

# Bible Studies

## Seven Servants



### **Read Acts 6v1-7**

This study is built around a single question, *why did the seven need to be full of the Spirit?* First we need to understand the background of this passage.

#### **What was the problem the apostles were faced with?**

On the surface, this problem seems simple enough, a group of widows were being neglected. This represents the tip of the iceberg. The problem had the potential to be much larger and to split the fledgling church. Had this not been dealt with, it had the potential to split the church and seriously inhibit the spread of the gospel. