to Babylon

Jerusalem was besieged and more people were taken captive to Babylon.

Judah:

- Jehoiakim was also taken captive to Babylon.

Another Prophecy of Jeremiah

God revealed the length of the captivity to Jeremiah as 70 years, after which Babylon will fall.

During all these years of rebellion and idolatry, there was one clan that remained faithful to God – the Rechabites. They lived a disciplined and nomadic life. The point is, there should have been more people obeying the commands of God, their very Creator.

Baruch

He was a scribe who recorded all of Jeremiah's prophecies to be preserved for ages to come, and for the people of Judah to review all his messages. Jehoiakim burns the scroll, and Baruch replaced it after God gave him some perspective:

Key verse: Jeremiah 45:2-5 'This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to you, Baruch: You have said, I am overwhelmed with trouble! Haven't I had enough pain already? And now the Lord has added more! I am weary of my own sighing and can find no rest. Baruch, this is what the Lord says: I will destroy this nation that I built. I will uproot what I planted. Are you seeking great things for yourself? Don't do it! But don't be discouraged. I will bring great disaster upon all these people, but I will protect you wherever you go. I, the Lord, have spoken!' – New Living Translation

Third exile to Babylon

Jerusalem was sieged for the third time; the Temple was destroyed and desecrated. The nation was scattered and almost all the population was taken to Babylon.

Judah:

- Jehoiachin was also taken into captivity in Babylon.
- Zedekiah was the last King of Judah and rebelled against the King of Babylon. He ordered the Hebrews to free their slaves after six years

of service.

Final exile to Babylon

Babylon was in the land of Shinar, present day Iraq. This was the country of Nimrod where the tower of Nimrod was built. He was a great grandson of Noah and was known as a mighty warrior against God. His grandfather was Ham. The sons of Anak were described as giants. Goliath, the giant who was killed by David, was also a descendant of Ham.

The prophecy of Daniel

Daniel and his four friends were chosen to be educated in the Aramean language and the Babylonian's culture for three years. Their names were changed, but this doesn't mean that their characters would change as well. It simply indicated a new phase in their lives. For the Chaldeans it meant that they would be more skilled and useful in their service to them.

It was not long before Daniel was elevated to a high position in King Nebuchadnezzar's palace. He identified and interpreted the King's dream. Daniel seized the occasion as an opportunity to glorify God.

The dream was of a statue of four different metals – gold, silver, bronze and iron, and a stone which breaks the statue. With God's revelation, Daniel interpreted the image in the dream. There would be four successive heathen kingdoms that would dominate the world.

- The head of gold was Nebuchadnezzar's Chaldean Empire.
- The chest and arms of silver was the Medo-Persian Empire.
- The belly and hips of bronze was the Greco-Macedonian empire.
- The legs, feet and toes of iron and clay were the Roman empire during which time the kingdom of the Messiah will have its beginning.

These four kingdoms will be destroyed but the kingdom of Heaven will endure forever.

A rock struck the statue, and the wind swept the chaff away without a trace. The rock became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth. The mountain will be a kingdom set up by God, never to be destroyed.

The golden era speaks of the beauty of the kingdom of Babylon. It surpasses all the other metals/kingdoms. The chief and biggest heathen kingdom of the world is thus portrayed.

The silver era speaks of Darius the Mede, who assumed rule over the Neo-Babylonian empire after the fall of a Mede-Persian force. The rule of the Medes and the Persians were consolidated under Cyrus. His rule marked the beginning of the return of the Jewish remnant to Jerusalem.

The bronze era (Grecian empire) was ruled by Alexander the Great who conquered Palestine, and four other successive Kings. Then came Antiochus Epiphanes who was a type of Antichrist.

The Roman empire was ruled by: Julius Ceasar, Caesar Augustus, House of Flavius, Antonian rulers, Commodus, Diocletian, Constantine and his sons, the Gothics, Caesar and Pompey and many others.

Legs of iron: because iron was an inferior metal, it indicated a decay of values and quality. The fourth kingdom collapsed from gold to mud! The two legs indicated a division between the Eastern Greek Church and the Western Roman church.

The 10 toes represented 10 kingdoms. Because it was partly iron and partly clay, the kingdoms were partly strong and partly weak. There was a lack of unity because iron and clay don't mix.

The prophecy of Ezekiel

A special theme to Ezekiel's prophetic messages while he was in exile already, was that, by severe punishment and subsequent restoration, Judah would come to know it's God as the true God of the universe, who rules over the affairs of individuals and nations.

Key verse: *Ezekiel 2:9,10 'Then I looked and saw a hand reaching out to me, and it held a scroll. He unrolled it, and I saw that both sides were covered with funeral songs, other words of sorrow, and pronouncements of doom.'* – *New Living Translation*

Key verse: Ezekiel 3:1-3 'The voice said to me, Son of man, eat what I am giving you – eat this scroll! Then go and give this message to the people of Israel. So, I opened my mouth, and he fed me the scroll. Eat it all, He said. And when I ate it, it tasted as sweet as honey.' – New Living Translation

If you digest God's Word, you will find that not only does it make you stronger in your faith, but its wisdom also sweetens your life. God's message must sink deep into your heart and show in your actions before you can effectively help others understand and apply the gospel.

An extraordinary thing happened. Ezekiel claimed that God took him to Jerusalem to show him the idolatry in the Temple and the punishment of idolaters and corrupt leaders, and then returned him to his house. It all happened somehow while Ezekiel was sitting in his house in the presence of a group of elders.

God called Ezekiel to speak out against the false prophets who were deceiving Judah into believing their captivity would soon end with swift victory over Babylonia.

God discredited any notion that Judah was suffering because of their predecessors' sins. He stated that each person is accountable for his own sins, and God assures us that just as the wicked can repent and be saved, the righteous can fall into sin and be destroyed.

God felt deeply the shame and disgrace that His 'bride' has brought Him. Her disrespect for his spiritual leadership, her chasing after material satisfaction, and her many adulteries with lesser gods have left him no choice: Israel must be put away until she repents. The time has come.

Jeremiah's lamentations

After the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah's predictions had come true. He could easily have said: 'I told you so!' But that was not consistent with his character. He was grieved at the loss of Jerusalem and the scattering of God's people. He is both angry and sad. This weeping prophet, who so many times lamented his own sufferings, now lamented the sufferings of his fellow countrymen.

His poem speaks of his personal viewpoint about his horror, grief, confusion and yet hope. The poem is read each year on the date of the Temple's destruction.

Chapter Eight

The exiled nation

585 B.C. – 535 B.C.

Ezekiel's restoration prophecies

Twenty years had passed since the first exile from Judah. Another 50 years before the exile would end.

Ezekiel criticised Israel's (north and south) spiritual leaders for taking care of themselves rather than taking care of their people. He outlined their sins and pronounced their judgement.

Key verse: Ezekiel 34:5,12,16 'So my sheep have been scattered without a shepherd...I will find my sheep and rescue them...I will search for my lost ones who strayed away, and I will bring them safely home again. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak. But I will destroy those who are fat and powerful. I will feed them, yes – feed them justice!' – New Living Translation

When our leader fails us, we must not despair but remember that God is in control and that he promises to return and care for us. He can turn any tragic situation into good for His kingdom. For example, the war between Russia and Ukraine, and the earthquakes in Turkey have forced some of the Jews to return to Israel. Over half of the Jewish nation has already returned to Israel from across the world!

God brings a vision to Ezekiel of the new life Israel will have. The visual image – of dry bones coming to life. The dry bones are a picture of the Jews in captivity – scattered and dead. The scattered exiles of both Israel and Judah would be released and one day be gathered in their homeland.

The climax of Ezekiel's restoration takes us to the time when the forces of evil will be destroyed forever. This is a future event. The ruler Gog of the land called Magog, and Meshech and Tubal. It corresponds with the names of the sons of Japheth. The punishment will be of an eternal

nature. There will be no restoration of the wicked – only everlasting peace and joy for the righteous.

Another prophecy of Daniel

Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are in the city of Babylon and about to be punished because they refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar's golden image. When they are put into a fiery furnace, they are saved from death by the Power of God. The King was impressed by the trust they placed in God. This concept is influencing the pagan world leader and may someday result in true conversion.

Another prophecy of Ezekiel

In a vision, Ezekiel saw a great Temple. The most important feature of the restoration would be the rebuilding of the Temple. It gave renewed hope to a downcast nation. The city of Jerusalem would soon be reconstructed. Ezekiel was once again taken by the hand of the Lord to the land of Israel. There He is showing symbolically the new Temple to come, its worship rituals, its celebrations, its servants and priests, its Laws and the division of the land surrounding it.

God's Temple was for true worshippers only. Those whose lives are holy, whose wills are obedient, and whose hearts are pure.

Sixteen years earlier, Ezekiel had prophesied that Nebuchadnezzar was to lay siege on Tyre. He managed to destroy the mainland city, but he could not reach the island city. Therefore, God told Ezekiel that he would give him Egypt as a consolation prize.

In 322 B.C. Alexander the Great and his mighty Grecian army would build a causeway to the island and bring about the very degree of destruction which Ezekiel had predicted.

Another prophecy of Daniel

Nebuchadnezzar had another dream and Daniel interpreted it with God's revelations to him.

Key verse: *Daniel 4:24-25 '...a voice called from heaven, O King Nebuchadnezzar, this message is for you! You are no longer the ruler of*

this kingdom. You will be driven from human society. You will live in the fields with the wild animals, and you will eat grass like a cow. Seven periods of time will pass while you live this way, until you learn that the Most High rules over the kingdoms of the world and gives them to anyone He chooses.’ - New Living Translation

The prophecy was fulfilled. The King was temporarily insane. After that, he urged the people to turn to this very special King of Heaven, the Most High God. What a happy ending!

Job and the exile’s suffering

Now, 45 years into the exile from Judah, many of the people were wondering if there was still a God. Even the wicked people must have bent their knees by now in prayer. How can they believe in a God who would allow such suffering? The faithful ones never understood their personal involvement in the first place.

Job was one of the steadfast people who suffered most of everyone and is legendary. So, we are looking at the poem he wrote amidst his suffering. Job lived before the teaching of the Law, before the promises made to Abraham, and he is not even one of the children of Israel. He is just a lone human being in terrible suffering for no apparent reason.

The poem starts with Job’s prosperity, and then turns to a conversation between God and Satan. Because Satan claims that Job is righteous only because of his prosperity, God allows Satan to test his theory by removing Job’s prosperity.

In the second scene, Job does not curse God, but he asks hard questions of God. His three friends reckon that Job must have sinned, to bring such suffering. But Job maintains his innocence.

In the third scene, someone else claims that God didn’t necessarily act on sin, but that suffering teaches you a lesson and strengthens you.

In the final scene God demanded to know what right Job had to question the Creator of the universe about his ways. Job’s humble response demonstrated the depth of his righteous character, and his prosperity was restored.

Psalms of a people in exile

Like Job, the people had fallen from prosperity to shame. Their prayers reflected seriously upon their predicament and their sins. Confession is a central theme and hope for deliverance was their prayer.

Key verse: *Psalm 137:1,9 'By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion...Happy the one who takes and dashes your little ones against the rock!' – New King James Version*

Daniel's dream of four kingdoms

Babylon was a rapidly declining empire. Daniel had his dreams again. He dreamed that the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea and the four beasts came up from the sea.

The four beasts represented the four kingdoms prior to the kingdom of the Most High. These beasts represented earthly political world powers.

The first beast was a lion with wings of an eagle. The wings were plucked off, and he was given a man's heart. The torn wings showed the decline of Babylon. The heart belonged to Nebuchadnezzar who recognized the Power of God in the end.

The second beast looked like a bear, raised up on one side, and had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. Although not a royal animal like a lion, it was still a dangerous animal. The bear was resting on the one (Medes) front leg and standing on the other (Persians), ready to pounce on its prey. The eating of the three ribs indicated the three kingdoms that the animal had devoured in its victories. He had the victim in its power, between his teeth.

The Persian's three ribs between its teeth: Lydia, Babylon and Egypt conquered. The bear would still pounce on the people of Daniel. Cyrus, the Persian, had to fulfil the will of God. According to the prophet Isaiah, the Lord had called Cyrus 100 years before his birth, to return the Jews to their native land, and to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

The third beast looked like a leopard with four wings on its back and with four heads. He was given the authority to rule. The leopard was the Grecian empire, ruled by Alexander the Great. The four wings indicated

that he was quicker in action than his predecessors. The lion-eagle had only two wings. He expanded quickly in the four directions of the compass. From Macedonia onwards he conquered Greece, Asia Minor, Babylon, Persia, India and even Egypt.

The four heads were the successive four generals: Kasander ruled over Macedonia and Greece, Lysimachus over Bithynia and Turkey, Seleucus over Syria (south), and Ptolemy over Egypt (north). The north and southern states would continually be at war.

The fourth beast had large iron teeth, crushed, and devoured the residue with its feet. It was terrifying and frightening and had 10 horns.

The fourth beast was the Roman empire. Caesar, the emperor, appointed Romans to rule Israel. The 10 horns represented 10 Kings. It coincided with the statue's 10 toes. It represents the 10 Kings of the Revived Roman Empire in the last days during the Great Tribulation.

Then there were three horns and one little one. The three horns were uprooted. The little horn had eyes like a man and a mouth speaking pompous words.

The little horn refers to the coming Antichrist. He will get his power from Satan. The other three Kings will surrender their power to the Antichrist, who will become very powerful and will be arrogant and blasphemous against God, His Name, His tabernacle and against those who dwell in Heaven. The Antichrist will mislead mankind by what he will say.

During the Tribulation, the Antichrist will endeavour to change the times and the Laws. The Sabbath and the Feast will again be instituted, and the Temple rituals. The Antichrist will seek to be worshipped in the middle of the Tribulation, the latter half of the Tribulation, for three and a half years.

The holy city of Jerusalem and the Temple will be trampled underfoot, and the people subjected to the rule of the Antichrist.

The heavenly court will open the books of God's judgement. The day of reckoning will come for the Antichrist and the godless heathen nation and people under his spell.

The Messianic kingdom of peace will then come. The people of God, the believing Jews, the remnant who had been true to God and survived the Tribulation, will inherit the promised kingdom. The 'stone' kingdom will have destroyed all earthly kingdoms. Israel will then rule over all earthly kingdoms for 1,000 years.

Daniel's vision of a ram and goat

Daniel had a vision of a ram and a goat, charging each other. The ram, namely the sheep with the two horns, represented the Mede and Persian empire. The goat represented the Grecian empire. The Grecian empire – the bronze era – would conquer the Mede and Persian Kingdom.

Cyrus of Persia had a proud and powerful empire. Cyrus was called and appointed by God according to the prophesy of Isaiah:

Key verse: Isaiah 44:28 'Who says of Cyrus, he is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, you shall be built, and to the Temple, your foundation shall be laid.' – New King James Version

Cyrus was instrumental in allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem to start rebuilding the city and the Temple.

Throughout the universe there is an ongoing battle between good and evil, between God and Satan, between justice and injustice, and between morality and immorality. Evil brings destruction. There will be a time to come when there will be a final destruction, giving a way to a state of peace and righteousness in the eternal kingdom of God.

Key verse: Daniel 8:23-25 'At the end of their rule, when their sin is at its height, a fierce King, a master of intrigue, will rise to power. He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause a shocking amount of destruction and succeed in everything he does. He will destroy powerful leaders and devastate the holy people. He will be a master of deception, defeating many by catching them off guard. Without warning he will destroy them. He will even take on the Prince of princes in battle, but he will be broken, though not by human power.' – New Living Translation

The fierce King describes both Antiochus IV Epiphanes of the Syrian part of the Grecian empire, and the Antichrist at the end of human history.

Daniel's prophesy of the writing on the wall

After Nebuchadnezzar's death, there was a successive following of evil Kings. Belshazzar (not Daniel) saw a hand, writing on the wall. Daniel interpreted it as the arrogance of the King that will cost him his life. The first heathen kingdom of Babylon in the times of the nations, had reached its end. It would become a divided kingdom.

Key verse: Daniel 5:26-28 'This is the interpretation of the message; 'mene' – God has numbered the days of your kingdom and put an end to it; 'tekul' – you have been weighed on the scales of righteousness and found deficient; 'peres' – your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians.' – Amplified Holy Bible

That same night the King died, and Darius the Mede took control of the nation.

Daniel's vision of the 70 weeks

According to Jeremiah's predictions, the exile of Judah would last for 70 years. The purpose of the 70 years:

Key verse: Daniel 9:24 '...to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.' – New King James Version

The angel Gabriel informed Daniel that before the kingdom of the Messiah could be established, not 70 years, but 70 periods of 7 years each – a total of 490 years. At the end of this period the Jews will have collectively repented as a nation.

Jesus was crucified before the last 7 years were completed. We can reason that Jesus died 7 years too early. The Jews still owes 7 years.

What Daniel did not fully understand was that the 490 years would be interrupted between the 69th and the 70th (490 years) week. This period

was also called 'the prophetic gap' when Jesus was crucified and will last until the start of the 70th week, namely the Great Tribulation.

The prophetic gap

The time between the 69th and the 70th week is called the mystery of the kingdom of Heaven. This is the week (7 years) of the Great Tribulation. And directly before that, the Rapture.

The present Church age is not mentioned in the Old Testament, but it is revealed to the New Testament Apostles.

Key verse: Matthew 13:11 'Jesus replied to them, 'To you it has been granted to know the mysteries (things which humans cannot know or discover on their own unless God reveals it to them) of the kingdom of Heaven, but to them it has not been granted.' – Amplified Holy Bible

The 'Church Age'; extends from the period of the Crucifixion of Christ until the Rapture of the Church.

Key verse: 1 Corinthians 15:23 'But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised first; then when Christ comes back, all His people will be raised.' – New Living Translation

The 'true' Church is those who are truly 'born again' believers. The Rapture will only take place when the full number of Gentiles became believers.

Key verse: Romans 11:25 'For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.' – New King James Version

After the Rapture has taken place, the Lord will again turn to Israel at the end of the Great Tribulation, and Israel as a nation will be saved collectively.

Daniel in the lions' Den

During the reign of King Darius the Mede, a plot was laid against Daniel by those opposed to him because of his exceptional qualities. Because

Daniel was worshipping only the God in Heaven, he was thrown into the lions' den, but miraculously survived by Heavenly intervention.

Chapter Nine

Period of Restoration

535 B.C. – 425 B.C.

First return to Jerusalem

After more than six decades away from their homeland, the people of Israel were well settled in the Babylonian-turned- Persian society. Some of them had taken Jeremiah's advice and bought or built homes, started up businesses, and learned a new language and way of life.

Despite the hard decision, over 42,000 decided to return when King Cyrus the Great issued a decree encouraging Hebrews to return to Jerusalem and rebuilt the Temple. He even gave them the looted silver that Nebuchadnezzar took from the Temple.

Daniel's last vision

Daniel predicted the short-term change in governments, namely the Greek empire taking over the Mede and Persian empire. This was all written in the Book of Truth. His long-term predictions were about the coming of the Antichrist and the Great Tribulation that would last 7 years before Christ returns to restore Israel.

Daniel's visions were invaluable in stretching one's imagination to the time when all mysteries would be revealed.

The prophecy of Haggai

Rebuilding the Temple was not easy, because of the economic situation. There was drought and famine, and they decided to wait until they were prosperous again before they finished the Temple of God.

Haggai prophesied that if the people would place God at the centre of their lives, they would realise the future blessings that God had in store for His people.

Through Haggai, God told the people that they had set their own selfish interests as the highest priority rather than totally committing

themselves to the construction of the Temple. The Temple they were building would be smaller than the Temple that Solomon built, but God promised that he would fill this Temple with an even greater glory.

The visions of Zechariah

Zechariah reminded the people about the sinful practices of their forefathers, again and again. Now that the work on the new Temple was underway, there could be no turning back, except a turning back to God.

Zechariah was shown eight graphic visions of assurance:

- That Israel's prosperity would be restored.
- That Israel's oppressors would be punished.
- That God would be among the returning people.
- That their sins would be removed by the 'Branch'.

Key verse: Zechariah 3:8 'Listen to me, O Jeshua the high priest, and all you other priests. You are symbols of good things to come. Soon I am going to bring my servant, the Branch.' – *New Living Translation*

The Branch refers to the Messiah. These verses were fulfilled hundreds of years later by Jesus Christ. Christ died for our sins once for all time, that He might bring us safely home to God. You cannot remove your sins by your own effort. You must allow God to remove them through Christ.

- That God would complete his Temple through his two anointed ones.
- That the wicked ones would always be punished.
- That the wicked nations would be brought to their knees.
- That there would be rest at last.

Zechariah was then told to place a crown on Joshua the high priest, symbolic of the Messiah, who will be both Priest and King over his people.

The meaning of Restoration

Haggai's mission was to construct the Temple of God in Jerusalem, and Zechariah's mission was to establish the spiritual house of Israel. The Temple was not completed yet.

The people of Bethel asked Zechariah about observing certain religious days. God's message was brought through Zechariah by the prophet Amos: true religion finds its expression in moral lives and social justice.

Completion of the Temple

The Temple was completed exactly 70 years after the Temple of Solomon was destroyed. This exact fulfilment of God's promise ought to encourage people everywhere to know that He truly is God – the faithful God who keeps his promises.

Psalms of a nation restored

With the house of God now restored, the nation's new life began in earnest.

Key verse: *Psalm 107:1,2 'Give thanks to Yahweh! For He is good, for His loving commitment is everlasting. Let the redeemed of Yahweh say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the adversary.'* – *The Scriptures*

Zechariah's futuristic prophecies

Zechariah predicted the life and death of the Messiah. In contrast to the present kings and their chariots of war, the spiritual King will come gently in peace, riding on a donkey. He will be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, and He will be pierced at the time of His death.

Esther and the feast of Purim

With the Temple now completed, it would take another 60 years to restore the civilization that the nation once knew.

At this time, Xerxes became King of Persia when King Darius died. He offended the Egyptians, the Greeks and his own country through repressive measures of high taxes and destruction of the god, Marduk.

During a festive celebration at the palace in Susa, King Xerxes sent for Queen Vashti, but she refused, so he decided to replace her.

During the search process for a new queen, Esther, the adopted daughter of Mordecai, whose forefathers were from the tribe of

Benjamin, became noticed and became the Queen. Mordecai overheard a plot against the King.

One of the King's right hands, Haman, found out the background of Queen Esther and Mordecai and plotted to kill their people. He told the King that there were people whose customs were different from all the other people and should be killed.

Haman prepared gallows to hang Mordecai but got hanged himself after Queen Esther called out a fasting and approached the King. Mordecai the Jew became second in rank to King Xerxes and he was held in high esteem among his fellow Jews, because he worked for the good of his people and spoke up for the welfare of the Jews.

This is a supreme example of personal courage, and a clear message that God watches over His people.

Prophecies of Malachi

The people of Israel were beginning to question the prophecies regarding the branch of Jesse, the King of the house of David who is supposed to deliver them from their enemies and establish an everlasting kingdom. Does God really care about his people? Is there divine justice?

Malachi emphasized the foolishness of a doubter, and assured the people that the day of the Lord is coming. Their relationship with God was broken because of their sin, and they would soon be punished. But the few who repented would receive God's blessing, highlighted in his promise to send a Messiah.

He brought an important message of hypocrisy, neglecting God, and that careless living has devastating consequences. Serving and worshipping God must be the primary focus in our life, both now and in eternity.

Ezra and the second return

Ezra was a teacher of the Law, and along with more Jews, left Babylon to return to Palestine. After four months they arrived in Jerusalem with treasures for the Temple service and the ongoing redevelopment project.

Key verse: Ezra 7:13 'I decree that any of the people in my kingdom, including the priests and Levites, may volunteer to return to Jerusalem with you.' – New Living Translation

Ezra was determined to study and obey the Law of the Lord and to teach those Laws and regulations to the people of Israel.

When he arrived in Palestine, he discovered that many of the men of Israel had married wives of foreigners, in violation of the Law given to Moses. Ezra was distressed because there was the danger that the Israelites would worship the foreigners' strange gods. Solomon fell spiritually because of his many foreign wives.

Ezra remedied the problem by calling upon the Israelites to separate themselves from these foreign wives. He enforced the Law by setting up courts of justice.

Nehemiah rebuilds the Wall

Nehemiah was the King's cupbearer in Susa. Being a royal cupbearer was a position of great trust.

When one of Nehemiah's friends reported that the wall of Jerusalem had been broken down and its gates had been burned with fire, he mourned, fasted and prayed before the Lord. When the King noticed Nehemiah's sadness, he commissioned him to go and build the wall in Jerusalem.

When the wall was completed, they dedicated it by a great choral procession, marching in opposite directions on top of the wall.

Chapter Ten

Historical Interlude

425 B.C. – 5 B.C.

End of Old Testament Record

From the early days of the patriarchs, a divine master plan has been unfolding to teach mankind the nature of God, and to prepare the world for a Saviour who will transform man's sinful condition and bring true life.

God promised the faithful patriarch Abraham that his descendants would become a great nation and have a land of their own – and that through them all the people of the earth would be blessed.

When the 12 tribes of Israel were delivered out of Egyptian bondage and brought to the Mount Sinai, the first promise was fulfilled. But the people rebelled and as punishment they wandered for 40 years in the desert. But in His mercy God forgave His people and led them to the promised land of Canaan.

After the local inhabitants were mostly driven out during the period of the judges, the nation finally had its own land, and God's second promise to Abraham was fulfilled.

In the 120-year-long monarchy of Saul, David, and Solomon, it was the beginning of the third fulfillment. After Solomon's death, the people rebelled again and brought disaster – this time civil war and turning to idolatry.

During the period of political and spiritual decline, God sent one prophet after another to warn them against sins and punishment, but also with a message of hope and a promise of restoration if they obeyed.

Israel was exiled to Assyria, and Judah to Babylon for 70 years. After another 20 years the Temple was rebuilt. Despite the message of Malachi that the day of the Lord was coming, and the temporary

spiritual revival under Ezra and Nehemiah, the people wilfully violated God's Laws.

The Jews were at the mercy of the Persian empire, and as far as the Jews were concerned, there was no sign of the super-King that would come and establish the ideal kingdom.

Daniel was given a clue in his vision of the 70 sevens; the Messiah's coming would not be before some 400 years from then. This is the same period that the historical record of Scripture will be silent. Perhaps it is simply to dramatise the most important event in the history of mankind, the birth of the Messiah.

Influences on a dispersed people

After the return of the exiled people to Palestine, not all the Jews returned. Many of them chose not to return and were still living in Babylon, Egypt and other areas. Their culture was influenced by foreign beliefs and practices. They spoke Aramaic and other languages, not only Hebrew.

The Persians played a significant role in their belief in astrology and the occult. It was the beginning of a so-called remnant theology. The question arose as to who this faithful remnant would be.

All these changes had an impact on Judaism. In 424 B.C., the Persian throne was both shaky and bloodstained. The final fall came in 330 B.C. when Alexander the Great defeated the Medes and Persians.

Hellenism and the Jews

Alexander the Great from Greece swept through Syria, Palestine and Egypt. The Greek Hellenistic culture and the koine Greek language had a profound effect on the Jewish people and their religion. Many of the intellectual Jews came under the influence of Greek philosophy.

The Old Testament was translated from Hebrew to Greek. It was called the Septuagint.

In 190 B.C. the Greek empire was defeated by an emerging world power, Rome. Epiphanes was one of the cruellest Emperors. He built a

gymnasium for naked athletes, confiscated property, looted the Temple, and sacrificed a pig on a pagan altar.

A group of Jews called the Maccabean, ran a guerrilla warfare that lasted until 143 B.C. One thousand Jews refused to fight on the Sabbath.

Judaism under Roman rule

In 63 B.C. General Pompey from the Roman empire, invaded Palestine, and captured Jerusalem. Pompey and his former ally, Julius Caesar, turned against each other, and Pompey was defeated in 48 B.C. Antipater was appointed over all Judea, as Palestine was now known. Antipater was assassinated and his son Herod took over and became the King of Judea.

Augustus Caesar got credit for founding the Roman empire with its Roman Peace. Herod restored the Temple in Jerusalem.

The Pharisees had broad support among the common people because they held a belief in life after death. Many Pharisees were chosen for high government positions including the Sanhedrin, which is the highest tribunal of the Jews.

The second major sect was the Sadducees. They believed that your soul dies with your body. They did not believe in a resurrection.

Many other sects had come into being, like the Essenes, the Zealots, the Herodians, and the Samaritans.

Found throughout several of the sects were traces of Persian mysticism, Greek humanism, patriotic Judaism, and time-honoured ritualistic traditions.

In their religious beliefs and practices, the Jews have come a long way from Mount Sinai.

Chapter Eleven

Jesus the Christ

5 B.C. – A.D.30

Jesus Christ and His pre-existence

Jesus Christ is the One who existed from eternity with our heavenly Father God. He was born into this world as a tiny helpless human baby.

Key verse: John 1:1-3,14 'In the beginning (before all time) was the Word (Christ) and the Word was with God, and the Word was God Himself. He was continually existing in the beginning (co-eternally) with God. All things were made and came into existence through Him; and without Him not even one thing was made that has come into being. And the Word (Christ) became flesh and lived among us; and we saw His glory, glory as belongs to the One and only begotten Son of the Father, the Son who is truly unique, the only One of His kind, who is full of grace and free of deception.'
– *The Amplified Holy Bible*

Jesus is revealed as the instrument of creation.

Key verse: Hebrew 1:1-2 'Elohim (God), having of old spoken in many portions and many ways to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by the Son, whom He has appointed heir of all, through whom also He made the ages.' – *The Scriptures*

Christ pre-existed before Abraham.

Key verse: John 8:58 'Jesus said to them, Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.' – *New King James Version*

In the book of Genesis, Abraham encountered a mysterious figure called Melchizedek to whom he offers his tithes. His name is explained as the 'king of righteousness' and the 'king of Salem', that is, sovereign of peace in Hebrews. He didn't have any parents, or a beginning, or an end. Jesus Christ is our High Priest today, a continuation of the priesthood of Melchizedek. The One who long ago appeared as Melchizedek to the patriarch Abraham can only be Jesus Christ Himself.

Key verse: *Hebrews 7:8 'Furthermore, here tithes are received by men who are subject to death; but in the case concerning Melchizedek, they are received by of whom it is testified that he lives on perpetually.'* – *Amplified Holy Bible*

The genealogies of Jesus

Matthew, one of the Apostles of Jesus, traced the descent of Jesus from his ancestor, Abraham, through the royal lineage of King David. He divides them into three groups of 14 each. Not only are there Jews, as would be expected, but also Gentiles, including a Canaanite and a Moabite, whose countrymen have been enemies of God's people.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Perez (his mother was Tamar), Hezron, Ram, Amminadab, Nahshon, Salmon, Boaz (his mother was Rahab), Obed (his mother was Ruth), Jesse and King David.

Before the exile to Babylon:

Solomon (his mother was Bathsheba), Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon, Josiah and Jeconiah.

After the exile to Babylon:

Shealtiel, Zerubbabel, Abiud, Eliakim, Azor, Zadok, Akim, Eliud, Eleazar, Matthan, Jacob, Joseph (Mary's husband) and Jesus Christ.

Birth of Jesus and John the Baptist

The people of Israel were still waiting for the Messiah to come. At that time, Herod the Great was the King of the Jews for the past 30 years. The Romans ruled the country. Herod was responsible for a variety of building projects. He claimed to be a God-worshipper, but he was also involved in many forms of pagan religion.

The angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah and announced the birth of John the Baptist. His wife Elizabeth couldn't bear children up to then and was blessed with this miracle from the Lord.

The angel also appeared to the virgin Mary and announced the birth of Jesus. Through the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit, a process was

triggered that we cannot fully fathom. An ovum in Mary's uterus supernaturally became a fertilised cell and began the process of embryonic growth and development.

Key verse: Luke 1:31,31-34 'And see, you shall conceive in your womb, and shall give birth to a Son and call His Name Yeshua.'

And Mary said to the messenger, How shall this be, since I do not know a man? And the messenger, answering, said to her, The Set-apart (Holy Spirit) shall come upon you and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you. And for that reason, the Set-Apart One born of you shall be called Son of Elohim (God).' – *The Scriptures*

An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph, Mary's future husband and informed him of the situation. When Jesus was born, an angel proclaimed the birth of Jesus to shepherds in Bethlehem.

After Jesus was circumcised on the 8th day, they presented Him to the Temple where Simeon and Anna the prophetess expressed their joy and thanks to the Lord for the birth of the Saviour of Israel.

Visit of the Magi and the flight into Egypt

Six months after the birth of Jesus, Magi were prompted by a star to travel to Jerusalem, looking for the child. They offered gifts to the newborn 'King of the Jews'.

King Herod believed that it was a political threat to his reign and ordered all male children under two years old to be killed. Joseph and Mary were warned about the slaughter and fled to Egypt until the death of Herod.

After their brief stay in Egypt, they returned to their home in Nazareth in Galilee where Joseph resumed his trade as a carpenter. At the age of 12, Jesus and His family went to the Passover celebration in Jerusalem. He grew quickly in maturity and His pre-incarnate knowledge began to return.

Key verse: Luke 2:46,47 '...He was in the Temple, sitting among the religious teachers, discussing deep questions with them. And all who

heard Him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.’ – New Living Translation

Little more is known of Jesus’ first 30 years. He had at least four brothers – James, Joses, Judas (Jude) and Simon – and some sisters. Jesus turned from the work of supporting his earthly family to the task of spiritually feeding the whole family of man.

The Ministry of John the Baptist

During the time of Pontius Pilate in Judea and Herod in Galilee, they were upstaged by a wilderness prophet, John the Baptist. By God’s standards, greatness is not measured by what you have, but by your faith in God. Like John, you should give yourself entirely to God so God’s power can work through you.

John lived much of his time in the desert areas and existed on a diet of locusts and honey. His clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. He was seen as a wild man who made strong appeals for practical ethical conduct and spiritual purity. City people went out of their way to be taught by this rough man of the wilderness.

Key verse: Matthew 3:3 ‘Isaiah had spoken of John when he said, He is a voice shouting in the wilderness: Prepare a pathway for the Lord’s coming! Make a straight road for Him!’ – New Living Translation

We can prepare people by explaining their need for forgiveness, demonstrating Christ’s teachings by our conduct, and telling them how Christ can give their lives meaning. We can ‘make a straight road for Him’ by correcting misconceptions that might be hindering people from coming to Christ.

Key verse: Matthew 3:11 ‘I baptise with water those who turn from their sins and turn to God. But someone is coming soon who is far greater than I am – so much greater that I am not even worthy of being His slave. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.’ – New Living Translation

John's ministry was given the highest possible honour when Jesus himself came to receive John's baptism. The Holy Spirit descended upon him like a dove and lightning.

Jesus faced temptations

Jesus recognised the value of prayer and fasting and when the Devil tempted Him with every temptation. He recalled the words of Scripture, which are a reminder of truth and wisdom in the face of Satan's lies.

The three temptations:

- To turn stones into bread.
- To throw Himself down without getting hurt.
- To receive all the devil's kingdoms if Jesus would worship him.

John the Baptist is convinced that Jesus is not only incomparably righteous, but also truly God's Anointed One, the Christ. He proclaimed Jesus as the Messianic Lamb of God.

Jesus' early work in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee

Jesus made it clear that His spiritual kingdom is not only for the Jews, but for the Gentiles as well. He appointed Andrew, Simon Peter (called Cephas), Philip and Nathaneal as his first disciples.

He performed miracles by:

- Turning water into wine.
- Driving merchants from the Temple.
- Healing the boy in Capernaum.
- A great catch of fish.
- Healing a man with an unclean spirit.
- Healing Peter's mother-in-law's fever.
- Healing other sick people with diseases, severe pain, seizures, paralysis, leprosy, and demon possessed.

He taught:

- Nicodemus, the Pharisee regarding being born again.

- The woman at the well about living water, and many Samaritans converted.
- About the kingdom of Heaven.

Paul's letter to the Colossian church was Christian centrality and supremacy.

Key verse: Colossians 3:1 'If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.' – New King James Version

We were raised with Christ Jesus' finished work which is peacemaking between us and the Father. There was no more need for sacrifices or temples because His work brought ultimate fulfillment to what their sacrificial system foreshadowed.

Jesus and his disciples spent some time with John while he was baptising people in the Judean countryside.

John rebuked Herod for marrying his brother's wife and all the evils he had done and was thrown into prison.

The Rise of Opposition

- The Scribes and Pharisees didn't believe that Jesus had the divine authority to forgive sins and heal people. They believed only God is divine and accused Jesus of blasphemy.

Despite opposition, Jesus continued his teaching. He appointed 12 Apostles and with the added support, he attracted greater crowds.

- He called Matthew (Levi), a tax collector and had a banquet with the tax collectors.
- Key verse: *Luke 5:30-32 'And their scribes and Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners? Jesus answered and said to them, Those who are well have not need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.'* – New King James Version

- The Pharisees complained about the people feasting and not fasting.

Key verse: Luke 5:34 'Jesus asked, Do wedding guests fast while celebrating with the groom? Someday he will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.' – New Living Translation

Jesus knew his death was coming. After that time, fasting would be in order. Although He was fully human, Jesus knew He was God and why He had come – to die for the sins of the world.

- On telling the parable of a piece of new garment patching an old garment and putting new wine in old wineskins:

Because new wine expands as it ages, it had to be put into new wineskins. A used skin becomes more rigid and can burst and spill the wine. The Pharisees had the Law (old wine skins). The gift of God was now Grace.

Christianity required new approaches, new structures. We need new methods or a new idea. For example, using digital tools to spread the Word of God – Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and messaging.

- The Pharisees complained about Jesus healing a man and plucking grain on the Sabbath.

The Jewish leaders saw both a mighty miracle and a broken rule. They threw the miracle aside and focused on the broken rule. God is prepared to work in our lives, but we can shut out His miracle by limiting our views by how He works.

If God stopped every kind of work on the Sabbath, nature would fall into chaos, and sin would overrun the world. God rested on the 7th day, but this can't mean that He stopped doing good. Jesus wanted to teach that when the opportunity to do good presents itself, it should not be ignored, even on the Sabbath. If someone is hungry on the Sabbath, he should be fed.

- They questioned Jesus' authority.

Key verse: *John 5:30 'I can do nothing on my own initiative or authority. Just as I hear, I judge; and My judgement is just, because I do not seek My own will, but only the will of Him who sent me.'* – *The Scriptures*

Jesus appointed 12 Apostles.

With guidance from God, Jesus appointed these Apostles:

Simon Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, Judas son of James and Judas Iscariot.

Sermon on the Mount

This was a very instructive Sermon. It covers a broad spectrum of spiritual topics and the nature of the kingdom of God. He spoke about faith, repentance, worship, prayer and humility. Jesus always demonstrated a concern for the welfare of the family and social relationships and peace of mind. It begins with the blessings in store for the believers and the woes for the non-believers.

Beatitudes – the kingdom and blessings for those who are:

- Poor in spirit.
- Who mourn.
- Who are meek.
- Who have the desire for righteousness.
- Who are merciful.
- Who are pure in heart.
- Who are peacemakers.
- Who are persecuted because of righteousness.

And the woes go to those who are:

- Rich.
- Well fed.
- Laughing now.
- Spoken well of by all men.

Regarding the Law, He didn't come to abolish it, but to fulfil it. In the Old Testament, there were three categories of Law:

- Ceremonial Law – we are not bound by ceremonial Law, but the principles behind them: to worship and love a holy God.
- Civil Law – because modern society and culture are so different today, we should be guided by the principles and conduct our actions accordingly.
- Moral Law – the 10 commandments require strict obedience. They reveal the nature and will of God.

Six ways to think like Christ:

- Avoid killing.
- Avoid adultery.
- Be legally married.
- Keep a vow.
- Seek justice for ourselves by showing mercy and love to others.

The Ministry continued

The authoritative teaching of Jesus had won the attention of multitudes. The religious leaders were becoming increasingly aware of Jesus' extraordinary Power.

On His way to Capernaum, he healed a slave, raised a widow's son, cured many who had diseases, sicknesses, and evil spirits, gave a man's sight back, made the lame walk, cured leprosy and deaf people.

Key verse: Matthew 11:13-14 'For John came, all the teachings of the Scripture looked forward to this present time. And if you are willing to accept what I say, he is Elijah, the one the prophets said would come.' – *New Living Translation*

John was not a resurrected Elijah, but he took on Elijah's prophetic role – boldly confronting sin and pointing people to God.

While eating at a Pharisee's house, a sinful woman wet His feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume

on them. Jesus told her that her sins were forgiven. This woman's act demonstrated her true faith, and Jesus honoured her faith.

The Pharisees didn't grasp the fact that Jesus was in fact God himself. They believed only God could forgive sins, so they wondered who this Jesus was. Jesus lifted a woman up from the agony of degradation and servitude to the joy of fellowship and service.

In Jewish culture women were not supposed to learn from rabbis. By allowing women to travel with Him, Jesus showed that all people were equal under God.

Regarding blasphemy:

Key verse: Matthew 12:32 'Anyone who blasphemes against Me, the Son of Man, can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven either in this world or in the world to come.' – New Living Translation

Sometimes believers worry that they have accidentally committed an unforgiveable sin. But only those who have turned their backs on God and rejected all faith have any need to worry. Jesus said they can't be forgiven, not because their sin is worse than any other, but because they will never ask for forgiveness. Whoever rejects the prompting of the Holy Spirit, removes himself from the only force that can lead him to repentance and restoration to God.

Jesus informed the crowd of his kinship when someone told him that His mother and brothers came to speak to Him.

Key verse: Matthew 12:50 '...whoever does the will of My Father in Heaven is my brother and sister and mother.' – New King James Version

Jesus taught about the lampstand that you shouldn't put under a cover, and that your eyes shine into your soul. The lamp represents Christ, and the eyes represent understanding and insight. Evil desires make the eyes less sensitive and blot out the light of Christ. If you have a hard time seeing God at work in the world, check for sinful desires blinding them.

Christ condemned hypocrisy when the Pharisees complained about Him not washing His hands before He ate. He answered that they wash their

outsides but not their insides. If you give to the needy, you will be clean all over. And you should also tithe. You should not load people down with religious demands. And very importantly you should not prevent others from believing the truth. They were wrong in focusing on outward appearances and ignore the inward condition of the heart by loving and helping other people. People may be fooled, but God isn't. Bring your inner life under God's control, and your outer life will naturally reflect Him.

Like unmarked graves hidden in a field, the Pharisees corrupted everyone who encountered them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed or hidden that will not be made known. The Pharisees were power-hungry imposters, and their attitudes are like yeast that influenced the believers.

We should fear God and not man. Man can kill the body, but God can throw you into hell. All the hairs on our head are numbered and known to God only. Other people evaluate us on how well we perform, what we achieve, and how we look, but God cares for us all because we belong to Him. So, we can face life without fear.

The rich man in Jesus' story died before he could use his proceeds. Planning for retirement – preparing for life before death – is wise, but neglecting life after death is disastrous. Faith, service and obedience are the way to become rich with God.

Worry is foolish because our Creator loves us and knows what we need. He promises to meet all our real needs but not necessarily all our desires. He will provide for us if we make the kingdom of God our primary concern. It is central that we don't hold back any areas of our life from God's control, because He wants to help provide our needs as well as guide us in using what He provides.

Jesus told the parable of the watchful servants. We must always be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when we don't expect Him.

Key verse: John 14:1-3 'Don't be troubled. You trust God, now trust in Me. There are many rooms in my Father's home, and I am going to prepare a

place for you. If this were not so, I would tell you plainly. When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with Me where I am.’ – New Living Translation

Jesus’ words show that the way to eternal life, though unseen, is secure – as secure as your trust in Jesus. He has already prepared the way to eternal life. The only issue that may still be unsettled is your willingness to believe. Though the detail of eternal life is unknown, we need not fear because Jesus is preparing for us and will spend eternity with us.

Jesus taught about the urgency for repentance. Pontius Pilate murdered some people from Galilee and 18 people died when the Tower of Siloam fell on them. The Zealots, a group of anti-Roman terrorists, would have said they deserved to die, but Jesus said not to blame others, but everyone should look to his or her own day of judgement.

In the Old Testament a fruitful tree was used as a symbol of Godly living. Jesus pointed out what would happen to a tree that took valuable time and space and still produced nothing for the patient gardener. By this illustration Jesus warned that God would not wait forever that people would repent and turn to Him. Are you enjoying God’s special treatment without giving anything in return?

Teaching through Parables

Some of Jesus’ parables will have the effect of concealing the truth for non-believers whose hearts are closed to His teaching.

Parable of the Sower: When the farmer scattered the seed, it is like anyone who hears the message of the kingdom and does not understand it. The evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.

- Seed falling on the path – evil one snatches it away.
- Seed falling on rocks – man receives it with joy, but because it has no root, he falls away when persecution comes because of the Word.
- Seed falling in thorns – man receives it but worries and wealth choke it and it is unfruitful.
- Seed falling on good soil – man receives and understands it, he

produces a crop, yielding many times what was sown – and becomes a fruitful believer.

Parable of the weeds: The farmer sows good seed in his field, but the enemy sows weeds in the same field. When harvest time comes, the harvesters gather the weeds first and burn them. The farmer who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy is the Devil.

Harvest time is the end of age, and the harvesters are the angels. The Son of Man will send His angels to gather the weeds – everyone that causes sin and does evil – and throw them into the fire. The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

Parable of the lamp:

Key verse: Luke 8:16-18 'No one would light a lamp and then cover it up or put it under a bed. No, lamps are mounted in the open, where they can be seen by those entering the house. For everything that is hidden or secret, will eventually be brought to light and made plain to all. So be sure to pay attention to what you hear. To those who are open to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But those who are not listening, even what they think they have will be taken away from them.' – New Living Translation

Parables regarding the kingdom of God:

- A seed growing, sprouts and produce grain, first the stalk, then the head and then the full kernel. When it is ripe, it is harvested.
- A mustard seed grows into a tree so that the birds come and perch in its branches.
- Yeast mixed with a large amount of flour until it is worked through the dough.
- A hidden treasure, a man sold all he had and bought the field.
- A pearl, a man sold all he had and bought the valuable pearl.
- The net, thrown out at sea, will catch good and bad fish. It is like the

end of the age when the angels gather the righteous and throw the evil ones into the fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

- Treasures in your storeroom, some new and some old. The real purpose of the Law as revealed in the Old Testament has a real treasure. The Old Testament points the way to Jesus, the Messiah. Understanding Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of Heaven, there is a double benefit. Both the old and new teachings give practical guidance for faith and for living in the world. The teachers of the Law were trapped in the Old and blind to the New. The religious leaders were blinded to the spiritual kingdom that Christ brought.

Performing Miracles

Jesus didn't just heal the sick and raise the dead, because of his great compassion for those who suffer, but through the miracles. He confirmed the message that the kingdom of God was now being established with power.

When Jesus called people to join the kingdom of God, He received differing responses:

- One person said he would follow Jesus wherever He went.
- Another one had to bury his father first.
- Yet another one had to say goodbye to his family first.

Miracles done by Jesus:

- He calmed the sea.
- He cast out a legion of evil spirits into pigs and they drowned in the sea.
- He healed the daughter of Jairus.
- A woman touched his garment and was healed.
- He healed two blind men.
- He cast out demons from a mute man so he could speak again.

Sending out Apostles

Jesus was rejected twice by His hometown of Nazareth, so He went to other parts of Galilee. He sent His Apostles out in pairs to do miracles by casting out demons and to heal, after He gave them the power to do it. They had mostly no education.

Sometime before the crucifixion of Jesus, John the Baptist was beheaded on request from Herod's daughter and his head was put on a platter. Herod Antipas imprisoned John because he feared his influence might enable him to start a rebellion.

Jesus instructed the Apostles not to go to the Gentiles or Samaritans, but only to the lost sheep of Israel. They had to proclaim that the kingdom of Heaven is near and to heal where needed.

Miracles and Multitudes

- Jesus amazed the crowds by feeding 5,000 men with a few loaves of bread and some fish. Afterwards they gathered 12 baskets full of leftovers. They misunderstood the nature of His kingdom. When Jesus said He is the true bread of life and that they must eat His flesh, many were offended and turned away.
- At another time Jesus fed 4,000 men with 7 loaves of bread and a few fishes. They collected 7 baskets full of leftovers afterwards.

These two miracles teach us to be grateful for the little we have. In His power, God can bless us abundantly with plenty if our attitude is Godlike.

They could accept Jesus as a popular hero who works wonders, but they were unwilling to accept the demands of discipleship. Therefore, Jesus encountered much opposition.

- Jesus sent his Apostles to cross the water by boat, and a strong wind came up and scared them. They called to Jesus and He walked towards them on the water. Peter tried to walk on the water as well, but he became fearful and began to sink and Jesus saved him.
- Key verse: *John 6:27 'Do not work for food that perishes, but for food that endures and leads to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give*

you; for God the Father has authorised Him and put His seal on Him.’ – Amplified Holy Bible

- Jesus explained to the crowd that He was not doing His own will, but that of His Father's. And whoever came to Him in faith, He would raise on the last day. Whoever believes in the Son, will have eternal life.
- Jesus told His Apostles that one of them would betray Him. The Jews opposed Jesus and couldn't fathom eating His flesh and drinking His blood. So, Jesus stayed away from Judea for this reason.

Extensive tour throughout Galilee

Jesus directed His ministry to Phoenicia and the area around Tyre and Sidon. He encountered a Canaanite woman who begged Him to heal her daughter. She was a descendant of Noah's son Ham, against whom a curse had been directed. The Jews looked down upon Canaanites as being unworthy of God's blessings.

- This was an opportunity for Jesus to show that His kingdom is for people in the whole universe, not only Israel. It provides an example of Jesus' care and persistent faith on the part of a believer.

He performed many more miracles, healing a deaf mute, teaching about the deity of signs, the yeast of the Pharisees, healing a blind man near Bethsaida, and healing an epileptic boy. The Pharisees' heart was so hardened that no sign or miracle would convince them to believe.

- Yeast in this passage symbolises evil. Just as only a small amount of yeast is needed to make a batch of bread rise, so the hard-heartedness of the religious and political leaders could permeate and contaminate the entire society and make it revolt against Jesus.
- When tax collectors in Capernaum demanded two drachmas from them, Jesus guided them to pull a fish from the water and they found a coin in its mouth to pay their duty.
- Jesus foretold His death to the disciples, but they didn't grasp it fully. They still thought of Jesus as an earthly King, and they were concerned about their places in the kingdom He would set up.

Key verse: Luke 9:46-48 'Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest. And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a little child and set him by Him, and said to them, Whoever receives this little child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. For he who is least among you all will be great.' – New King James Version

Our care for others is a measure of our greatness. We need to humble ourselves and look out for the poor, needy and helpless people.

- Jesus warned the Apostles against temptations. He used startling language to stress the importance of cutting sin out of your life. Jesus said to cut off your hand if it causes you to sin. Painful self-discipline is required of His true believers. Christ is worth any possible loss. Nothing should stand in the way of faith. We must be ruthless in removing sin from our life to avoid suffering for eternity.
- Jesus taught about forgiveness. Not 70 times, but 70 times 7. This means that we shouldn't keep track of the number of times when we should forgive someone. We should always forgive those who are truly repentant.

In Jerusalem for Feast of Tabernacles

- The feast of Tabernacles is one of three National festivals to commemorate the ancient wilderness journey. The other two festivals are Passover and Pentecost. Jesus went to the feast quietly and taught publicly in the Temple.

Key verse: John 7:37 'Now on the last and most important day of the feast, Jesus stood and called out in a loud voice, If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink!' – Amplified Holy Bible

Here Jesus talked about the Messiah's life-giving blessings. The living water that He spoke of was the Holy Spirit. Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah because that is something only the Messiah could do.

- The guards were sent to arrest Jesus, but they were so amazed about

what he preached, that they couldn't do it.

- Jesus went to the Mount of Olives and continued teaching. The crowd brought a woman who was caught in adultery and wanted to stone her to death. Jesus told the crowd that if anyone of them was without sin, he should throw a stone, and then they all left. Jesus told the woman to go and not to sin anymore.
- Jesus told the crowd that He is the Light of the world, and whoever follows Him, would not stumble through the darkness, because they would have the light that leads to life. As we follow the Laws of our nation, we should follow the Laws of the kingdom of Heaven.
- Jesus warned them against unbelief. He stressed that His Father who has sent Him is reliable and that He is carrying out His instructions. He told the Jews that the truth will set them free. Everyone who sins are a slave of sin. The Jews believed in God, but not that Jesus is the Son of God.
- Jesus declared eternal existence. He told them that before Abraham was born, He was. And that those who obey won't die. He was talking about spiritual death, not physical death. Even physical death will eventually be overcome. Those who follow Jesus will be raised to live eternally with Him.
- God told Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, that through him all nations would be blessed. Abraham had been able to see this through the eyes of faith. Jesus, a descendant of Abraham, blessed all people through His death, resurrection, and offer of salvation.

Key verse: John 10:4 '...the sheep follow Him because they know His voice and recognise His call.' – Amplified Holy Bible

Just as a shepherd care for his sheep, Jesus cares for those who follow Him.

- With telling this parable to teach the people, some people resented Jesus because He is the only way of access to God. Jesus is God's Son. Why should we seek any other way or want to customise a different approach to God? Life in Christ is lived on a higher plane because of his overflowing forgiveness, love and guidance.

If Jesus had been merely a man, His claims to be God would have proven Him insane. But His miracles proved His words true – He really was God. The Jewish leaders could not see beyond their own prejudices, and they looked at Jesus only from a human perspective – Jesus confined in a human box. But Jesus was not limited by their restricted vision.

Ministry from Galilee to Judea

After the feast of Dedication, Jesus returned to Capernaum for the final two months of His Galilean ministry. On His journey to Jerusalem, in Samaria, He again encountered immediate rejection. As a final appeal to the northern region, Jesus sent out 72 of His disciples, to whom he gave the power to heal in His Name, with the mission of proclaiming the coming of His kingdom.

He proceeded down through Judea, near Jericho, and told the parable of the Good Samaritan. An expert of the Law asked how he can inherit eternal life. Jesus answered him with the two new commandments.

- Key verse: *Luke 10:27* ‘... You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself.’ - *New King James Version*
- Jesus travelled on to Bethany, visiting in the home of Martha and Mary, and later proceeded to Jerusalem.

He told more parables, one of them about giving good gifts.

- Key verse: *Matthew 7:11* ‘If you, then, being evil (that is, sinful by nature), know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask and continue to ask Him?’ – *Amplified Holy Bible*
- Christ is showing us the heart of God the Father. God is not selfish, begrudging, or stingy, and we don’t have to beg or grovel as we come with our requests. He is a loving Father who understands, cares and comforts. If humans can be kind, imagine how kind God, the Creator of kindness, can be.

In Jerusalem for the Feast of Dedication

The feast of Dedication is also known as Hanukkah. It lasts for 8 days in December and is in aid of the rededication of the Temple.

Jesus affirmed His own deity – that He and the Father is One. It infuriated the Jews who claimed this to be blasphemy. They took up rocks to stone Jesus and tried to arrest Him, but He escaped.

Key verse: *John 10:26-30 'But you don't believe Me because you are not part of My flock. My sheep recognise My voice; I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them away from Me, for My Father has given them to Me, and He is more powerful than anyone else. So, no one can take them from Me. The Father and I are One.'* – New Living Translation

The Perea Ministry

Jesus went into the area beyond the Jordan River which is ruled by Herod Antipas. Herod also ruled Galilee at that time. It is the same Herod who beheaded John the Baptist. Jesus didn't fear Herod because He knew that He would be crucified in Jerusalem.

Jesus taught many parables to the people.

- The door to heaven is narrow, and we dare not take too long to accept Jesus as our Saviour, lest the door closes.
- Do not take the best seat at a wedding feast, lest you are humbled to move. Do not exalt yourself lest you are humiliated.
- Instead of inviting your friends and relatives, invite the poor, the crippled and the lame and you will be blessed.
- The cost of discipleship is to give up everything and follow Jesus.
- Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, you can't replace the salt. Just as salt flavours food, we are to preserve the good in the world. If you fail to be salty, you fail to represent Christ in the world.
- One lost sheep is like a sinner who repents, and much more important than 99 believers.
- The lost son returning after spending his inheritance is welcomed by the Father after repenting his sins.
- The rich man who ends up in hell, longs for water and for his family not to continue in their sinful ways, but it is too late. His family

should repent lest it is too late.

- The kingdom of God is not like an earthly kingdom with geographical boundaries – it begins with the work of God's spirit in people's lives and their relationship with God.

Return to Judea to raise Lazarus!

Martha and Mary, Lazarus' sisters, asked Jesus to come to Bethany to raise their brother after four days in the grave. This was such a conclusive demonstration of His power that His opponents plotted to kill Him. So, Jesus withdrew northward to Ephraim, near the wilderness.

The Final Journey

Jesus did some more teaching, blessed little children, and reminded those who followed Him of the burdens they must bear. For the third time He told His Apostles of His impending death.

He taught them about forsaking their earthly attachments to follow Him. When the Son of Man sits on His throne, the Apostles will judge the tribes of Israel. Those who left assets or family behind will receive 100 times as much and receive eternal life. God offers a secure relationship with Himself now and forever. You will gain the love of the family of God. Don't dwell on what you have given up, but what you gained and give thanks for it.

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, asked if they could sit on the left and right of Jesus in His kingdom. Jesus denied their request because He knew what was good for them. It is easy to say that we will endure everything for Christ, yet most of us complain about the most minor problems. God wants to give us what is best for us, not merely what we want.

Tax collectors were among the most unpopular people in Israel. They were considered traitors because they worked for Rome. Zacchaeus was one of them. Jesus loved him, and in response, he was converted. In every society, certain groups or people are considered 'untouchable' because of their political views, their immoral behavior, or their lifestyle.

We should not give in to social pressure to avoid these people. Because Jesus loves them, they need to hear His Good News.

As Jesus' journey to Jerusalem came to an end, the Gospel accounts tell the beautiful story of Mary anointing Jesus with precious ointments. It will be a touching prelude to the brutal events of the last week.

The triumphant Entry – Sunday

It was late March and the feast of Passover was near. Passover lasted for 7 days. It commemorated the exodus of the Israelites from their captivity in Egypt.

On Passover the lamb was slain, just as it was at the beginning of the exodus, at which time its blood was sprinkled over the doors of the Israelites. When death passed over Egypt, the firstborn of each household was killed. God spared only those households whose doors were covered by the blood.

As the perfect lamb of God, Jesus Himself was about to be slain for the salvation of all who would recognise and accept the power in His blood.

Riding on a donkey, Jesus was met by multitudes who shouted praise to God for having sent this 'great prophet' in whom they now believe.

Key verse: Luke 19:38 '...Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!' - New King James Version

Jesus knew that most of them didn't understand the true nature of His Messiahship and Deity. The enemies feared His popularity but let Him have His day of glory.

Final week – Monday

Jesus is still popular at this stage. Children praised and thanked Him and shouted, 'Hosanna to the Son of David'. They recognised the prophecy of Zechariah being fulfilled.

The unfaithful fig tree and the cleansing of the Temple from robbers are both recorded here. The Temple was supposed to be a place of worship, but true worship had disappeared. The fig tree showed promise of fruit, but it produced none. If you claim to have faith without putting it to

work in your life, you are like the barren fig tree. Genuine faith has great potential. Ask God to help you bear fruit for His kingdom.

Jesus spoke of His pending crucifixion and tried to explain it. There are many who still disbelieve, but as John observed, even their disbelief is the fulfilment of prophecy.

Key verse: John 12:24 'I assure you and most solemnly say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone (just one grain, never more). But if it dies, it produces much grain and yields a harvest.' – Amplified Holy Bible

Jesus had to die to pay the penalty for our sin, but also to show His power over death. His resurrection proves He has eternal life. Because Jesus is God, Jesus can give this same eternal life to all who believe in Him.

Jesus called for the people to walk in the 'light'. By walking in the light, they would become children of the light, revealing the truth, and pointing people to God. We must let His light shine through us, so that others can see Christ in our actions.

Final week – Tuesday morning

The Pharisees and Sadducees confronted Jesus. He pointed out that their predecessors had always rejected God's messengers and now they are rejecting the Son of God. They tried to trap Jesus so that they could arrest Him, but His answers gave them no basis for a charge.

Jesus told many parables, and the religious leaders kept asking questions. One of which was whether there was marriage in heaven, but Jesus said no. The souls will be like the angels in heaven.

One of the teachers wanted to know which of the commandments are the most important.

Key verse: Matthew 22:37 '...You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' – Amplified Holy Bible

Jesus taught who or what would be condemned:

- The self-righteous.
- False religion.
- Legalism – swearing by something.
- Injustice.
- Hypocrisy.
- Persecution.

Discussion on future events

Jesus told Peter, Andrew, James, and John that the Temple would be destroyed, which happened in 70 A.D. They left the Temple and went to the Mount of Olives.

To underscore the need for watchfulness, faithfulness, and spiritual readiness, Jesus concluded His prophecies with parables describing the final judgement.

Jesus taught about the signs to watch out for:

- Many will come in the Name of the Messiah.
- Wars.
- Civil unrest.
- Revolts.
- Uprisings.
- Nation rises against nation.
- Kingdom rises against kingdom.
- Earthquakes.
- Famines.
- Pestilence.
- Sights and signs from heaven.

Spiritual readiness: Jesus will appear on the clouds in the sky and His angels will gather the believers and take them to heaven.

No one knows the exact time, the day or hour except the Father. Pray that you will be ready to be raptured so you will escape all the bad things that will happen on earth during the 7 years of Tribulation.

After the rapture and before Jesus comes down on the Mount of Olives, the Bema court of the believers will take place. The believers (raptured and risen dead) may be rewarded with crowns according to the work they have done during their life on earth.

During the last judgement, the sheep and the goats will be separated. Sheep: believers and goats: unbelievers. The unbelievers will go away to eternal punishment and the righteous to eternal life. The sheep nations include New Zealand, Australia and South America.

Final week – Tuesday afternoon

Jesus told His disciples that His crucifixion was only two days away. The enemy continued to conspire against Him and Judas Iscariot bargained to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

Final week – Wednesday

Jesus taught at the Temple and made a final public appeal.

Key verse: *John 12:47,49 'If anyone hears My words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge and condemn the world, but to save the world...For I have never spoken on My own initiative or authority, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment regarding what to say and what to speak.'* – Amplified Holy Bible

The Upper Room

On the night of the last Supper, Wednesday night, Jesus washed the disciples' feet to teach them the need, not for the power and position, but for humility and service to others.

Jesus took the bread and wine and told the disciples to partake of them as symbols of His body and blood. He revealed the disciple who would betray Him as Judas Iscariot by dipping the bread and giving it to him. Satan entered Judas and he left.

Jesus gave the 11 disciples a new commandment:

Key verse: *John 13:34 '...Love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if*

you have love for one another.’ – New King James Version

On the question by Peter of where Jesus was going, He answered that He was going to prepare a place for them and all believers in His Father’s house.

Thomas asked Him the Way to which He answered:

Key verse: John 14:6 ‘...I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’ – New King James Version

Jesus explained to Philip that anyone who has seen Him, has seen the Father, because He is in the Father and the Father is in Him.

Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to teach and guide them. Anyone who loves Jesus will obey His teaching. And then Jesus promised to return one day.

Peter pledged his loyalty to Jesus, and Jesus told him that he (Peter) would betray him three times before the cock crows.

Final discussion

They were east of Jerusalem, just before the Kidron Valley, on their way to the Mount of Olives. Jesus encouraged the Apostles to:

- Love one another.
- Prepare for persecution.
- Be guided by the Holy Spirit.
- Remember He is the vine and they the branches, with God the gardener. Those branches who don’t bear fruit will be cut off and burnt.
- Have faith and continue to spread the Gospel.

Jesus prayed for Himself, for all believers, and for His disciples.

Betrayal and arrest

As they approached the garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, Jesus took Peter, James, and John beyond the others to keep watch

while He prayed. But they fell asleep as soon as He left. This happened three times when Jesus went to pray, and He had to wake them up.

Jesus was betrayed by Judas then He was arrested. There was a struggle where Peter cut one of the men's ears off, and Jesus healed the ear. The soldiers took Jesus away with them.

Trial before Sanhedrin

Jesus was taken before Annas, and then before his son-in-law Caiaphas who served as high priest over the Council which is the Jewish Supreme Court. They interrogated Jesus regarding His claims of Messiahship.

Key verse: Mark 14:62 'Jesus said, I am and you will all see the Son of Man seated with authority at the right hand of Power (the Father) and coming with the clouds of heaven.' – Amplified Holy Bible

On Thursday morning they had to vote for or against official condemnation.

Here Peter denied knowing Jesus three times and only realised his demise when the cock crowed.

Judas was so consumed by guilt because of his betrayal of Jesus that he took his own life. Because it was blood money he received and had thrown it in the Temple, they decided to buy a potter's field with it as a burial place for foreigners.

If Judas would have simply waited a few more hours, the hanging of Jesus would have been his hanging. Suicide will never be enough to atone for sin. Jesus is the only one who could pay the full and ultimate price. Jesus took our sins on Him and died 'as us'.

Trial before Pilate

Although Jesus was condemned to death by the Sanhedrin, they had to get permission from the Roman government. Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor who ruled over Judea, Idumea, and Samaria. Pilate was convinced of Jesus' innocence and sent Him to Herod Antipas, but Herod didn't want anything to do with it. Pilate tried to release Jesus, but failed, so he ordered the execution of Jesus.

Pilate had Him flogged first, then put a crown of thorns on His head. They stripped Jesus and put a scarlet robe on Him. They mocked Him and spat on Him. The Jews told Pilate that if he sets Jesus free, then he would be no friend of Caesar. This was the day of the Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour. They put Jesus' own clothes back on Him and led Him to be crucified.

Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry the cross to Golgotha which is also called The Place of the Skull.

The Crucifixion of Jesus

When Jesus was hanging on the Cross, He directed John to care for His mother Mary. He spoke briefly to one of the criminals who was crucified with Him, telling him that he would be with Him in Paradise that day.

Key verse: Luke 23:42 'Then he said to Jesus, Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.' – New King James Version

The Cross is a gate to Paradise. It is a way back into the Garden of God. The tragic disobedience of Adam in the garden of Eden ends in total triumph in the garden of Gethsemane because Jesus, unlike Adam, was obedient to His Father, God.

Jesus spoke from the Cross to John; He told him to care for His mother Mary.

Pilate had a notice prepared which read 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews' and nailed it above Jesus' head on the Cross. The soldiers cast lots for Jesus' clothes as was prophesied.

Key verse: Luke 23:34 'And Jesus was saying, Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing...'

About the 9th hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? They gave Jesus wine vinegar to drink. Then Jesus called 'It is finished' and 'Father, into your hands I commit My spirit'. Then He bowed His head and gave up His Spirit.

A miraculous event took place: The curtain of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs

broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.

One of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side and blood and water flowed out. His legs were not broken just as it was prophesied.

Burial of Jesus

Joseph of Arimathea was a respected member of the Council and a believer. He was aided by Nicodemus, the Pharisee and Jewish ruler who came to Jesus at night to ask how you get born-again. These two men wrapped Jesus' body in strips of linen and spices and placed Him in Joseph's new tomb. They rolled a big stone in front of the entrance.

The women went home and prepared spices and perfumes and then rested on the Sabbath. The soldiers secured and guarded the tomb.

Jesus' Resurrection and Appearance

The women went to the tomb on the Sunday morning, but it was empty. The angels told them that Jesus has risen from the dead. They reacted with both fear and joy. Mary Magdalene ran ahead to find Peter and John.

Jesus appeared to the women and sent them to tell the others.

Jesus appeared to two believers from Emmaus without being recognised. When they sat down to eat, they recognised Him. Jesus appeared to His disciples later and showed Thomas His hands and feet that were pierced. He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

Key verse: Luke 24:46,47 'And He said, Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah must suffer and die and rise again from the dead on the third day. With My authority, take this message of repentance to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: There is forgiveness of sins for all who turn to Me.' – New Living Translation

Jesus breathed on the disciples, and they received the Holy Spirit. He sent them out to forgive people's sins.

Peter was reinstated and Jesus told him to spread the Gospel.

Final instructions and Ascension

Jesus commissioned the Apostles to make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything they were commanded by Him.

When He had led them to the vicinity of Bethany, He lifted his hands and blessed them. They wanted to know when the kingdom of Israel would be restored, but they were told only the Father knows.

Then He was lifted in the sky with a cloud hiding Him from their sight.

The Apostles replaced Judas Iscariot with Matthias.

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples, which were not recorded in the Bible. The Bible was written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in His Name.

Chapter Twelve

Christ's Church and the Apostles

A.D. 30 - A.D.100

Acts of the Apostles

Doctor Luke recorded the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church of the first century. He recorded many of the acts of some of the Apostles and also included the work of others, such as Stephen, Philip, Barnabas and Silas. The gospel was to go from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Paul took the gospel first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles.

Jesus had told his Apostles to wait in Jerusalem until they have received the Holy Spirit. Pentecost is celebrated each year 50 days after Passover. It is also known as the Feast of Weeks where the first fruits of the harvest were celebrated.

Key verse: Acts 1:4,5 'In one of these meetings as He was eating a meal with them, He told them, Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you what He promised. Remember, I have told you about this before. John baptised with water, but in just a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit'. – New Living Translation

When the day of Pentecost came, suddenly a strong wind came from heaven and filled the house where they were sitting, and tongues of fire came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

God-fearing Jews from every nation were there and they came in bewilderment as they heard the Apostles speaking in their own languages. There were Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents from Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus Cyrene, visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans and Arabs.

This was the formal beginning of Christ's spiritual body, the Church.

The people were deeply moved by Peter's powerful, Spirit-filled message and asked him what they should do.

Key verse: *Acts 2:38 'And Peter said to them, Repent (change your old way of thinking, turn from your sinful ways, accept and follow Jesus as the Messiah) and be baptised, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ because of the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'* – Amplified Holy Bible

Growth of the early Church

The fellowship of the early Church continued to attract more and more believers. As the gospel message and miracles spread rapidly, the Church grew rapidly. So much that the Jewish leaders became alarmed and had the Apostles arrested. The early Christians repeatedly multiplied their number by sharing the good news of Christ to all who would listen.

Peter healed a crippled beggar and explained the miraculous power. He told them that they have killed the Author of life, but God raised Him from the dead. They were witnesses to this event. By faith in the Name of Jesus, this man was made strong.

Peter also preached repentance. This is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that His Christ would suffer. If you repent, your sins will be wiped out and salvation will come from the Lord. Jesus will remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything.

God told Abraham that all people on earth will be blessed. When God raised up His servant Jesus, He sent Him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.

Peter and John were arrested and put in jail until the next day, where they were brought before the Sanhedrin. They were amazed by Peter and John's boldness and they witnessed the crippled man's healing. The leaders let them go because they did not know how to punish them. They were warned not to speak or teach about Jesus.

Key verse: *Acts 4:11 '...the stone that you builders rejected, has now become the cornerstone.'* – New Living Translation

The cornerstone unites two walls at the corner of a building and holds the building together. Peter said that the Jews rejected Jesus, but without Christ there would be no Church because it would not be able to stand.

Ananias and Sapphira sold their property and brought the money to the Church but held some of the money back. Because they lied, they both fell dead and were buried. Great fear seized the whole Church and all who heard about these events.

All the believers used to meet in Solomon's Colonnade where the Apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. The high priest of the Sadducees was very jealous and imprisoned them. That night the angels of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and let them out.

The Apostles went to the Temple court and continued preaching. The leaders took them to court again but were told that they were obeying God's orders rather than men's. A Pharisee named Gamaliel, advised the court to let them go, because if their activities were from God, they would not be able to stop them. So, they flogged the Apostles and let them off with a warning not to preach again.

The Apostles rejoiced for being worthy to suffer disgrace for the Name of Jesus.

Because their work became too much for them, they appointed 7 Spirit-filled men to help distribute food. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and many priests became obedient to the faith.

Martyrdom of Stephen

Stephen was the first to give his life for the gospel. He was among the 7 distributors of food in the early Church. Stephen was opposed by members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen. They were Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the province of Cilicia and Asia.

In court they brought false witnesses against him and accused him of blasphemy. Stephen presented a summary of the Jew's own history and made powerful applications that stung his listeners. Members of the

council could not stand to have their evil motives exposed. They stoned him to death while he prayed for their forgiveness.

Key verse: Acts 7:59,60 'They continued stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, Lord Jesus, receive and accept and welcome my spirit. Then falling on his knees in worship, he cried out loudly, Lord, do not hold this sin against them! When he had said this, he fell asleep in death.' – Amplified Holy Bible

His death had a lasting impact on young Saul (Paul) of Tarsus, who would move from being a violent persecutor of Christians to being one of the greatest champions of the gospel the Church has known.

Persecution and Preaching

The growing Church encountered opposition from those who were jealous of the joyous fellowship among the disciples. Saul began to destroy the Church. Going from house to house, he dragged off the believers and put them in prison.

A widespread persecution arose, and the new converts fled to cities throughout Judea and Samaria. Despite the personal tragedies, the persecution became a blessing, because the Church expanded far beyond Jerusalem.

Philip went down to Samaria and preached the gospel. Evil spirits came out of many paralytics and cripples were healed. There was great joy in that city.

Simon practiced sorcery and was followed by many who were amazed by his magic. When the people heard Philip's preaching, they were baptised and Simon himself believed and was baptised.

Peter and John were sent to Samaria to lay hands on the new believers to receive the Holy Spirit. Simon offered them money to receive the gift of laying hands on people and was rebuked by them.

The angel of the Lord appeared to Philip and told him to go south to Gaza where he met an Ethiopian eunuch who was reading the book of Isaiah. He explained the book to him and baptised him in some water along the way.

The Spirit of the Lord took Philip away and he continued preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

Conversion of Saul

Meanwhile Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He requested a letter from the synagogue in Damascus to imprison anyone who belonged to the Way, the believers in Jesus.

On the way to Damascus, he had an encounter with Jesus who made him blind for three days. Jesus sent Ananias to him in Straight Street to lay hands on him, and he was baptised and received the Holy Spirit.

He preached in Damascus, but the Jews conspired against him to kill him. He was taken in by his followers who lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall to escape.

Back in Jerusalem, Barnabas took him to the Apostles, but they were afraid of him. He preached the gospel in Jerusalem and debated with the Grecian Jews who tried to kill him. The Apostles took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

The Church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit and grew in number, living in fear of the Lord.

First Gentile converts

God's eternal plan for mankind has been all along that all people of the world – Jews and non-Jews alike – should come to know Him through Jesus Christ. To approach pagan Gentiles had seemed unthinkable. It took a special vision from the Lord to convince Peter that the Gentiles were also included in God's plan.

In a vision, Peter saw heaven open and a large sheet with four-footed animals, reptiles and birds came down to earth, and a voice told him to kill and eat it. This happened three times and then the sheet was taken back to heaven.

Peter healed Aeneas of paralysis in Lydda and he raised Dorcas, who was also known as Tabitha, from the dead.

Cornelius who was a devout Roman military leader and God-fearing, sent for Peter. Some brothers from Joppa went along with him from Joppa to Caesarea, and Peter baptised him in the name of Jesus. The believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the Holy Spirit was poured out even on Gentiles.

The new era of God's grace was proclaimed when Christians taught Greeks in Antioch. Barnabas and Saul, who was called Paul later, taught great numbers of people in Antioch. The Disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

The prophet Agabus came down from Jerusalem to Antioch and predicted famine. Barnabas and Saul took gifts to Judea to help their brothers.

Persecution by Herod Agrippa 1

Herod Agrippa controlled all the territory formerly ruled by Herod the Great. He seized James, the brother of John, and put him to death with the sword.

He also seized Peter and put him in jail, but an angel of the Lord came and rescued him. Then Peter went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, and told them everything that had happened.

Herod had the guard killed, and then went to Caesarea. He had been quarrelling with the people of Tyre and Sidon and delivered a public address to the people. Because Herod permitted himself to be worshipped and did not give God the glory, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

First missionary journey

The Holy Spirit directed Barnabas and Saul/Paul on a tour to Cyprus and Turkey. John Mark was travelling with them as their helper. They had an encounter with Elymas, a Jewish sorcerer, and blinded him. The proconsul saw what had happened and believed.

When they sailed to Perga, John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem. When Barnabas and Paul were in Pisidian Antioch, Paul gave his first recorded sermon on the Sabbath. The sermon was well-received,

but the Jews were jealous when they saw the crowds gathering to hear the Word of the Lord.

Key verse: Acts 13:46 'And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and confidently, saying, It was necessary that God's message of salvation through faith in Christ be spoken to you (Jews) first. Since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, now we turn to the Gentiles'. – Amplified Holy Bible

The Gentiles were glad and honoured the Word of the Lord and believed. The good news spread through the whole region. It stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and they were expelled from the region. So, they left and went to Iconium.

A great number of Jews and Gentiles believed, but when there was a plot afoot to mistreat and stone them, they fled to Lystra. In Lystra, Paul healed a crippled man. When the crowd saw what he had done, they thought that they were gods and worshipped them. Barnabas and Paul tore their clothes and told them they were humans who were bringing the good news of the Lord to them.

Paul was stoned and dragged outside the city, thinking that he was dead. The next day they went to Derbe, and then Attalia.

After they strengthened the Churches in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, they sailed back to the Church in Antioch and reported about the mission they had completed, and all that God had done through them.

The Jerusalem Conference

The tour through ancient Asia Minor ended around A.D. 47 and in A.D. 48 there was trouble in the Church. Certain Jewish Christians tried to convince the Gentiles to be circumcised in addition to being baptised in obedience to God, and to keep the Law of Moses.

For this reason, the Conference was called and the message was sent out to Gentile Christians that they don't need to be circumcised and they don't need to keep the Law of Moses. They are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A letter was sent to the Gentile believers, stating that they should abstain:

- From food sacrificed to idols.
- From blood.
- From the meat of strangled animals.
- From sexual immorality.

Letter to the Galatians

Paul wrote the letter about A.D. 50, shortly after the Jerusalem conference.

Authority as an Apostle

The marks of a true gospel:

- Teaches that the source of the gospel is God.
- We trust in the God who loves us and died for us so that we may die to sin and live for Him.
- Explains that all believers have the Holy Spirit through faith.
- Declares that we cannot be saved by keeping Laws. The only way of salvation is through faith in Christ which is available to all.
- Says that all believers are one in Christ, so there is no basis for discrimination of any kind.
- Proclaims that we are free from the grip of sin and that the Holy Spirit's power fills and guides us.

Doctrine of Justification

Law and Christ – I live by faith in the Son of God, who loves me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the Law, Christ died for nothing.

Law and Faith – Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the Law, or because you believe what you heard?

Abraham's Faith – Those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Christ saves, not Works – Christ took the curse of the Law upon Himself when He hung on the cross. He did this so we wouldn't have to bear our own punishment. The only condition is that we should accept Christ's death on our behalf as the means to be saved.

Inheritance by Promise – If the inheritance depends on the Law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in His grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

Purpose of Law – The Law was given because of sins, until the Seed to whom the promise referred, had come. The Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

Heirs through faith – You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Adoption as sons – God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those under the Law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

Return to legalism – When you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God, or rather are known by God, you cannot turn back to those weak and miserable principles.

Paul calls on their love – Paul had an illness when he visited the Galatian Churches, and although it was a trial, they welcomed him as if he was an angel of God. He said it was fine to be enthusiastic, provided the purpose is good.

Allegory of Sarah and Hagar – Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. The Scriptures says to get rid of the slave woman and her son. The slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son. It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.

Christian liberty

Circumcision a matter of Law – In Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

Law fulfilled in love – The entire Law is summed up in a single commandment: Love your neighbour as yourself.

Flesh and spirit – The acts of the sinful nature of flesh are sexual immorality, impurity, idolatry, hatred, drunkenness and the like. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Mutual responsibility – If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.

Living by the Spirit – The one who sows to please his sinful nature, will reap destruction. The one who sows to please the Spirit, will reap eternal life.

Neither circumcision nor Law – What counts is a new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule.

Second Missionary Journey

Not long after the letter, Paul decided to visit personally. Paul and Barnabas had a disagreement and they separated. Barnabas and John Mark sailed for Cyprus, and Paul and Silas went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the Churches.

Timothy joined Paul and Silas in Derbe. They travelled through the region of Phrygia and Galatia and went down to Troas. Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia who needed him, so he travelled there.

From Troas they sailed for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. From there to Philippi, a Roman colony in the district of Macedonia. Lydia and her household were converted and baptised there.

An evil spirit was removed from a slave girl who predicted the future. The spirit left when Paul commanded: 'In the Name of Jesus Christ, I command you to come out of her!' When the owner of the slave girl

didn't make money with her anymore, they seized Paul and Silas and imprisoned them. They were ordered to be stripped and beaten. Their Philippian jailer was converted that night, and the whole household was baptised.

When Paul and Silas claimed to be Roman citizens, they were released from prison and escorted out of the city. When they came to Thessalonica, they preached in the synagogue and converted several people.

The Jews were jealous and fetched them from Jason's house where they were staying. Their King was Caesar and now they claimed that there was another King called Jesus. They posted bond and let them go.

They had a good reception at Berea and many Jews and Greeks believed in Jesus when they preached. Agitators forced Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed on in Berea.

Paul had a debate with philosophers in Athens. Their object of worship was an 'Unknown God'. He told them of the resurrection of Jesus and a few people became followers.

From Athens Paul went to Corinth where he met Aquila and his wife Priscilla. Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. They were also tentmakers, so Paul stayed with them.

Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia. The people became abusive towards Paul, and he left to go to the house of Titius Justus, a worshipper of God. Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, preaching the gospel.

First letter to Thessalonians

In A.D.51 Paul wrote two letters to the Christians in Thessalonica, which he passed on his way to Corinth. Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica to establish the faith. Paul addressed his letters to Gentile Christians who converted from paganism.

Paul reminds them that they had turned from idols to worship the true and living God, and he encouraged them to continue in purity, love and labour for the Lord.

He addressed their questions regarding the second coming of Jesus and referred to Timothy, Silas and himself as examples of sacrifice and suffering.

Second letter to Thessalonians

There was some misunderstanding about the first letter. The people thought that Christ was going to come right away. Paul pointed to some events that would precede the Lord's second coming.

First the rebellion will come, and the Man of Lawlessness will be revealed. This man, the Antichrist, will be doomed to destruction. He will oppose and exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God's Temple, proclaiming himself to be God. The Church of believers is holding him back, though, and will continue to do so until they are raptured. The Antichrist will be revealed whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth to destroy him.

The coming of the Antichrist will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so are saved. For this reason, God sends a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie. Those who do not believe the truth but delight in wickedness will be condemned.

Paul called them to stand firm and requested that they pray for the spreading of the gospel. He called on the people not to be lazy, but to work for their food. They are not to be regarded as the enemy but should be warned as brothers.

Paul stayed in Corinth for some time before he left for Syria. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off because of a vow that he had taken. They arrived at Ephesus where he left Priscilla and Aquila and went to Antioch.

Third Missionary Journey

Paul travelled to Ephesus, the capital of Asia, where he stayed for three years.

A Jew named Apollos from Alexandria, came to Ephesus and was eager to learn, since he only knew about the baptism of John. Priscilla and Aquila explained to him the way of God more adequately. He left to go to Achaia.

Paul arrived at Ephesus and rebaptised disciples who were only baptised with John's baptism of repentance. He baptised them in the Name of the Lord Jesus, and after he laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them and they spoke in tongues.

God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that touched him, were taken to the sick, and they were cured, and the evil spirits left them. A number who practiced sorcery brought their scrolls and burnt them publicly.

Paul sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia while he stayed in Asia a little longer.

First letter to the Corinthians

In A.D. 55-56, Paul mentioned the previous letter and indicated that he received a return letter from the Corinthians. The content of the first letter is unknown, but the return letter posed specific questions regarding marriage and singleness, food sacrificed to idols, spiritual gifts and special contributions.

Paul warned them against divisions in the Church. They should be perfectly united in mind and thought. Division prevents growth.

Key verse: 1 Corinthians 1:18,19 'I know very well how foolish the message of the cross sounds to those who are on the road to destruction. But we who are being saved recognize this message as the very power of God. As the Scriptures says, I will destroy human wisdom and discard their most brilliant ideas.' – New Living Translation

God's way of thinking is not like the world's way, that is, normal human wisdom. God offers eternal life which the world can never give. We can spend a lifetime accumulating wisdom and yet never learn how to have

a personal relationship with God. We must come to the crucified and risen Christ to receive eternal life and joy of a personal relationship with our Saviour.

Wisdom from the Spirit: God has a secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Key verse: 1 Corinthians 2:9 'That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him.' – New Living Translation

He will create a new heaven and a new earth, and we will live with Him forever. Until then, the Holy Spirit comforts and guides us. Knowing the wonderful and eternal future that awaits us gives us hope and courage to press on in this life, to endure hardship, and to avoid giving into temptation. This world is not all there is. The best is yet to come.

Each one of us has a task. Paul planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. We are God's fellow workers. God's work involves many different individuals with a variety of gifts and abilities. We can become useful people of God by setting aside our desires to receive glory for what we do. Don't seek the praise that comes from people. It is worthless compared to the approval from God.

The Christian Church was filled with those whose work was 'wood, hay, and straw', members who were immature, insensitive to one another and vulnerable to wrong doctrine. Local Church members should be deeply committed to Christ.

Regarding Immorality

Paul taught about:

- The danger of tolerating sin.
- The duty of self-policing.
- Judgement among selves.
- That sin prevents inheritance.
- Those bodies are not meant for sin.

Regarding Marriage and Singleness

- Marital relations: it is good for a man not to marry, but since there is so much immorality, it is good for each man to have his own wife.
- Singleness: it is good to stay single, but if you cannot control yourself, then you should marry.
- Regarding separation: it is acceptable, but then either must remain unmarried, or be reconciled to each other.
- Unbelieving spouses: an unbeliever is sanctified by a believer.
- Remaining in present state when you are called.
- Reason for advice: this world is passing away, so don't worry too much.
- Advantage of singleness: your interest is not divided like a married man.
- Regarding marriage: if you do, it is right and if you don't, it is also right.
- Regarding widows: a woman is bound to her husband, but when he dies, she can marry again.

Regarding mutual submission

- The man who loves God is known by God.
- There is only one God, the Father and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.
- We should not eat something if it offends another.
- We should not encourage someone to eat something they believe is a sin.
- You can change lives by helping them to grow spiritually.
- If you tend a flock, you should be allowed to drink their milk.
- If you teach, you should expect to get money for it.
- If you preach, you should be supported by those who benefit from it.
- I may offer my preaching because it gives me satisfaction.
- To the weak, I become weak to win the weak. I do this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in the blessings.
- A Christian's life takes hard work, self-denial and preparation. As

Christians we are running towards our heavenly reward.

- The Israelites who were led out of Egypt to escape slavery were not all saved. Some of them died in the desert, so we should not be overconfident in our life.
- We should not test the Lord by knowingly committing sin.
- God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear.
- Your action indicates your loyalty. Don't put your trust in your money, but in God.
- Everything is permissible, but not everything is beneficial. We should be sensitive towards others. Don't do something that could hurt others.
- Whatever you eat or drink, do it to the glory of God.

Regarding role distinctions

Women are not independent of men, because Eve was created from Adam's rib. Men are not independent from women, because they are born from their mothers, except Adam of course.

A Church needs diversity. Some people are Apostles, other are prophets, teachers, miracle-workers, and some able to help others. They all make up the body of Christ.

But love is the greatest gift of all. Love is patient, kind, does not envy, boast or are proud. It is not rude, self-seeking, not easily angered and keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, trusts, hopes and perseveres. Love will outlast all gifts. These remain: faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love.

When you prophecy, you speak to men, but when you speak in tongues, your spirit speaks to God, unless it is interpreted. Tongues are a sign for unbelievers, prophecy is for believers.

Regarding the Resurrection

- Resurrection is a provable fact.
- Resurrection is central otherwise our faith is futile.

- Our resurrection is certain. First Christ, then us and the dead.
- Our conduct is based upon hope.
- We get heavenly bodies in resurrection.
- Our bodies will have a spiritual nature.
- We will have glorified bodies.
- Our bodies will be imperishable.

Key verse: *1 Corinthians 15:54 'And when this perishable puts on the imperishable, and this mortal puts on immortality, then the Scripture will be fulfilled that says, Death is swallowed up in victory (defeated forever).'*
 – Amplified Holy Bible

Second letter to Corinthians

The letter was written about A.D. 56-57. Paul expressed his gratitude for God's comfort, so they can comfort others in need. He told them about all the hardships they had to endure. The reason for all the sufferings were that they might not rely on themselves, but on God. He was hoping to be viewed positively and be recognised for the integrity that they conducted themselves.

It is God who makes everybody stand firm in Christ. The troublemakers should be forgiven and comforted to confirm their love for Him.

Regarding Paul's Ministry

- His ministry was not for profit, but to speak God's Word.
- The letters were not written with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God.
- His competence came from God, he was a minister of the new covenant.
- The ministry of righteousness is glorious.
- The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit is, is freedom from judgement, sin, the Law and even death.
- The mind of the unbelievers is blinded, so they can't see the light shining in our hearts with the knowledge of God.
- All power is from God and not from man. Paul and his men were persecuted, but not abandoned by God.

- Paul is speaking out of faith so that the grace of God can reach more and more people and cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.
- We are renewed inwardly every day. We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.
- We are longing for our eternal dwelling. God has given us the Spirit as deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.
- We have courage facing death, so that we can be with the Lord.
- Christ's love compels us because we are convinced that Christ died for us.
- We are God's ambassadors, so don't let His grace be in vain.
- We submit under hardship and always rejoice.
- Paul called for full acceptance by the Corinthians and that they would open their hearts to them.
- We must purify ourselves from everything that contaminates our body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of great respect for God.
- Paul pleaded for fellowship, as he had great pride in them and is greatly encouraged in all his troubles.
- He rejoiced in knowing that they had great concern for him.
- Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation.
- Paul expressed his joy regarding Titus' reception and their obedience to his ministry.

Regarding collection for brethren in Judea

Key verse: 2 Corinthians 9:6,7 'And this: He who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly, and he who sows on blessings shall reap on blessings. Let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not of grief or of necessity, for Elohim loves a joyous giver.' – The Scriptures

Paul wrote about the surpassing grace that God has given them.

Defense on Paul's discipleship

Paul wrote about his reasons for boasting. He:

- Received 40 minus one lashes of flogging, five times.

- Was beaten with rods, three times.
- Stoned one time.
- Was shipwrecked, three times.
- Spent a day and night on the open sea.
- Was constantly on the move.
- Had been in danger from rivers.
- Had been in danger from bandits.
- Had been in danger from his own countrymen.
- Had been in danger from Gentiles.
- Had been in danger in the city.
- Had been in danger in the country.
- Had been in danger at sea.
- Had been in danger from false brothers.
- Had laboured and toiled.
- Had often gone without sleep.
- Had known hunger and thirst.
- Had gone without food.
- Had been cold and naked.
- Faced daily with the pressure of his concern for all the Churches.

All these sufferings indicate strength.

Key verse: 2 Corinthians 12:7,8 ‘...But to keep me from getting puffed up, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from getting proud. Three times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time He said, My gracious favour is all you need. My power works best in your weakness. So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may work through me.’ – New Living Translation

Paul made his third promised visit to Corinth and other parts of Achaia. He finally arrived in Greece, where he stayed three months.

Letter to the Romans

Paul wrote this letter to the saints in Rome, around A.D. 56-58. He told them of his desire to visit them. The theme of his letter is that those who are righteous through faith are those who truly live. The thrust of

the letter is the superiority of obedient faith over futile attempts to earn salvation through strict Law-keeping. Grace is not a substitute for the Law, but rather a higher motivation to obey God's Laws.

Judgement of God

- The Gentiles rejected God and although they knew Him, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him. They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.
- Idolatry led to immorality.
- Unnatural replaced natural.
- Sinfulness replaced purity. They had become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. Those who do such things deserve death.
- We are all sinners. God's kindness, tolerance and patience leads us to repentance. Because of our stubbornness and unrepentant heart, we are storing up wrath against ourselves for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgement will be revealed.
- God's judgement is impartial. He does not show favouritism.
- Those who obey the Law will be declared righteous. The Gentiles who do not have the Law, and do things according to the Law, demonstrate that the requirements of the Law are written on their hearts.
- Paul says that if we do not live up to what we know, we are no better off than the heathen.
- A man is a Jew if he is one inwardly. Circumcision is circumcision of the heart by the Spirit, not by the written code.
- God, in His wonderful love, offers us eternal life. We receive our salvation not through Law but through faith in Jesus Christ.
- God cannot overlook sin. No matter how many excuses they make, sinners will have to answer to God for it.
- No one will be declared righteous by observing the Law, rather, through the Law we become conscious of sin.

Righteousness of God

- Righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.
- We don't nullify the Law but uphold it.
- Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. The Law didn't come into it. It was before he was circumcised.
- David recognized grace upon an undeserving sinner.
- Key verse: *Psalm 32:1 'Blessed is he whose transgressions is forgiven, and whose sin is covered.'* – *Amplified Holy Bible*
- Abraham's promise was based on faith – the promise was that he would inherit the world. This inheritance would come through the righteousness that comes through faith.
- Abraham's promise was for all people – the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all.
- Abraham's faith was an example. His body was as good as dead at 99 years old, yet he and Sarah had a child because God promised it.
- For us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He made me free from the law of sin and death.

Freedom from Condemnation

- Through justification we have peace with God.
- Through justification we stand in Grace.
- Through justification we have Hope in Glory.
- Through justification we can have joy in our suffering.

Freedom from Sin

- Grace is no excuse to sin. Those who are baptised into Christ's death, will be raised from the dead through the glory of the Father into a new life.
- Just as we died with Christ (in baptism), we will live with Christ.
- Grace requires submission. We do not let sin reign in our bodies by obeying its evil desires. Our body is not an instrument of wickedness, but an instrument of righteousness. We are not under Law, but under grace.
- Slavery to righteousness. We have been set free from sin, and offer

our bodies to righteousness, leading to holiness.

- Grace brings life. The wages of sin is death, but the gracious gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Freedom from the Law

- The Law is binding only during the lifetime, for example if a man dies, his wife can marry another man without committing a sin.
- Now married to Christ's ways. God is at the centre of a Christian's life.
- Sin deceives people by misusing the Law. When we are tempted to sin, we must focus on His great love for us, and then we will understand that He only restricts us from actions that will harm us.
- The Law did not cause sin. If I try to struggle with sin in my own strength, I will slip into the grasp of sin's power.
- The Law is good, but man has got a sinful nature. Becoming a Christian does not stamp out all sin and temptation from a person's life. The Holy Spirit that lives within us gives us power. And when we fall, he lovingly reaches out to help us up.
- Our flesh and spirit struggle. Sin has caused all creation to fall from the perfect state in which God created it. One day all creation will be liberated and transformed. Until that time, it waits in eager expectation for the resurrection of God's children.

Freedom from death

- There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
- The Spirit gives life in you.
- Those who are led by the Spirit are sons of God.
- The present sufferings cannot be compared to what glory awaits us.
- The Spirit helps us in our weakness. When we pray, the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to God's will.
- God works for the good of all who love Him. Jesus is at the right-hand of God, also interceding for us.
- God's love is unfailing, and nothing will separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Regarding the Jewish experience

- Paul said he would willingly take his brothers and sisters' punishment if that would save them. He showed a rare depth of love.
- The basis of God's promise. Covenant people are not just his biological descendants but are all those who trust in what Jesus Christ has done for them.
- God can have mercy on anyone. God's choices are good, even if we don't understand them.
- A man cannot limit God's grace. We have no right to demand anything from our Creator – our very existence depends on Him.
- The Prophets of Old Testament were foretold of God's grace. Seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus, Hosea told of God's intention to restore his people. Isaiah prophesied that only a small number of God's original people, the Jews, would be saved.
- The Jews did not see grace. The Gentiles obtained righteousness by faith, but Israel tried to pursue it by their works. We may think that attending Church, doing Church work, giving offerings, and being nice will be enough to earn grace.
- The Jews tried to earn salvation. The Jewish people believed in God but not in Jesus. God appointed Jesus to bring God and people together. We cannot come to God except through Jesus.
- Salvation for all. There is no difference between the Jews and Gentiles. They are both richly blessed by God.
- The Gospel produces faith. Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ. How can people respond to the Good News unless someone tells them?
- Israel rejected preaching. Some religious people are spiritually blind, while those who have never been in a Church are sometimes the most responsive to God's message. We can't see in people's hearts, so beware of judging people's response.
- Always a faithful remnant. God told Elijah that he reserved 7,000 faithful people when he despaired over the Israelites' actions towards the prophets. He was the last living prophet and was scared. At the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.

- Unrighteous hearts were hardened and blinded to the truth.

Key verse: Romans 11:7 'So this is the situation: Most of the Jews have not found the favour of God they are looking for so earnestly. A few have – the ones God has chosen – but the rest were made unresponsive'. – New Living Translation

- Because the Jews didn't believe that Jesus was the Saviour, the Gentiles believed the Good News to make the Jews jealous.
- The Gentiles may win back the Jews because of their envy.
- The Gentiles shouldn't boast about being given the opportunity what the Jews are rejecting, because our mighty God can cut the Gentiles off or graft them in again.
- One of the mysteries is that the Jews' heart was hardened until an amount (only known by God) of Gentiles are saved. Then the door closes. God has saved us by his great mercy after our disobedience.

Christian life and conduct

- We are called to be holy and pleasing to God.
- We must use the gifts that God gave us.
- We must show our love towards others through our deeds.
- We must show our love through our relationship with others.
- We must pay our duty towards the governing authority.
- The one commandment 'Love your neighbour as yourself' is a summary of all the other commandments.
- Hope is the key to our motivation. Clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Regarding mutual responsibility

- Do not judge people who don't eat all the food that you eat, e.g., vegetarians, because God has accepted them.
- Don't judge others, because one day we will each give account of ourselves to God.
- All food is clean, but it is wrong to eat food that will cause others to

stumble. Drinking wine causes a temptation for people who try not to drink alcohol or eat something that others believe no one should eat.

- Base your actions upon conviction. The man who has doubts about a certain kind of food and eats it anyway, is wrong, because if something is not coming from faith, it is a sin.
- Each person should do things to build someone else up. We who are strong ought to bear the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.
- Accept one another, just as Christ accepted you, to bring praise to God.

Closing remarks

Paul's plans to leave for Jerusalem were changed. He began his return to Syria through Philippi, Troas, and Miletus (near Ephesus). Paul anticipated possible imprisonment and persecution upon his return to Jerusalem.

When he was in Troas, a man fell from the third-floor balcony and died. Paul brought him back to life again.

When they reached Caesarea by boat, they stayed with Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. His four daughters were prophets. Another prophet, Agabus prophesied that Paul would be bound and handed over to the Jews when he reached Jerusalem.

Paul's arrest and trial

Paul was arrested and attacked by local Jews in Jerusalem. Claudia, a Roman commander, took him into protected custody. Paul was on trial before the Sanhedrin Council, but they could find no charge against him. There was a plot to kill him, but he was removed to Caesarea.

Paul before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa

Paul appeared before Felix, the governor of Judea. Felix knew enough about 'The Way' to realise that there is no substance to the charges. He

was angry that Paul failed to bribe him, and Paul remained in jail for two years. Felix was recalled to Rome.

Festus, his successor, could also find no charge against Paul and sent him to appear before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. But Paul exercised his right as a Jew and a Roman and appealed his case to Caesar. Agrippa II was visiting and when he has a conversation with Paul, he was vulnerable to the gospel message, but there is no record that he responded in full belief.

Voyage to Rome

They had an almost disastrous voyage from Caesarea to Rome. During a two-week storm they landed in Malta and stayed there for three months where Paul healed many of the people's diseases. A viper fastened himself to Paul's hand and was shaken off into the fire. The people regarded him as a god. The remainder of the voyage was uneventful and they received a warm welcome in Italy.

House arrest in Rome

Paul was placed under house arrest, where he was permitted to maintain his own living quarters while being guarded by a Roman soldier. He continued preaching to the local Jewish leaders for two years. He boldly preached the kingdom of God and taught them about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Letter to the Colossians

About A.D. 61 - A.D. 63 Paul wrote four letters which came to be known as the Prison Epistles. He had never been to Colosse, but one of his companions had been preaching there. He thanked God for their witnessing and prayed that they would receive wisdom.

The preeminence of Christ

- The person of Christ is the image of the invisible God and by Him all things were created.
- The broken relationship with God is restored by Jesus dying on the Cross.
- By baptism the Church died with Christ and arose with Him. The

mystery is revealed of how Christ lives in you, the hope and glory of eternal life.

- All the treasures of faith, wisdom, and knowledge are hidden in Christ.
- Paul warned them against false teaching.
- Jesus Christ is all-sufficient and is Head over every power and authority.

Carnality and Spirituality

- Christ should be our only focus. Don't listen to people telling you to worship angels. The people who spread the false doctrine are not connected to Christ. Such a person should not be trusted.
- New Christians grow gradually to maturity. Just keep on trusting God to change you.
- Be spiritually minded. To be hidden in Christ means to be concealed and safe. Live for Christ and He will give you hope for the future when He returns.
- Live to be spiritually transformed. Be committed to telling the truth. To be a Christian means more than having good intentions. It means taking the right actions.
- Putting on Christ, means to clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Forgive each other, and put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Whatever you do, do it in the Name of Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Concluding thoughts

- Devote yourself to prayer, being watchful and thankful.
- Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders, by speaking with grace.

Key verse: *Colossians 2:9,10 'For in Christ the fullness of God lives in a human body, and you are complete through your union with Christ. He is the Lord over every ruler and authority in the universe.'* – *New Living Translation*

Letter to Philemon

Onesimus was Philemon's slave and had taken money and property belonging to his master. Paul writes to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus, asking Philemon to take Onesimus back as a brother in Christ.

Paul offered to pay any loss that might have been incurred. He was confident of Philemon's obedience.

Key verse: *Philemon 1:15,16 'Perhaps you could think of it this way: Onesimus ran away for a little while so you could have him back forever. He is no longer just a slave; he is a beloved brother, especially to me. Now he will mean much more to you, both as a slave and as a brother in the Lord.'* – *New Living Translation*

Letter to the Ephesians

The message is universal. Paul writes about the

- relationship between Christ and the Church and the
- practical results which that knowledge ought to bring into the lives of the individual Christians.

Revelation of God's mystery

- Praise for God's grace: to put into effect all things in heaven and earth together under one head, even Christ.
- Our hope in Christ is sealed. Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the taking possession of those who belong to God, to the praise of His glory.
- Christ's great power and strength as He is sitting at God's right hand. God has placed all things under Jesus' feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the Church, which is His Body.
- We were raised from spiritual death to be shown the riches of His grace expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.
- It is a gift of grace from God that we are saved through faith.
- Christ had destroyed the barriers people build between themselves like age, appearance, intelligence, political persuasion, economic

status, race and theological perspective. We were all sinners, and we are all offered salvation. All believers are now united in one family.

- God's house is not a building, but a group of people. He lives in us and shows Himself to the world through us. People can see that God is love and we live in harmony with each other. We are citizens of God's kingdom and members of His household.
- The mystery revealed namely that both Gentiles and Jews form one body, and together they share the promise in Christ Jesus.
- Paul said that without the help of the Father, he would never have been able to do God's work. Obeying Christ is never easy. You must be willing to endure pain so that God's message of salvation can reach the entire world.
- The family of God includes all who believe in Him in the past, the present and the future. We are a family because we have the same Father. God promises his love and power to his family, the Church. When you feel shut out or isolated, remember that you can never be lost to God's immeasurable love.
- Praise to God who can do more than we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us.

Encouragement regarding the Church

- We are only one body, says Paul. Unity does not just happen; we must work at it. Often differences among people can lead to division, but this should not be true in the Church. We should focus on what unites us: one Body, one Spirit, one future, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God!
- Each believer has God-given abilities that can strengthen the whole Body, and we should use them. We can do more as a group than trying to do something on our own.
- Christ is the truth and the Holy Spirit who guides the Church, is the Spirit of truth. Holding to the truth in love is not always easy, convenient, or pleasant, but it is necessary if the Church is going to do Christ's work in the world.

Key verse: *Ephesians 4:4-6 'We are all one body, we have the same Spirit, and we have all been called to the same glorious future. There is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and there is only one God and Father, who is over us all and living through us all.'* – *New Living Translation*

Encouragement regarding personal Righteousness

- The Good News will seem foolish to those who forsake faith and rely on their own understanding. They indulge in every kind of impurity with a lust for more.
- Our old way of life before we believed in Christ, is completely in the past. We are to be made new in attitude of our minds, and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.
- Each person must put off falsehood, anger, and slander, otherwise we give the Devil a foothold to control us. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as Christ forgave us.
- Just as children imitate their parents, we should follow God's example. His great love for us led Him to sacrifice Himself so that we might live. Our love should go beyond affection to self-sacrificing service.
- We should strive to be morally pure. There should not be a hint of sexual immorality, greed, or any other impurity, because these are improper for God's holy people.
- Live as children of the light, for the fruit of the light consists of goodness, righteousness, and truth. Do what pleases God.
- Live spirit-filled lives, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Don't get drunk on wine. Always give thanks to God the Father for everything, in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Encouragement regarding Relationships

- Submit to one another out of respect for God. Submitting to another doesn't mean becoming a doormat.

Key verse: *Philippians 2:10,11 'that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under*

the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father'. – New King James Version

Children should honour their father and mother, that it may go well with them and that they may enjoy a long life on earth. Parents should not enrage their children, instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Servants should obey their earthly masters as they would obey Christ, like the will of God from your heart. And masters should treat their servants the same way. God will reward you one day for whatever good you do.

Encouragement regarding our Relationship with God

- Spiritual struggles: Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of evil. We must put on the full armour of God. Stand firm with the belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, feet with readiness of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.
- Pray in the Spirit and keep on praying for all the saints.

Letter to the Philippians

Paul had visited Philippi three times already. He had a close relationship with them, also because they had contributed generously to his support. Joy was a dominant theme in this letter but two women in the Church conflicted with each other, and they caused a split in the Church.

Reflections upon Imprisonment

- Paul thanked the believers for helping him when he had a need. Paul described the process of Christian growth and maturity that begins when we accept Jesus and continues until Christ returns.
- Being imprisoned would cause many people to become bitter or to give up, but Paul saw it as an opportunity to spread the Word. Turning a bad situation into a good one, he reached out to Roman soldiers and encouraged the Christians who were afraid of

persecution. We may have times of discouragement – times of financial burdens, or the loss of jobs. How we react will reflect on what we believe.

- Paul taught that it doesn't matter what the motivation behind preaching the gospel is, whether it is love or personal ambition, if the Word is reaching people.
- Paul's dilemma was that he could be released or executed, but whatever the outcome, he wanted to exalt Christ. Only faith could sustain Paul from such adversity.

Various encouragements

- Stand united with joy in your heart by being like-minded, having the same love, and being one in spirit and purpose.
- Stay humble and do all your work to the glory of God the Father.
- Continue working out your salvation whether your superior is present or absent.
- Do everything without complaining or arguing.
- Christians should be joyful in the Lord.

Various warnings

- Watch out for people who do evil.
- Hold on to your faith in Christ.
- Forget what is behind and go forward to what is ahead.
- Stand firm in the Lord because our citizenship is in heaven.

Concluding thoughts

- Let your gentleness be evident to all.
- Think about things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and praiseworthy, and put it into practice.
- Be content whatever the circumstances, whether well fed or hungry. Do everything through Him who gives you strength.

Key verse: *Philippians 3:20,21 'But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for Him to return as our Saviour. He will take these weak mortal bodies of ours and change them into glorious bodies like His own, using the same mighty power that He will use to conquer everything, everywhere.'* – New Living Translation

First letter to Timothy

With Timothy being a young evangelist and facing many challenges at the Church of Ephesus, Paul wrote him a letter from Macedonia, advising him on:

- Church organization and conduct.
- The matter of prayer.
- The role of women.
- Qualifications of elders and deacons.
- Support of widows.
- Proper attitude of Christian slaves.
- Those who teach false doctrine.
- Those whose only goal is making money or achieving popularity by teaching.

Key verse: *Philippians 2:20-22 'I have no one else like Timothy, who genuinely cares about your welfare. All the others care only for themselves and not for what matters to Jesus Christ.'* – New Living Translation

Letter to Titus

Titus faced very similar challenges to Timothy. Paul advised Titus in his responsibility of supervising the Churches on the island of Crete. Therefore, Paul's letter to Titus resembled his letter to Timothy in its emphasis on false teaching, Church organization, and instruction in Christian living.

People flocked to hear Paul's teaching. Filled with the Holy Spirit, this man of God faithfully proclaimed the Good News throughout the Roman Empire. Lives were changed and Churches began. But Paul knew that the Church must be built on Christ and not on a person. So, he trained

young pastors to assume leadership in the Churches after he was gone. He urged them to centre their lives and preaching on the Word of God and to train others to carry on the ministry.

Paul emphasised the importance of good deeds in the life of the Christian. He urged Titus to be a good example of a mature believer and to teach with courage and conviction. It is not enough to be educated or to have a loyal following, but you must have self-control, spiritual and moral fitness, and a Christian character. Who you are is just as important as what you can do.

Key verse: Titus 1:10 'For there are many who rebel against right teaching; they engage in useless talk and deceive people. This is especially true of those who insist on circumcision for salvation.' – New Living Translation

Second letter to Timothy

It appeared that Paul had been arrested again in either Nicopolis or Troas and returned to Rome under a sentence of death. Paul referred to himself as a prisoner and mentioned that he made a legal defense.

The tone of his letter to Timothy indicated that his time was short. Some of Paul's supporters had deserted him because he faced persecution. Paul wanted Timothy to come back to travel with him.

In this letter, Paul displayed the love he had for Timothy. He reminded Timothy of the qualities necessary for a faithful minister of Jesus Christ.

Timothy should:

- Remember his call and use his gifts with boldness.
- Keep to the truth.
- Prepare others to follow him in the ministry.
- Be disciplined and ready to endure suffering.
- Keep his eyes and mind focused on Christ.

Key verse: 2 Timothy 4:5 'But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at bringing others to Christ. Complete the ministry God has given you.' – New Living Translation

Apparently, Paul died a martyr's death.

Letter by James

James and Jude are believed to be Jesus' brothers. The letter could have been written prior to A.D. 62. The letter was intended for the first century Jewish Christians residing in Gentile communities outside Palestine and all Christians everywhere.

The letter can be considered a 'How to...' book on Christian living. Confrontation, challenges, and a call to commitment awaits you in the letter.

He addressed persecution, facing all the Churches during that time.

James discussed the nature of temptation, and the need for consistency between faith and conduct. It is not enough to talk the Christian faith, he says; we must live it. It is no use saying you have faith if you can't prove it by your actions.

He wrote that only those who demonstrate true faith can endure the sufferings of the times, and that faith can be measured by conduct. James shows the importance of controlling one's speech. There are two kinds of wisdom – earthly and heavenly. He encouraged his readers to turn from their evil desires to obey God.

James' writings contain words of practical advice for every Christian's daily walk. He reproves those who trust in their own plans and possessions. He also encourages his readers to be patient with each other, to be straightforward in their promises, and to help pray for each other.

Key verse: *James 3:13 'If you are wise and understand God's ways, live a life of steady goodness so that only good deeds will pour forth. And if you don't brag about the good you do, then you will be truly wise!' – New Living Translation*

Letter by Jude

Jude addressed a general audience through a brief writing in which he warned them of false teachers and encouraged them to keep the faith.

There are many people who live in opposition to God and His followers. They twist God's truth, seeking to deceive and destroy the unwary. But God's truth must go forth, carried and defended by those who have committed their lives to God's Son. It is an important task, an awesome responsibility, and a privilege to have this commission.

He wrote about the prophecy of Enoch where he talked about the coming judgement of those who are ungodly and do ungodly acts. These people follow their own evil desires, boast about themselves, and flatter others for their own advantage.

Key verse: *Jude 2:21 - 22 'Live in such a way that God's love can bless you as you wait for the eternal life that our Lord Jesus Christ in His mercy is going to give you. Show mercy to those whose faith is wavering.'* – *New Living Translation*

First letter by Peter

Peter wrote this letter to offer encouragement to suffering Christians who were driven out of Jerusalem and scattered throughout Asia Minor, and believers everywhere.

Suffering has many forms – physical abuse, undermining and weakening, social rejection and persecution. The pain and anguish tempt a person to turn back and give in. Many of the first century followers of Christ were suffering and were being abused and persecuted for believing in and obeying Christ.

Peter knew persecution firsthand. Beaten and jailed, Peter had been threatened often. He knew Christ, and nothing could shake his confidence in his risen Lord.

Peter begins by:

- Thanking God for salvation.
- Explaining that trials will refine their faith.
- Commanding them to live holy lives.
- Reverently fearing and trusting God.
- Teaching honesty and love.
- Becoming like Christ.

- Jesus Christ as the living cornerstone.
- Those rejecting Jesus will stumble and fall.
- The Church is God's holy priesthood. Peter explains that believers should:
 - Live above reproach.
 - Imitate Christ in all their social roles.
 - Obey God amid great suffering.
 - Be grateful for the privilege of suffering for Christ.
 - Trust God for rescuing.

Special instructions:

- Elders should care for God's flock.
- Younger men should be submissive to older people.
- Everyone should trust God and resist Satan.

Key verse: *1 Peter 1:7 'These trials are only to test your faith, to show that it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold – and your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold. So, if your faith remains strong after being tried by fiery trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honour on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.'* - New Living Translation

Second letter by Peter

Second Peter is a letter of warning against false teachers and to encourage believers to grow in their faith and knowledge of Christ. It was written three years after the first letter, about A.D. 67.

Peter knew his time on earth was limited, so he wrote about what was in his heart, warning believers of what would happen when he was gone. He reminded his readers of the unchanging truth of the gospel.

Peter gave an antidote for stagnancy and shortsightedness in the Christian life. He implied that his readers ought to be thankful that the Lord has not yet come again, because if He had, they would not have been ready.

Key verse: 2 Peter 1:3 'As we know Jesus better, His divine power gives us everything we need for living a godly life. He has called us to receive His own glory and goodness!' - New Living Translation

Letter to the Hebrews

It is not clear who the writer of Hebrews might have been. Some believe it was Luke, others believe it may have been Paul's colleague, Barnabas, or perhaps Apollos. Whoever it was, was acquainted with the situation.

Judaism was not second-rate or easy. It was the best religion, expressing true worship and devotion to God. This message of Jesus Christ was difficult for Jews to accept.

The message of Hebrews is that Jesus is better, Christianity is superior, Christ is supreme and completely sufficient for salvation. Hebrews begins by emphasising that the old (Judaism) and the new (Christianity) are both religions revealed by God. The writer shows that Jesus is superior to angels, superior to their leaders, and superior to their priests. Christianity surpasses Judaism because it has a better covenant, a better sanctuary and a more sufficient sacrifice for sins.

The practical implications of Christianity:

- Encouraging each other to hold on to the new faith.
- Looking forward to Christ's return.
- Warning against rejecting Christ's sacrifice.
- Reminding of the rewards for faithfulness.
- Explaining how to live by faith.
- Encouragement for daily living.
- Comparing the old and new covenant.
- Moral encouragement.
- Request for prayer.

Whatever you are considering as the focus of life, Christ is better. He is the perfect revelation of God, the final and complete sacrifice for sin, the compassionate and understanding mediator, and the only way to eternal life.

Key verse: *Hebrews 1:3 'The Son reflects God's own glory, and everything about Him represents God exactly. He sustains the universe by the mighty power of His command. After He died to cleanse us from the stain of sin, He sat down in the place of honour at the right hand of the majestic God of Heaven.'* – *New Living Translation*

First letter by John

John was an older man and perhaps the only surviving Apostle at this time. He had not yet been banished to the island of Patmos, where he would live in exile. As an eyewitness of Christ, he wrote to give this new generation of believers assurance and confidence of God and in their faith.

First John was written to help you know the reality of God in your life through faith in Christ, to assure you that you have eternal life, and to encourage you to remain in fellowship with the God who is light and love.

As the elder statesman in the Church, John wrote his letter to his 'dear children'. In it he presented God as:

- Light, symbolising absolute purity and holiness.
- Love: giving, dying, forgiving and blessing.
- Life: God's life is in His Son.

He explained what it means to have fellowship with God.

False teachers entered the Church, denying the incarnation of Christ. John wrote to correct their serious errors. He warned against false teachers.

John explained that when people sin, Christ is their defender. He urged them to obey Christ fully and to love all the members of God's family.

He warned his readers of the Antichrist who will try to lead them away from the truth.

God is love, and because God loves us, he calls us His children and makes us like Christ. This should motivate us to live close to Him. We can

be sure of our family relationship with God when our life is filled with good deeds and love for others.

Key verse: *1 John 5:13 'I write this to you who believe in the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life.'* – *New Living Translation*

Second letter by John

The second letter written by John was addressed to 'The chosen lady and her children'. Possibly the local Church and all believers everywhere.

It emphasises the basics of following Christ – truth and love – and warn against false teachers.

Key verse: *2 John 1:6 'Love means doing what God has commanded us, and He has commanded us to love one another, just as you heard from the beginning.'* – *New Living Translation*

To be loyal to Christ's teaching, we must seek to know the Bible, but we may never twist its message to our own needs or purposes or encourage others who misuse it.

To obey Christ fully, we must believe His command to love others. Helping, giving, and meeting needs put love into practice.

Don't encourage those who are opposed to Christ. Politely remove yourself from association with false leaders.

Third letter by John

Church leaders travelled from town to town helping to establish new congregations. They depended on hospitality from fellow believers.

John wrote to three people:

- Gaius, who follows Christ and loves others.
- Diotrephes, the self-proclaimed Church leader who does not reflect God's values.
- Demetrius, who also follows the truth.

Key verse: *3 John 1:5 'Dear friend, you are doing a good work for God when you take care of the travelling teachers who are passing through,*

even though they are strangers to you.’ – New Living Translation

Chapter Thirteen

Revelation of the End-times

A.D. 95 - A.D. 96

Revelation to John

The Apostle John was exiled to the Greek island of Patmos by the Roman authorities. Patmos lies in the Aegean Sea.

God's plan was revealed to John through a vision. What was revealed was the way God would save mankind from sin. It is about restoration. It is about God putting us back in our original state, restoring everything that fell into corruption and decay. Corruption and decay entered the world when Adam disobeyed God, now through Jesus Christ we enter into the new creation.

John was a beloved Apostle and eyewitness of Jesus. He proclaimed that the victorious Lord Jesus Christ would return to successfully defend the righteous and judge the wicked. He was on a journey of hope for all believers and warning to all unbelievers.

Key verse: Revelation 1:1,2 'This is a revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him concerning the events that will happen soon. An angel was sent to God's servant John so that John could share the revelation with God's other servants. John faithfully reported the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ – everything he saw.' – New Living Translation

The first letter to Ephesus

Ephesus was the capital of Asia Minor, a centre of land and sea trade and one of the three most influential cities in the eastern part of the Roman Empire.

False teachers tried to draw people away from faith, but the church resisted them. The body of believers began to tolerate sin and lowered their standards without considering that God's approval was more important than the world's.

Paul had once praised the church for working hard, but the second-generation believers had lost their zeal for God. They worked for their own and the communities' benefit, and not out of love for God.

To restore the church, they had to repent and turn back to God, restoring their relationship with the Lord. Otherwise, the church might be closed.

Jesus promised that those who would no longer be disobedient, would receive eternal life and eat from the tree of life in Paradise one day.

The second letter to Smyrna

The city was about 25 miles north of Ephesus. It had an excellent harbour on the Aegean Sea.

Jesus informed the church that He was the First and the Last and that He knows everything about their poverty and persecution.

He promised that suffering was only temporary, and if the believers would remain faithful unto death, they need not fear the future. They would receive the martyr's crown.

The third letter to Pergamum

Pergamum was built 1,000 feet above the surrounding countryside, creating a natural fortress. It was called the city 'where that great throne of Satan is located.' The symbol of their god was a serpent and people came from far to be healed by it.

Antipas was martyred because of his faith in Jesus.

The all-seeing and double-edged sword from His mouth, Jesus was described as pronouncing judgement against those who uphold the doctrine of Balaam (the destroyer) and the Nicolaitans. The sword separated good and evil.

Jesus promised 'to him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat'. A white stone would be given to each one with their new name written on it.

The fourth letter to Thyatira

The city was a working person's town, with many trade guilds for cloth making, dyeing and pottery. It was situated to the southeast of Pergamum.

Jesus called Himself the Son of God with eyes like blazing fire and His feet were like polished bronze, which speaks of judgement. He confirmed that He knew about their works, love, faith and patient endurance. Because times are critical, we must spend our days wisely and faithfully.

They tolerated Jezebel who was a false prophetess. She had misled the servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. Jezebel was more concerned about her own selfish pleasure and freedom than about the needs and concerns of fellow believers.

Jesus promised the Overcomers that they would reign with Him over Christ's enemies while He judges evil. He promised them the morning star.

The fifth letter to Sardis

The city of Sardis is in western Turkey, at the foot of the mountains. The word Sardis means 'a remnant that had broken away'.

This rich church had a good reputation of being active, but inwardly they were corrupt and spiritually dead. The church was infested with sin and denied the Power of the Holy Spirit.

The Roman Catholic Church with its Latin language that ordinary people could not understand, misled the Christian world. The church was encouraged to get back to the basics of the faith.

The promise to those who would be found worthy would walk with Jesus in white clothes, which refers to their salvation. Their names would appear in the Book of Life. The Overcomers would also be announced before His Heavenly Father and His angels.

The sixth letter to Philadelphia

The city was founded by the citizens of Pergamum. The residents kept barbarians out of the region and brought in the Greek culture and

language. The church was formerly destroyed by an earthquake and for this reason, most of the people lived outside the city limits.

Jesus holds 'the key of David'. If He opens the door to Salvation, nobody can shut it. Once it is closed, no one can open it and judgement is certain.

During that time the church experienced extra-ordinary revival. Evangelists and missionaries were welcome everywhere. John and Charles Wesley were among these people.

This church would be kept from the trials of the Great Tribulation. The believers were told to hold on to what they had and let no one take their crown. They were promised to be pillars in the Temple of the Lord and they would never have to leave it.

They would have three names on them: The Name of God, the New Jerusalem and the new Name of Jesus. They would be citizens in the City of God.

The seventh letter to Laodicea

The name Laodicea means 'the rights of people' which is not necessarily the same as the Will of God. Nowadays all countries claim to be Democratic, thus being countries where the will of the people are more important than the Will of God.

This church was the wealthiest of the 7 churches. Rich in worldly goods indicated self-deception because they were pitiful in the spiritual sense. It doesn't matter how rich you are, you have nothing if you don't have a relationship with God.

There was a problem with the natural source of hot water. When it reached the city, it was lukewarm. 'Warm' refers to truly born-again, 'cold' refers to unbelievers, and 'lukewarm' refers to those who claim to believe in Jesus but are not born- again.

There is nothing more disgusting than a half-hearted, nominal Christian who is self-sufficient. Let God fire up your faith and get into action!

Jesus knocks on the door of our hearts. He is patient but persistent. Are you going to open the door and have fellowship with the Lord?

The Overcomers were promised to receive the right to sit with Christ in His kingdom.

Our primary goal should not be to learn how to quit sinning, but to feed on what will cause us to lose the very desire for sin.

The order of events for believers and unbelievers

Believers

The born-again believers who had died in Christ during the past 2,000 years since the crucifixion of Jesus, will rise and be taken up to heaven (raptured). The born-again believers who are still alive at the time of the rapture, will receive their glorified bodies the same time as the dead and will be taken up to Heaven (raptured).

- Before the end of the Tribulation, the believers will receive their crowns at the Bema court. They will not be judged but rewarded for their good deeds on earth.
- During the Great Tribulation the unbelievers who converted to born-again believers, will be martyred and killed and their souls will go to Heaven.
- At the end of the 7-year Tribulation, the Israelites of the Old Testament who died in Christ before the Crucifixion of Jesus, will be taken to heaven.
- The believers with their glorified bodies and crowns will rule with Christ during the Millenium.

Unbelievers

- When the born-again believers are raptured, the unbelievers who died in the last 2,000 years, will stay in their graves, or wherever they died, awaiting judgement at the White Throne at the end of the 1,000 years Millenium.
- The unbelievers who are still alive when the born-again believers are raptured, will stay on earth and will have to deal with the Antichrist.

- The 144,000 Israelites will be born-again and raptured after they had carried out God's instructions on earth. Included will be the 10 lost tribes of Israel that were scattered among the heathen nations.

The unbelievers who get converted and refuse to take the mark of the Beast, will be martyred and killed and taken to Heaven. They won't be allowed to commit suicide. They will share in the 1,000 years ruling on earth.

- The unbelievers who died of thirst and hunger on earth and got converted and sit around the throne of God in Heaven. They will also be part of the Millenium.
- The unbelievers who refuse to be converted will suffer the plagues and wars and will die and go to Hades, awaiting judgement at the White Throne.
- The sheep nations will live outside the city during the Millenium and will be tested when the Devil is released from bondage and corrupt some of them. The people who are not born-again will die and go to Hades, awaiting judgement at the White Throne.
- After the judgement at the White Throne. the unbelievers will be thrown into hell together with the Devil, the False Prophet and the Antichrist.

The Rapture

The Rapture of the Church will take place before the beginning of the 7 years of the Great Tribulation where the unbelievers will have to deal with the Antichrist. This will happen between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel.

Key verse: 1 Thessalonians 4:17 'Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus, we shall always be with the Lord.' – New King James Version

The word 'caught up' in Greek is 'harpuzo' and in Latin is 'rapturo', where the word 'rapture' in English derives from.

'Harpuzo' means to snatch away, to take away, to pluck away, to claim for oneself eagerly and to seize by force.

Key verse: 1 Thessalonians 1:10 'and to look forward and confidently wait for the coming of His Son from Heaven, whom He raised from the dead – Jesus, who personally rescues us from the coming wrath and draws us to Himself, granting us all the privileges and rewards of a new life with Him.'
– Amplified Holy Bible

All believers in Jesus Christ, Israelites, and all other nations, will be Raptured.

Pre-tribulation Rapture

The reason why we are confident that the Rapture will take place before the Tribulation, is evident in the Scriptures where Jesus tells us that we will be kept from the wrath of God by being taken away to heaven before the Antichrist is revealed.

The Book of Revelation is divided in three phases:

The first Chapter focuses on the past, Chapter two and three focus on the present and Chapter four to 21 focus on the future. The Church is mentioned 19 times in Chapter one to three and there is no reference to the Church from Chapter four to 18, which is a strong indicator that the Church is not there anymore (raptured). Since the Tribulation starts in Chapter four, it is clear that the Rapture takes place in the Pre-Tribulation stage of the future.

Key verse: *Revelation 1:19 'Write down what you have seen – both the things that are now happening and the things that will happen later.'* – New Living Translation

The Establishment of the Church

Jesus appointed disciples and Apostles to help Him teach the Gospel to the Israelites. After His crucifixion and resurrection, he spent 40 days with them and promised the outpouring of the Holy Spirit after His ascension into heaven. The Holy Spirit would give them power while they were telling people all about Jesus' teachings.

Key verse: Acts 1:9-11 *'It was not long after he said this that He was taken up into the sky while they were watching, and He disappeared into a cloud. As they were straining their eyes to see Him, two white-robed men suddenly stood there among them. They said, Men of Galilee, why are you standing here staring at the sky? Jesus has been taken away from you into heaven. And someday, just as you saw Him go, He will return!'* – New Living Translation

Escaping the wrath of God

The believers will be rescued from the Tribulation as in the following Scriptures.

1 Thessalonians 1:10 'and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead – Jesus, who personally rescues us from the coming wrath and draws us to Himself, granting us all the privileges and rewards of a new life with Him.' – Holy Amplified Bible

1 Thessalonians 5:9 'For God has not destined us to incur His wrath, that is, He did not select us to condemn us, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.' – Holy Amplified Bible

Revelation 3:10 'Because you have kept the word of My endurance, I will keep you safe from the hour of trial, that hour which is about to come on the whole inhabited world, to test those who live on earth.' – Holy Amplified Bible

Requirements for the Rapture

- More than half of the population of the Jews in the world must have returned to Israel. There are about 15 million Jews in the world. About 6.3 million returned to Israel in 1948, of which only 30,000 was Messianic Jews. By now, 2023, a lot more Jews have returned and is still returning home. So, most of the Jews are not born-again believers.
- All nations must have heard the Word of God, which is done, except maybe for some ethnic groups. The World Evangelism workers are still spreading the Word.
- Unrest and rumours of wars. Jerusalem are being trampled upon.

- Israel will prepare the rebuilding of the Temple. They have already got the heifer in place for the inauguration.

Why the Rapture is held back

A certain number of the heathen nations will have been born- again before the Rapture can take place. Only God knows when this will happen. The prophetic clock is ticking. We are living in the Church age between the 69th and the 70th week of Daniel. It will go on until we have spread the Word of God to everyone that God intends us to do.

Key verse: Romans 11:25,26 'For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so, all Israel will be saved.' – New King James Version

For a person to be born-again, he must come to the realisation that he leads a sinful life and needs prayerful repentance and forgiveness. This can only happen by the grace of God. Then the new believer will be born-again in Christ.

The coming of the Antichrist is held back by the Church because the believers will be the Body of Christ. As soon as the Rapture has taken place, the Antichrist will step forward.

Key verse: 2 Thessalonians 6-7 'And you know what restrains him now from being revealed; it is so that he will be revealed at his own appointed time. For the mystery of Lawlessness (rebellion against divine authority and the coming reign of Lawlessness) is already at work; but it is restrained only until he who now restrains it is taken out of the way.' – Amplified Holy Bible

What happens at the Rapture?

Key verse: 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17 'For the Lord Himself will come down from Heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel and with the blast of the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain on the earth will simultaneously

be caught up (raptured) together with them (the resurrected ones) in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord!
‘– Amplified Holy Bible

This is also a confirmation that at the time of the rapture, those who are still alive as well as the people who died in Christ, will receive their glorified bodies.

Key verse: 1 Corinthians 15:51,52 ‘Listen very carefully, I tell you a mystery (a secret truth decreed by God and previously hidden, but now revealed); we will not all sleep in death, but we will all be completely changed (wondrously transformed). In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the sound of the last trumpet call. For a trumpet will sound, and the dead who believed in Christ will be raised imperishable, and we will be completely changed. – Amplified Holy Bible

Let us pray that we are worthy to escape the pain and suffering of the Great Tribulation!

The reason why the rapture is called a mystery, is because it was never prophesied or promised to Israel.

We are all eager for the Rapture to take place, but in the meantime, what we should do, is to 1) Pray while studying the Bible, 2) Spread our knowledge of the Word and 3) Provide funds to support spreading the Word through missionaries around the World, tirelessly serving the Lord.

From the crucifixion of Christ to the present time, we are in the Church age. The Seven Churches are part of the Church age.

Marriage of Christ and His bride

The Church is the bride of Christ. The guests at the feast will be the Old Testament saints and the martyrs. The marriage will take place sometime after the Rapture.

Key verse: Revelations 19:7,8,9 ‘Let us rejoice and shout for joy! Let us give Him glory and honour, for the marriage of the Lamb has come at last and His bride the redeemed has prepared herself...Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he said to me, These are the true and exact words of God.’ - Amplified Holy Bible

The believers who will have been raptured will attend a Bema court where each one will receive a crown or crowns as a reward for their service on earth. They will not be judged, because through their faith and obedience the Blood of the Lamb covers all their sins. They will have glorified bodies, the same as Jesus' glorified body, and will be called children and sons of God who also inherit eternal life.

The 5 crowns of the New Testament

- The crown of life: the martyr's crown – those who remain faithful to God.
- The incorruptible crown: the crown that will last for an eternity by practicing self-control and discipline.
- The soul winner's crown: those who come to believe and grow in Christ.
- The crown of glory: awarded to leaders who care for their flocks.
- The crown of righteousness: those who look forward to the Second Coming of Jesus and are ready for the event.

After the Rapture, the Church age will be completed. But that doesn't mean that the Holy Spirit will not be actively working on earth to teach the unbelievers who want to convert to born-again believers.

Chapter Fourteen

After the Rapture

The Great Tribulation

The reason for the Tribulation focuses entirely on Israel. The 7 years shortfall for the punishment of Israel, will play out in the 7 years of the Tribulation. The reason being that during their exile, they didn't rest the land every 7 years and didn't celebrate the Jubilee in the 70th year. So, Jesus was crucified 7 years early. He was crucified after 483 years instead of 490 years. So, Israel still owes the Lord 7 prophetic years of purification. After the 7 years of the Great Tribulation the prophecy will be fulfilled.

The Purpose of the Tribulation

Key verse: Daniel 9:24 '...to put down rebellion, to bring an end to sin, to atone for guilt, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to confirm the prophetic vision, and to anoint the Most Holy Place.' - *New Living Translation*

The duration of the Tribulation will be 7 years in two parts of three and a half years each.

Key verse: Matthew 24:15 – 16 'Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.' – *New King James Version*

The Antichrist will come at the beginning of the Great Tribulation.

Key verse: Daniel 9:27 'And he (the Antichrist) will enter into a binding and irrevocable covenant with the many for one week (seven years) ...' – *Amplified Holy Bible*

The Scene in Heaven revealed to John

John was called up to Heaven to witness what would happen in Heaven before the Great Tribulation. This is after the believers are Raptured to

Heaven.

- Key verse: *Revelation 4:1 '...Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.'* – *Amplified Holy Bible*
- The Father sitting on His throne in the throne room in Heaven. We get glimpses into Christ's glory. God is orchestrating all the events that John will record. The world is not spinning out of control. The God of creation will carry out His plans as Christ initiates the final battle with the forces of evil. John shows us heaven before showing us earth so that we will not be frightened by future events.
- John mentioned His appearance was like jasper (sea green, meaning the light and holiness of God) and carnelian (red, meaning judgement). A rainbow at full circle because in Heaven everything is complete and perfect. In God's final judgement, He will remember the covenant He has made about never flooding earth again.

The emerald's deep green color indicated that God is still full of grace and compassion.

- The 24 crowned elders, each on a throne, wearing white clothes, and all the redeemed – both Jews and Gentiles - worshipping the Lord.
- Lightning and thunder indicate the storm of God's judgements that was to come.
- The 7 spirits of God: The spirit of wisdom and understanding, counsel and strength, knowledge and fear of the Lord, delight in the fear of the Lord, not judging with what His eyes see and not making decisions by what His ears hear.
- Glass was very rare in the New Testament. The sea of glass highlights both the magnificence and holiness of God.
- The four living creatures, also known as Zoa. First a lion (majestic and powerful), second an ox (faithful), third the human (intelligent) and fourth the eagle (sovereign). They were all worshipping God.

Key verse: Revelation 5:1 'And I saw a scroll in the right hand of the one who was sitting on the throne. There was writing on the inside and outside of the scroll, and it was sealed with 7 seals.' – *New Living Translation*

The contents of the book: events that will take place at end- times. The 7 seals: a secret document like a will or testament today. The seals indicate the importance of its contents.

John wept because there was no one worthy to break the seals and open the scroll. The elders told him that Jesus was the worthy One. He was the Lion from the tribe Judah and the root of David.

Jesus proved Himself worthy by living a perfect life of obedience to God, dying on the cross for the sins of the world, and rising from the dead to show His power and authority over evil and death.

Jesus Christ is pictured both as a Lion (symbolising His authority and power) and a Lamb (symbolising his submission to God's will).

The lamb had 7 horns (power and strength) and 7 eyes (seven spirits of God was sent out into all the earth and therefore nothing is unknown to Him).

The 7 major characteristics of the worthy: power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honour, glory and praise. Every creature in Heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea joined in heavenly songs of praises of the Lamb.

We, Jesus Christ's followers, are sometimes despised and mocked for our faith but in the future, we will reign over all the earth.

The seven seals

The 1st seal – White horse

The horse is a symbol of war and white is a symbol of peace but in this instance false peace, because he wants to deceive the world into a false religious brotherhood. The rider is the Antichrist.

The true Messiah will come on a white horse at the end of the 7 years to destroy the Antichrist – the Beast.

The 2nd seal – Red horse

The false peace will be removed from the earth. Great war will erupt on earth, and especially in Europe, North Africa and the Middle East.

The 3rd seal – Black horse

Wars will result in famine. One day's wages will buy food for one day. Wine and oil will still be available because it doesn't require as much work to produce. Oil will be used for healing and wine for pleasure.

The 4th seal – Pale horse

Masses of people will die of hunger and pestilence as a result of the war, in fact one quarter of the population, which is 1.5 billion. The wild animals will hunt the humans because there will be no food for them.

There is still time for unbelievers to turn to Christ and away from their sin. The punishment demonstrates God's wrath on sin, but also His merciful love in giving people yet another opportunity to turn to Him before He brings final judgement.

The 5th seal – the Martyrs

The unbelievers who become believers after the Rapture will be martyred and slaughtered. They will be safe under the altar in Heaven, clothed in white robes to indicate their salvation.

They will be told to wait a little while until their brothers and sisters have been killed and joined them.

Scene on earth for further judgement

The 6th seal - universal

Seven judgements are mentioned:

- A great earthquake.
- The sun will turn black.
- The moon will turn red.
- The stars will fall on earth.
- The sky will be rolled up like a scroll.
- Mountains will be dislodged and removed.
- Islands will disappear.

When these forces of nature strike the earth, mankind will panic and flee to the mountains. At the sight of God sitting on the throne, all human beings will be terrified, calling for the mountains to fall on them so that they will not have to face the judgement of the Lamb. For the kings, rulers and other powerful people who previously showed no fear of God and arrogantly flaunted their unbelief will find that they were wrong.

Sinners will fear the presence of the Lord rather than death. The unbelievers will know that the wrath of God has struck mankind. No one who has rejected God can survive the day of His wrath, but those who belong to Christ will receive a reward rather than punishment.

An interlude

Four angels stood at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds. An angel came from the East and told them not to harm the earth and sea before they seal the bondservants with the mark of God on their foreheads.

God's people: 144,000 sealed

Twelve thousand from each tribe of Israel will receive the Seal on their foreheads. These are people who were not born-again believers at the time of the Rapture, because the born-again or Messianic Jews would have already been taken up in the clouds with the Church. The 10 lost tribes of Israel are included in the 144,000. They are not scattered anymore. God knew exactly where they are always.

The Antichrist will have appeared at this stage and will be about to demand that his followers will accept his mark of obedience.

The 144,000 will evangelise among the unbelievers while they will be untouchable by the Antichrist. They will spread the Word of God to the unbelievers because the Church is not present to undertake this task anymore.

Praise from a multitude from the Tribulation

John saw a multitude of people who had been saved from the nations, tribes, peoples and languages. They were redeemed from the heathen

nations (not the 144,000 from Israel). They repented in the first half of the Great Tribulation. They stood before the throne of God and before the Lamb. They wore white clothes (salvation) and had palm branches in their hands (victory). They confessed that they have received salvation through the blood of Jesus. Jesus was now honoured by this multitude while he was opening the Seals. Some of them died of hunger and thirst during the wars.

The angels

The angels were standing around the throne with the 24 elders and the four living creatures, all worshipping God.

The martyrs

The stream of those who are coming from the Great Tribulation was still flowing. These people have all paid the price of salvation with their lives. They will have died for their faith. Suffering and persecution will be inescapable for these martyrs during the days of the Great Tribulation.

It is clearly shown that the Holy Spirit will be active during the time of the Great Tribulation.

The 7th seal – 7 angels – 7 trumpets

There was silence for about half an hour, in sympathy for the people on earth who will endure the terrible contents of the Seal. The judgement of the unbelievers on earth was imminent – nothing could stop the flow now!

Each angel will receive a trumpet. Another angel will offer incense with the prayers of all the saints. The smoke of the incense, symbolising the believers' prayers, will have a lovely, sweet smell and ascend to Heaven. John was aware that the prayers of the saints would give rise to judgement and retribution on the inhabitants of the earth, especially on those who maltreated the saints and caused great suffering to them.

Purpose of the trumpet blasts

- To warn that judgement is certain.
- To call the forces of good and evil to battle.

- To announce the return of the King, the Messiah.

The angel filled the censor with fire from the altar and hurled it to the earth. Then there were:

- Sounds of confusion, desperation and anxiety.
- Peals of thunder – loud rumbling.
- Flashes of lightning – refer to the power and might of God.
- An earthquake – the earth will be ripped open and shaken to its foundation.

Seven trumpets

Trumpets were sounded when the priests wanted to convey a certain message to the tribes. Not the priests, but the angels sounded the trumpets in the end times.

Key verse: Numbers 10: 8 'The sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow the trumpets, and the trumpets shall be for you a perpetual statute throughout your generations.' – Amplified Holy Bible

1st Trumpet – hail and fire mixed with blood. One third of the earth was burned up.

2nd Trumpet – something like a mountain blazing with fire, was thrown into the sea. One third of the sea was turned into blood, the sea creatures died and the ships were destroyed.

3rd Trumpet – A flaming star called Wormwood fell from the sky onto the rivers and the springs of fresh waters. A third of the waters turned bitter and poisonous and many people died as a result.

4th Trumpet – One third of the sun, moon and stars will turn black. Four hours less daylight, four hours less light for the night.

From the results of the first four Trumpets, we realise that the earth will have gone through a tremendous amount of destructive change. It will make it almost impossible for humans to survive without food and water.

Three woes – Woe, woe, woe.

The three woes announced the alarming increase of the seriousness of the coming judgement of God for mankind on earth.

1st woe or 5th Trumpet – An angel fell from heaven and unlocked the bottomless pit. This unleashed demonic grasshoppers for five months. The evil spirits or demons of Satan's army are referred to as having tails like scorpions which torment and burn like fire. They will only harm those who don't have the Seal of God to protect them. Only the 144,000 will have the Seal to protect them. The other people will have to endure the torment. The demons will not be permitted to kill people, only torture them. The people won't be able to commit suicide either.

The name of the King (fallen angel) of the Abyss, is Abaddon in Hebrew and Apollyon in Greek. Both names mean Destroyer or Corrupter.

Key verse: Revelation 9:3-5 'Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth, and power to hurt was given to them, like the power which the earth's scorpions have. They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but to hurt only the people who do not have the seal (mark of protection) of God on their foreheads. They were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment and cause them extreme pain for 5 months...' – Amplified Holy Bible

The purpose of these atrocious actions is to punish the unbelievers. God has done His utmost to warn the unbelievers of the future events. In fact, God has been warning the people for the past 6,000 years. We ought to realise that after the Rapture, all these terrible events will happen to those who missed the Rapture.

The sad thing is that this will only be the first woe. There are two more to come! My advice to each unbeliever is to waste no time anymore but stop your sinful ways and turn to our loving and gracious Lord Jesus Christ.

2nd woe or 6th Trumpet – Four fallen angels that had been held back at the Euphrates River will be set free. They will be allowed to kill one third of mankind. Demonic horsemen will be unleashed from the bottomless

pit, bringing death and destruction to millions of people. The people will be killed by fire, poisonous smoke, and sulphuric acid coming out of the mouths of the demonic creatures.

Two hundred million demonic horsemen will be led by the four angels which represent the four directions of the wind on earth. Three and a half billion people will have died within the first three and a half years of the Tribulation.

The rest of the people will still not repent. They will worship Satan and their idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood. They will refuse to turn away from murder, drugs, adultery and theft.

Before the 7th Trumpet is sounded, we will have a look at the events that will happen on earth. The 7th Trumpet is the beginning of the second half of the Tribulation.

The angel and the little book

Key verse: Revelation 10:1-4 'Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from Heaven, surrounded by a cloud, with a rainbow over his head. His face shone like the sun, and his feet were like pillars of fire. And in his hand was a small scroll, which he had unrolled. He stood with his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land. And he gave a great shout, like the roar of a lion. And when he shouted, the seven thunders answered. When the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write. But a voice from Heaven called to me, Keep secret what the seven thunders said. Do not write it down.' – *New Living Translation*

The purpose of the mighty angel is to announce the final judgement on the earth. His feet on sea and land indicate that his words are not directed at a certain group of people, but to all creation.

The angel took an oath that there would be no more delay. All the prophecies will be fulfilled, and the judgements will become effective.

The Antichrist will assume his place in the Temple during the final three and a half years of the Tribulation.

When the **7th trumpet** sounds, the mystery of God will be accomplished. Satan will finally be cast out of Heaven in the middle of the Tribulation.

When John was going to write down what the seven thunders said, he was stopped. He was told to take the book from the angel and eat it. It tasted sweet like honey (bringing promises of encouragement to believers) and became bitter (devastating warnings of judgement we must pronounce to unbelievers) in his stomach. He had to tell the sinful world about the terrible judgements that await them. He urged John to continue with his prophecies because it was of utmost value for future information.

Daniel and Ezekiel had similar experiences where they had to eat the mysterious book. From this we conclude that God loves us so much that He doesn't want us to know beforehand what unimaginably horrible events will take place.

The two witnesses

John was told to go and measure the inner Temple of God, the altar and count the number of worshippers. John measured the Temple to show that God is building walls of protection around the people to spare them from spiritual harm, and that there is a place reserved for all believers who remain faithful to God. The believers will be protected through persecution, but those who refuse to believe will be destroyed. Believers should remember that the great reward awaiting you in heaven far outweighs any suffering that you face now.

Key verse: Revelation 11:3 'And I will grant authority to My two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, dressed in sackcloth' – Amplified Holy Bible

The two witnesses will be Elijah and Enoch. They are the only two prophets that didn't die.

Key verse: Malachi 4:5 'Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.' – Amplified Holy Bible

Key verse: Genesis 5:24 'And Enoch walked with God; and he was not found among men, because God took him away to be home with Him.' – Amplified Holy Bible

Their prophecy will serve to call Israel and the nations to repent to the true God of Israel. They will also perform great miracles. They will gather in a harvest from amongst Israel and the nations for His kingdom.

The Antichrist will be powerless against these two witnesses. The beast will come from the bottomless pit and kill them when the 1,260 days have passed. The unbelievers will rejoice over their deaths and send gifts to one another.

After three and a half days the two witnesses will be resurrected by an act of God and taken up to Heaven in a cloud.

Key verse: Revelation 11:13 'And in that very hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell and was destroyed; 7,000 people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest who survived were overcome with terror, and they glorified the God of heaven as they recognised His awesome power.' – Amplified Holy Bible

God's love for us is so enormous that He grants the unbelievers opportunity after opportunity to become part of the God-family, but they repeatedly throw this gift back into the face of the Lord. The only thing we can do is to pray for the people who has hardened their heart for Jesus our Saviour.

3rd woe or 7th Trumpet – The second half of the Tribulation will start. An announcement was made that Christ has received the kingdom of the world. Jesus is currently reigning in a spiritual kingdom, but in future He will reign over the nations with a rod of iron.

A second announcement was made that the final judgement has come. The final expulsion of Satan with his fallen angels will take place. They will be cast down to earth to do their dirty and evil work of destruction among men by the activities of the Antichrist, the false prophet and others.

The Heavenly hosts will rejoice in worship before God. It will be time for the final judgement. The Temple of God in Heaven will be opened and the Ark of the Covenant will be seen. The Ark of God will encourage and remind the people suffering on earth of God's presence and faithfulness.

On earth we see lightning and thunder, we hear voices, we take note of an earthquake with a hailstorm. These are part of the judgement of God on sinful mankind.

John then went and stood on the sand of the sea where he would witness how the Antichrist and the false prophet will direct their attention to mankind. People will have no political rights, religious freedom, or economic independence outside of the structures imposed by the Antichrist in his new world order.

Observing the great conflict

A woman clothed with the Sun

Key verse: Revelation 12:3,4 'Suddenly, I witnessed in Heaven another significant event. I saw a large red Dragon with 7 heads and 10 horns, with 7 crowns on his head. His tail dragged down one third of the stars, which he threw to the earth. He stood before the women as she was about to give birth to her child, ready to devour the baby as soon as it was born.' – *New Living Translation*

John sees the conflict between God and Satan. He sees the source of all sin, evil, persecution and suffering on the earth, and he understands the great battle between the forces of God and Satan must soon take place. The nature of evil is exposed, and Satan will be seen in all his wickedness.

The woman represents God's faithful people who have been waiting for the Messiah; the crown of 12 stars represents the 12 tribes of Israel. God set apart the Jews for Himself and the nation gave birth to the Messiah.

The heads, crowns and horns represent the kingdoms of the world. Up until the Tribulation there was 7 earthly kingdoms that oppressed Israel: Assyria, Babylon, the Medes and the Persians, Greece, the Roman Empire and the Revived Roman Empire under the rule of the Antichrist.

Satan will use the kingdoms of the world to incite hatred of the Jews and to try to destroy Israel from the face of the earth. The crowns are a sign of authority under the influence of Satan.

The stars that are swept from the sky are fallen angels.

Satan defeated by Michael

Michael is a high-ranking angel. One of his responsibilities is to guard God's community of believers.

When war erupts in the middle of the Tribulation, there will also be war in the Heavenly realm. The conflict will be between the archangel Michael and his holy angels, against Satan and his fallen angels. Satan will lose the war and be cast out from Heaven down to earth. Michael means 'who is like God'. Lucifer declared that he would 'make himself like the Most High'.

The Devil is very real. Originally Satan was an angel of God, but through his own pride, he became corrupt. The Devil is God's enemy and he constantly tries to hinder God's work, but he is limited by God's power and can do only what he is permitted to do. Satan means 'accuser'. He actively looks for people to attack. Satan likes to pursue believers who are vulnerable in their faith, who are spiritually weak, or who are isolated from other believers.

The Devil begins to step up his persecution because he knows that he has little time. We are living in the last days and Satan's work has become more intense. One of the reasons why God allows Satan to work evil and bring temptation is so that those who pretend to be Christ's followers will be weeded out from Christ's true believers.

In Heaven there will be great joy, while on earth there will be horror. Satan and his fallen angels will cause havoc on earth. They don't have access to Heaven anymore. Satan will know that his end is near before he is cast into the bottomless pit for 1,000 years.

Israel flees

Israel will flee from the Antichrist to a place of safety which is the wilderness where God has prepared for His people. The flight of Israel

will take them to Petra.

Key verse: Revelation 12:14 'But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place.'
– Amplified Holy Bible

The expression 'wings of the eagle' means that the remnant of Israel will flee to the mountains under the protection of the Lord.

The Beast from the Sea

The Antichrist will come from the sea (people) of humanity (human). He will be ruler of the areas symbolized by the 7 heads, which will coincide with the 10 kingdoms of the ancient Roman empire.

The Antichrist will lead mankind to revolt against God. People will become like wild animals. The first Beast is like a lion and represents the head of gold in Nebuchadnezzar's time. The second Beast is like a bear and represents the Medes and the Persians, the chest and arms, the third Beast a leopard which is Greece. The fourth Beast had teeth of iron which devoured everything. This Beast had 10 horns.

Satan always wanted to be worshipped as God. His instrument, the Antichrist, will receive his power from Satan. The Antichrist will sit in the newly erected Temple and demand to be worshipped. The miraculous deeds of the Antichrist will direct people to worship Satan.

The Antichrist will be an excellent politician. He will perform his duties with great success, and Satan will be his adviser. He will mislead many people.

Satan will fail in his desperate attempt to destroy Israel. In his anger, he will turn against the remnant of Israel who didn't flee to Petra. Millions of Jews will pay with their lives. They will be severely persecuted, murdered and killed.

Key verse: Revelation 13:7 'He was also permitted to wage war against the saints (God's people) and to overcome them, and authority and power over every tribe and people and language and nation.' – Amplified Holy Bible

The Antichrist will become a cruel military dictator. His role will change from politician to military leader bent on making war. Many nations and languages will fall under his power, while he strives for world dominion.

Since 1948 many Jews have returned to Israel. There are about 14 to 15 million Jews throughout the world. Seven million are already living in Israel. During the Tribulation two thirds will be killed in the space of three and a half years.

Those who will have accepted Christ as their Saviour, will refuse to worship the Antichrist, and will rather choose death than forsake and deny Christ. The Antichrist will not succeed in forming a global world government.

The beast from the earth

Key verse: Revelation 13:11 'Then I saw another Beast rising out of the earth; he had two horns like a lamb, and he spoke like a Dragon.' – Amplified Holy Bible

This is the false prophet and coming from the earth indicates that God didn't send him. Now we have the Satanic trinity:

The Dragon – Satan, the Beast from the sea – Antichrist, and the Beast from the earth – the False prophet.

The two horns speak of bearing testimony – a false testimony. The horns also speak of authority – given to him by Satan. The powerful deception of the false prophet will lead many people astray by influencing them to worship the Antichrist.

The false prophet will perform miracles and signs like causing fire to come down from Heaven. The unbelievers and wicked people will fall for it.

Key verse: Revelation 13:15 'And he is given power to give breath to the image of the Beast, so that the image of the Beast will even appear to speak, and cause those who do not bow down and worship the image of the Beast to be put to death.' – Amplified Holy Bible

Either a satanic spirit caused the image to speak, or some form of advanced technology enabled the image to speak. Those who refuse to worship the false prophet will be killed.

One of the heads of the Beast (Antichrist) had a fatal wound but had healed. One of the heads will be one of the world empires.

One world economy

Key verse: Revelation 13:18 'Here is wisdom. Let the person who has enough insight calculate the number of the Beast, for it is the number of a man; and his number is 666.' – Amplified Holy Bible

Every person under the rule of the Antichrist will be forced to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead. The mark will be the number of the Antichrist – 666.

This number will be the total of the individual letters of the person who will be the Antichrist. Note that the Hebrew alphabet is different. It has only got 22 letters, and each has a numerical number. In short, 1-10, 20,30,40...100, 200, 300, and 400.

The 666 will only come into effect during the last three and a half years of the Tribulation. Those who take the number will be liable for eternal punishment in the Lake of Fire in the end.

Christian believers will receive the Name of God on their forehead. It will be the Lords new name, the name of the New Jerusalem, and the new name of Jesus.

First half of the Tribulation

The Antichrist will be:

- Introduced as the Prince of Peace.
- False.
- Entering a covenant with Israel and its Arab neighbours.
- Attempting to introduce a new world order.
- Building a Temple in Jerusalem.
- Attempting to establish unity for a world peace-force.
- Establishing a world religion.

- Establishing international peace.
- Establishing temporary economic progress.
- Receiving recognition for the false peace established.

Second half of the Tribulation

- His true colours will emerge.
- He will desecrate the Temple.
- Cease the sacrificial rituals.
- Declare himself to be God.
- Compulsory worship of Antichrist.
- Persecution of believers.
- He will be a world dictator.
- He will enforce economic matters with 666.
- Cause many deaths in wars, plagues and pestilence.
- He will mobilise forces for the battle of Armageddon.

The 144,000

John wrote about the events of the 144,000 in the Heavenly realm. Just like Mount Zion on the earth, there is also Mount Zion in Heaven. John saw Jesus, the Lamb on Zion with the 144,000. Each of them had the Name of the Father and the Name of Jesus written on their foreheads.

John heard them singing, and it sounded like rushing waters, harpists playing on harps. They were singing a new song before the throne, the four living creatures and the elders. The Heavenly hosts will listen in awe and with great respect, but they cannot join in the singing of it.

They are the first fruits to God, which means that there will be many Jews from the Tribulation that would follow them. They are holy unto God. They will honour their call to the evangelists at the beginning of the Tribulation with such dedication that they would keep themselves pure.

Three angels announcing warnings

This will happen during the 2nd half of the Tribulation.

- The first angel announced a warning that mankind should not worship the Antichrist.
- The second angel announced that the political and false religious of Babylon will be condemned to destruction.
- The third angel announced that those who accepted the mark of the Beast, the 666, will separate the believers from the unbelievers.

The dead who died in the Lord

Key verse: Revelation 14:13 '...Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, so that they may rest and have relief from their labours, for their deeds do follow them.' – Amplified Holy Bible

This was a word of encouragement to believers and called for their patient endurance amid the most terrible persecution. The secret to endurance is trust and obedience. Trust God to give your patience to endure even the small trials you face daily, obey Him even when obedience is unattractive or dangerous. God will remember our love, kindness and faithfulness and those who accept Jesus through our witness will join us in the new earth. Be sure that your values are in line with God's values and decide today to produce fruit that lasts forever.

The Reapers

John explained that the harvest is fully ripened and ready to reap. The image of reaping the harvest (believers) with a sickle, is an image of judgement. Christ is separating the believers from the unbelievers.

This is a time of joy for the believers who have been persecuted and martyred – they will receive their long-awaited reward.

The winepress is often used as a symbol of God's wrath and judgement against sin.

The blood of the wicked anti-Christian nations will flow for almost 320 kilometres and as deep as 1 and a half meter. The day when it is going to happen, is only known to God. That will be the day of the war at Armageddon.

Seven angels with 7 plagues

These last and final plagues will prepare the world for Armageddon. With the 7 last plagues, God's wrath will be completed. The consequence of the 7th trumpet will only come into effect after the judgement of the 7 bowls of wrath had been accomplished.

John had seen a sea of glass and fire in front of the throne of God. This represents the martyrs that were victorious after their terrible death. They would understand the meaning of 'whoever loses his life for Me will find it'.

Two songs are mentioned. The song of Moses when the Egyptians perished in the Red Sea, and the song of the Lamb, sung by those who have overcome the Antichrist. These victorious people will also have seen God's wonderful deeds and His mighty power to deliver those who will trust Him on earth.

John saw the Temple in Heaven opened and the 7 angels coming forth with the 7 last plagues. All of creation will be affected adversely by these bowls of judgement. The Temple was filled with the Shekinah glory of God.

The difference between the trumpet judgements and the bowl judgements are:

- The bowl judgements are complete whereas the trumpet judgements were partial.
- The trumpet judgements still give the unbelievers the opportunity to repent, where the bowl judgements are final.
- People are indirectly affected by several of the trumpet judgements but directly attacked by all the bowl judgements.

There was a command from the Temple in Heaven from the very presence of God.

- The 1st bowl: ugly and painful sores broke out on unbelievers.
- The 2nd bowl: the sea turned into blood.
- The 3rd bowl: rivers and springs of water turned into blood.
- The 4th bowl: the heat of the sun scorched people with fire.

- The 5th bowl: darkness in the kingdom of the Antichrist.
- The 6th bowl: the river Euphrates dries up to make way for the Kings from the east. The Kings were gathered in Armageddon. The armies were mainly from Iraq, Iran, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and China. The war will be aimed against God and His Anointed.
- The 7th bowl: A great earthquake and huge hailstones.

After the 7th bowl is poured out, a loud voice will be heard from the throne in Heaven, saying 'It is done'. The earthquake will change the face of the earth. Islands will disappear, and mountains will be leveled. The weight of one hailstone will be about 34 kg.

The inhabitants of the earth will curse God because of the tragic event and because of the enormity of the destruction. The people who will have succumbed to the reign of the Antichrist will be lost and beyond any salvation. They are destined for eternal damnation!

If you find yourself ignoring God more and more, turn back to Him now before your heart becomes too hard to repent.

Seizing the final victory

The great prostitute

One of the angels took John to see the judgement that was going to come on the great prostitute, which was also the destruction of Babylon. The great prostitute represents the seductiveness of the governmental system that used immoral means to gain its own pleasure, prosperity and advantage.

Key verse: Revelation 17:3-6 'So the angel took me in spirit into the wilderness. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet Beast that had seven heads and ten horns, written all over with blasphemies against God. The woman wore purple and scarlet clothing and beautiful jewellery made of gold and precious gems and pearls. She held in her hand a gold goblet full of obscenities and the impurities of her immorality. A mysterious name was written on her forehead: Babylon the Great, Mother of all Prostitutes and Obscenities in the World. I could see that she was drunk – drunk with

the blood of God's holy people who were witnesses for Jesus. I stared at her completely amazed.' – *New Living Translation*

John discussed the two Babylons which will become prominent in the end-times.

- The first Babylon is the 'Mother of Prostitutes and of the abomination of the earth.'
- The second Babylon is the 'City of Power'.

It deals with the coming and blending of all false religions in the world in the last days. There will be two political systems during the Tribulation. During the first half, the 10 Kings, and in the second half, there will be two religious systems.

The true Church of Jesus Christ is pure and obedient, and the false religious system is a harlot, whore or prostitute who rejected the truth and practised religious harlotry for personal gain.

The woman who is the prostitute indicated the union between false religion and the state. The woman is sitting on many waters, which indicate many peoples, multitude, nations and languages.

The onset of the Tribulation will be directly after the Rapture. With the Church in Heaven, false religion will enjoy the co-operation of the state, and together they will control and rule the world.

The harlot is described as sitting on a scarlet Beast, covered with blasphemous names. Scarlet is the colour of Satan. The Beast and the kingdoms of the world will have spread their influence with the help of Satan. The false religion will have the support of the government during the first half of the Tribulation.

The 7 heads and 10 horns indicate that the false religion will be in coalition of religion and political government. The 7 heads point to the 7 main world powers of government and the 10 horns indicate authority.

In history the name Babylon means 'Portal of the gods'. We see the prostitute in the form of the false world religion as the bride of the Antichrist.

She was drunk with the blood of the saints and the martyrs and those who were persecuted. The woman's drunkenness shows her pleasure in her evil accomplishments and her false feeling of triumph over the church. But every martyr who has fallen before her sword has only served to strengthen the faith of the church.

Various Beasts in the end-time

The Antichrist, the False prophet, the Satanic prince from the bottomless pit and the 8th King.

- Key verse: *Revelation 17:9-11 'Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits; and they are seven Kings: five of whom have fallen, one exists and is reigning; the other (the seventh) has not yet come, and when he does come, he must remain a little while. And the Beast that once was but is not, is himself also an eighth King and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction.'* - Amplified Holy Bible

- The 1st King – Egypt.
- The 2nd King – Assyria.
- The 3rd King – Babylon.
- The 4th King – The Medes and the Persians.
- The 5th King – Greece...five have fallen prior to John's day.
- The 6th King – Roman empire...one is during the time of John.
- The 7th King – Revived Roman Empire...one has not yet come (will only come after the time of John).
- The 8th King – revived Grecian empire... once was, and now is not. He belongs to the 7 and is going to his destruction.

The Revived Roman Empire will remain a little while and then it will hand over its kingdom to the Antichrist.

During the 8th kingdom the Antichrist and his cohorts will persecute Israel and make war against them.

Key verse: *Revelation 17:12,13 'The ten horns you saw are ten Kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but together they receive authority as*

Kings for a single hour for a common purpose along with the Beast. These Kings have one common goal, and they give their power and authority to the Beast.’ – Amplified Holy Bible

These 10 horns are the allies of the Antichrist, which means that North Africa, the main part of the Middle East and Eastern and Western Europe will be included as allies. The 10 Kings do not presently rule. The main countries of the East which were separated from Russia in 1989 without a shot being fired have opened the way for these events to come to pass.

Key verse: Revelation 17:15 ‘Then the angel said to me, The waters which you saw, where the Prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.’ – Amplified Holy Bible

The false church and false religion will be totally corrupt during the time of the Tribulation. The Antichrist and his allies will turn against world religion and destroy it during the second half of the Tribulation. When the Kings hand over all their religious, political, military and economic power to the Antichrist, then the Word of God is fully accomplished and the prophecy is fulfilled.

The fall of Babylon

Babylon will be the capital of the Antichrist. The evil spiritual prostitution started with Babel under Nimrod and will come to the fore as Babel among the 10 Kings (Revived Roman Empire). Ancient Babel will rise again as a great world and trade centre.

Ancient Babel of Babylon is situated in the present-day Iraq. It will be a commercial and political power around the Persian Gulf. The Persian Gulf controls 60% of the oil wells and reserves of the world. So, Babylon will be corrupt and hold mankind captive in the grip of its material and secular influence. Babylon will also be spiritually evil.

Iraq, Syria and Iran will play a major role during the second half of the Tribulation. Just as it happened in the prophecy of Jeremiah, there will be a call for Israel (the Jews) to flee from Babylon. God warns his people,

as in the days of Lot, regarding the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, to flee from the judgement that is to come.

All the punishment that is reserved for Babylon will strike at once and unexpectedly. The plagues will overtake them in one hour.

With the destruction of Babylon by an earthquake, three groups of people will mourn.

- The first group will be the 10 Kings of the earth, world leaders and mighty people who will have been involved in the city and will have benefited financially.
- The second group will be the merchants of the earth.
- The third group will be the sea captains and sailors.

How can a person keep away from the evil system?

- People must always be more important than products.
- Keep away from pride in your own programs, plans and successes.
- Remember that God's will and Word must never be compromised.
- People must always be considered above the making of money.
- Do what is right, no matter what the cost.
- Be involved in businesses that provide worthwhile products or services – not just things that feed the world's desires.

Final destruction of Babylon

Key verse: *Revelation 18:21 'Then a single powerful angel picked up a boulder like a great millstone and flung it into the sea, saying, with such violence will Babylon the great city be hurled down by the sudden, spectacular judgement of God, and will never again be found.'* – Amplified Holy Bible

Songs of victory in heaven

Key verse: *Revelation 18:20 'Rejoice over her (Babylon), O Heaven, and you saints (God's people) and Apostles and prophets who were martyred, because God has executed vengeance for you through righteous judgement upon her.'* – Amplified Holy Bible

Heaven is told to rejoice on three different occasions:

- 1st when Satan will be cast out of Heaven.
- 2nd when Babylon is destroyed.
- 3rd when the time comes for the wedding of the Lamb.

John wrote about the 4 Hallelujahs of the Heavenly hosts:

- 1st hallelujah focuses on the fall of Babylon.
- 2nd hallelujah focuses on the destruction of Babylon.
- 3rd hallelujah gives praise to God from those gathering around God's throne.
- 4th hallelujah for those who anticipate the marriage feast of the Lamb.

The visible second coming of Christ

John's vision shifted again. At last, the event that we have all been waiting for! Jesus' first coming brought forgiveness and his second coming will bring judgement. Although Jesus is called 'Faithful and True', King of kings and Lord of lords, no name can do Him justice. He is greater than any description the human mind can devise.

Key verse: Revelation 19:11-13 'And I saw Heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who was riding is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness. He judges and wages war on the rebellious nations. His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many royal crowns; and He has a name inscribed on Him which no one knows or understands except Himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.' – Amplified Holy Bible

The 7 years of Tribulation will have come to an end. The order of events:

- 1st the goat nations will gather at Armageddon which will happen with the emptying of the 6th bowl of God's wrath. The nations will assemble in the Valley of Jezreel.
- 2nd Babylon will be destroyed by an earthquake for being guilty of the blood of the 2 witnesses and the persecution of the saints.

- 3rd the fall of Jerusalem as recorded in Zechariah.
- 4th the armies of the Antichrist gathered in Bozrah to destroy the Jews who have flown to safety.
- 5th the national repentance of Israel which will lead to the salvation of the remnant of Israel.
- 6th the visual second coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah.
- 7th the war will be extended to face the Antichrist at Armageddon which will end at the Valley of Jehoshaphat. This is the Kidron Valley at the foot of the Mount of Olives.
- 8th we see the Messiah in His greatest victory standing on the Mount of Olives.

At the battle of Armageddon, Christ will strike down the nations with a sharp sword as He treads the winepress of the fury of God Almighty. The blood will flow for 320km and run as deep as the bridles of the horses. The flesh of the sinners will serve as food for the vulture birds. To bury the bones of the dead will take 7 months.

Judgement of the Antichrist and the False prophet

Both the Antichrist and the False prophet will be cast into hell. A thousand years after this Satan will join them in hell. Currently, hell is empty.

The flames of hell cannot be extinguished and those there will have no rest but will be subjected to everlasting suffering.

Satan bound for 1,000 years

Satan will be judged at this time – to be bound for 1,000 years. At the end of the 1,000 years, he will be unleashed once more to act out his final revolt against God.

John doesn't tell us why God once again sets Satan free, but it is part of God's plan for judging the world. Perhaps it is to expose those who rebel against God in their hearts and confirm those who are truly faithful to God. During the Millenium, the women will continue to have children, and some of them may be very young still at the end of the 1,000 years.

An angel came down from Heaven with keys and a chain and locked Satan up in the bottomless pit of torment. The pit will then be sealed, and he will be kept captive. He will have no contact with anyone, so he couldn't mislead anyone anymore.

This pit will not be the same place that the Antichrist and the False Prophet abide, or even Tartarus where the fallen angels are kept.

The 1,000 years Millenium

Before the millennium starts, there will be 75 days grace period in which Jesus will prepare certain things for the next event.

'Mille' means 1,000 and 'annus' means year, so combined we get the word Millenium.

About the 1,000 years:

- It will be a theocratic (ruled by God) world government, ruled by the Father and His Son.
- Christ's throne will be in Jerusalem where He will rule in righteousness.
- There will be peace on earth.
- Satan will be bound for the duration of peace.
- All of Israel will be saved.
- The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. Nature will be partly restored. Creation waits in anticipation for the Sons of God to be revealed.
- There will be harmony in the realm of wild animals.
- It will be a time of economic prosperity.
- People will live to become very old. 100 years will be young.

The kingdom of the Messiah will bring untold blessings to the people of Israel. Messiah Himself will be King of the Jewish people. Jerusalem will become the capital of the world.

The kingdom of the 1,000 years will be:

- In fulfilment of the covenant made with Abraham regarding inheriting the Promised Land.

- That the Jews will be brought back from the scattered lands, never to be exiled again.
- In fulfilment of the covenant with David and the throne being established forever.
- The promise about the rebirth of Israel, the salvation of all Israel, and their restoration.
- The 1,000 years of peace in the kingdom of Christ and the fulfilment of the Jewish covenant and all prophecies regarding the nation of Israel.

The two resurrections

The first resurrection of the righteous

There are three phases of resurrection:

- First phase: Jesus Christ
- Key verse: *1 Corinthians 15:20 'But now Messiah has been raised from the dead and has become the first fruit of those having fallen asleep.' – The Scriptures*
- Second phase

a) Those who belong to Christ at his coming: This **huge harvest** will be gathered in at the time of the Rapture of the Church. This harvest will be of those who will have died in Christ, as well as of those who will still be alive at the time of His coming for His Church.

Key verse: *1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 'For if we believe that Yeshua died and rose again, so also Elohim shall bring with Him those who sleep in Yeshua. For this we say to you by the word of the Master, that we, the living who are left over at the coming of the Master shall in no way go before those who are asleep. Because the Master Himself shall come down from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of a chief messenger, and with the trumpet of Elohim, and the dead in Messiah shall rise first. Then we, the living who are left over, shall be caught away together with them in the clouds to meet the*

*Master in the air – and so we shall always be with the Master.’ –
The Scriptures*

b) The 144,000.

c) The two witnesses.

Those who have part in the First resurrection will occupy the throne. They are the Kings and priests of God and of Christ. We also learn that they will have governmental authority in Christ. Those who will be sitting on the thrones will be given authority to judge.

- Third phase

The late harvest will only take place at the end of the 7-year period of the Great Tribulation.

John wrote that he saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the Word of God. They will have come from the Great Tribulation. They are the late harvest. They would resist the Antichrist in the days of the Tribulation and were willing to die for their faith and loyalty to God and Christ. They refused to worship the Beast and his image, or to receive his mark on their hands and foreheads.

They will be resurrected to life and will consequently share with Christ in his reign of a 1,000 years.

The second resurrection of the unrighteous

- The resurrection of the unbelievers: to be judged at the White throne judgement– only after 1,000 years. The wicked and godless will be taken up in this resurrection.

Key verse: Revelation 20:13 ‘And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Sheol gave up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. And Death and Sheol were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And if anyone was

not found written in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.’ - The Scriptures

At the end of the 1,000 years Satan will be unbound from the confinement in the Abyss. The bottomless pit will be unlocked, the chains will be removed and then the Devil will be let loose on the earth for a short while to lead the final revolt against Christ.

At the time there will be many unbelievers under 100 years old who have not been born-again. They will be easy prey for the deception of Satan. They will gather for the final battle and their number will be like the sand on the seashore. This will be the Gog and Magog.

The name Gog and Magog does not refer to the army from the north as described in Ezekiel 38 and 39. This army will come from the 4 corners of the earth.

Key verse: Revelation 20:7 ‘Now when the 1,000 years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together in battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea.’ – New King James Version

The final judgement of the Great White Throne

This throne is huge and majestic in comparison with the other thrones that John saw. The White Throne speaks of purity, transparency, holiness, and righteousness. The judgement will be just and true. Every sinner will appear as an individual before God. Every accused or defended will be formally charged and convicted. Jesus will sit on the throne.

Key verse: John 5:22 ‘For the Father judges no one but has committed all the judgement to the Son’. - New King James Version

The purpose of the judgement will be to determine the degree of punishment, based on the seriousness of sins committed. White Throne judgement must not be confused with the judgement seat of God (Bema), where believers will receive their rewards.

As a result of the judgement of the Great White Throne, the wicked sinners and unbelievers will be cast into the lake of fire (hell), because their names will not be found in the book of life, which will be damning evidence against them.

There will be many different books that will be opened, and the contents will reveal all the things and events in an individual's life – every thought and all deeds, every sinful act. Nothing will be added or erased.

The Devil himself will be cast into the lake of fire where he will join the Antichrist and the False prophet, having been there already for 1,000 years.

Key verse: Revelation 21:27 'And there shall by no means enter into it (Heaven) whatever is unclean, neither anyone doing abomination and falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of Life.' – The Scriptures

The promise of Jesus to the believers is that they will not have to fear the second death, while the wicked, the godless, liars, the vile and the immoral will have their part in the second death.

To be cast into the lake of fire, means:

- To be separated from the presence of God.
- To be deprived of Heavenly rest, eternal light and peace.
- To receive no sympathy in eternity.
- To have absolutely no hope for salvation throughout eternity, but only pain and suffering, sorrow and deprivation and remorse in everlasting fire.
- To be subjected to the company of Satan, the Antichrist, the false prophet, fallen angels, evil spirits, demons, and all other lost sinners in a place where sorrow and pain and suffering will last for ever and ever.

The lake of fire:

- Testifies of the righteousness of God.

- Testifies of man's responsibility because man is a creature with the power of choice.
- Hell, bears testimony of the hideous nature and reality of sin. When people learn to see sin as God does, they will be able to understand why there is a hell.

With the Great White Throne there is a judge, but no jury! There will be prosecution, but no defence! There will be a sentence, but no appeal. Before God can introduce the new Heaven and the new earth, He must finally deal with sin. This will be done at the Great White Throne.

The new Heaven and new earth

Key verse: Revelation 21:1 'And I saw a renewed Heaven and a renewed earth, for the former Heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea is no more.' – The Scriptures

This implies the destruction of the old, existing order, and the establishment of a new order by means of an act of creation by God. The fact that John could no longer see the sea could mean one of 2 things: there will be no literal sea anymore, or the 'sea' of wicked people (mankind) will no longer be there.

John stated that he saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

Throughout Scripture there is various names for this city:

- It is a Heavenly Jerusalem.
- It is called the bride of God.
- It is the holy Jerusalem.
- It is a holy city.

The One who sat on the throne

The 'Shekinah' glory of God will be shared with those who dwell with Him eternally in the new situation on earth. The curse of Genesis will be abolished and taken away. On the new earth there will no longer be

sorrow and death and tears and decay, because the old order of things will have passed away.

Eight things that will be made new:

- New Jerusalem.
- The new name for Christ.
- The new name for those who overcome.
- The new song of the redeemed.
- The new song of the 144,000.
- The new Heaven.
- The new earth.
- New things, everything new.

The eternal order of the future is guaranteed by the:

- Promise of God.
- Spring of water of life.
- Inheritance of the believers.
- End of all unsaved sinners.

The wife of the Lamb

The wife of the Lamb will be the great, holy city with all its people. It will be the home of the Bride of Christ. The building is not the city, but the people who inhabit it, but the redeemed whose names are written in the Book of Life are the city of people.

The description of the New Jerusalem

- The glory of God will give light to the city.
- With every single breath the inhabitants of this city will be aware of God's presence.
- All who dwell there will be safe.
- The walls will be about 100 meters high.
- There will be 12 gates, three in each direction, east, west, south and north.
- The gates will guarantee entrance to the city.

- The names of the 12 tribes will be written on the gates.
- Each gate will be made of a single pearl.
- 12 angels will guard the gates.

There will be 12 foundations: Jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, emerald, sardonyx, carnelian, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, jacinth and amethyst.

Just imagine these beautiful gemstones as foundations in New Jerusalem. It is like the colours of the rainbow all over again!

John did not see the Temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its Temple. The sheep nations will live outside the City of Jerusalem.

The Book of Life

All the righteous of whom the names are written in the book of life will have the right of not only entering New Jerusalem, but also of partaking of the tree of life. When Moses asked the Lord to forgive Israel's sin, the Lord answered that He will blot out those people's names who have sinned against Him.

David prayed that the names of his wicked enemies should be removed from that book. The wicked and unrepentant sinners who are lost are due to their own choice, the reason why their names are removed from the book of life.

Key verse: Revelation 3:5 'He who overcomes shall be dressed in white robes, and I shall by no means blot out his name from the Book of Life, but I shall confess his name before My Father and before His messengers.' – *The Scriptures*

The revelation that God through Jesus Christ and by sending His angel has conveyed to John in order that God's servants may know the things that are going to happen. Apart from knowing they should also prepare to be ready to meet the inevitable events.

The river of life

The angel showed John the water of the river of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. We get a clear picture of salvation, comfort, peace and adequate supply of food and water.

The water of life pictures the fullness of life with God and the eternal blessings that come when we believe in Him and allow Him to satisfy our spiritual thirst.

The source of the river is God and the Lamb. It serves as a symbol of eternal life. Sin's control over us is destroyed and our eternity with God is secure. The water is available to the redeemed and saved people – freely given.

The tree of life

Those who are truly redeemed have the right to partake of the tree of life and they may enter the portals of the city of God.

The tree of life once was in the garden of Eden and now it is in the paradise of God. John sees the tree in New Jerusalem. It grows on the banks of the river of life and bears its crops and yields its fruit 12 times a year – every month.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were prohibited to eat from it, but now it will be available for the nourishment and sustenance of the redeemed. The purpose of the leaves is not to heal existing illnesses, but to guarantee health and to convey the message of enduring sense of being healed throughout eternity.

The river of life and the tree of life give that assurance of life in abundance under the blessing of God for the redeemed in the glorious circumstances of the city of God.

The throne of God and the Lamb

The throne will be in the centre of the city. The inhabitants of the city will include God, the Lamb, and the redeemed of all ages – those who will have the name of Jesus on their foreheads. The saved ones will reign as Kings throughout eternity.

There will be earthy nations on the new earth. These nations can only be the ones who were saved during the Millennium. There will be natural people who will not be able to sin anymore, who will never grow old or die, but will remain young and fruitful to procreate throughout eternity, just as God had originally intended it to be for Adam and Eve.

The trustworthiness of the book of Revelation

Key verse: *Revelation 22:6 -7 'And he said to me, These words are trustworthy and true. And Yahweh Elohim of the set-apart prophets has sent His messenger to show His servants what must take place with speed. See, I am coming speedily! Blessed is he who guards the words of the prophecy of his book.'* – *The Scriptures*

The book may not be sealed

Key verse: *Revelation 22:10 'And he said to me, Do not seal the words of the prophets of this book, because the time is near.'* – *The Scriptures*

The book of Daniel can still be a sealed book of prophecy to many of the Jewish people because they have not yet accepted the New Testament and consequently, they will not understand the book of Revelation. The Messianic Jews on the other hand will read Daniel with the necessary insight because they know and read and study the book of Revelation.

For this reason, both the righteous and unrighteous are warned. The righteous must become even more righteous and those who are holy even holier still, while they have the return of Christ, the spotless Lamb, in view.

The unjust and godless people will continue their course of self-destruction. Every individual will have to make a definite and clear choice regarding their relationship with Christ.

The final end of the Redeemed and of the Condemned

Many will claim to have known the Lord and that they have kept His Word, but there are few who qualify and are approved by God.

Those who don't qualify will be unclean, the false teachers, the idolaters, the murderers, those who practise magic arts, and those who

love lies, who are fearful, unbelievers, and those who don't know God. They will be 'outside' in the lake of fire.

Jesus Christ guarantees the authenticity of Revelation

Key verse: Revelation 22:16 'I, Yeshua, have sent My messenger to witness to you these matters in the assemblies. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.' – The Scriptures

When Scriptures state that Christ came from the seed of David, his humanity is confirmed. He was a descendant of David. He is the promised Messiah, from the tribe of Judah and from his lineage of David – the 'seed' of Abraham through whom all the nations were to be blessed.

When Jesus is referred to as the bright Morning Star it does not merely confirm his Deity and the Shekinah glory of God Himself, but it also points to his imminent return.

The great invitation by the Spirit and the Bride

Key verse: Revelation 22:17 'And the Spirit and the bride say, Come! And he who hears, let him say, Come! And he who thirsts, Come! And he who desires it, take the water of life without paying!' – The Scripture

Pure love issues this invitation. The water of life is freely available. The reason why it is free is because the Lamb of God, Christ, has already paid the price with His own blood.

Salvation cannot be earned. We live in a world desperately thirsty for living water and many are dying of thirst. But it is still not too late. Let us invite everyone to come and drink.

It is the Holy Spirit who convicts people of sin and righteousness and who convinces them to accept Christ's atoning work. It is true that nobody has the choice of being born into this world, but everybody has the choice of where they wish to spend eternity!

Our efforts to better our world is important, but their results cannot compare with the transformation that Jesus will bring about when He

returns. He alone controls human history, forgives sin and will re-create the earth and bring lasting peace.

The Final warnings

Key verse: Revelation 22:18,19 'For I witness to everyone hearing the words of the prophecy of this book. If anyone adds to them, Elohim shall add to him the plagues that are written in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of the prophecy, Elohim shall take away his part from the book of Life, and out of the set-apart city, which are written in this Book.' – *The Scriptures*

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with God's people. Amen.

Dear Reader, your Father in heaven loves you and wants you to be part of the God-family by receiving salvation and inherit eternal life.

God's richest blessings!

Prayer of Salvation

Dear heavenly Father, I come to you in the Name of
Jesus Christ.

I acknowledge that I am a sinner and that I need your
forgiveness.

I believe that your Son Jesus Christ died for my sins on
the cross.

Please take control of my life and help me to turn from
my sins and trust in your grace and merciful love to
guide me to Salvation.

I love you Lord and I thank you that I will spend all
eternity with You.

Amen

Romans 10:9-10

*'Because if you acknowledge and confess with your
mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God
raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*

*For with the heart a person believes in Christ as
Saviour, resulting in his justification; and with the mouth he
acknowledges and confesses his faith openly, resulting in and
confirming his salvation.'* – Holy Amplified Bible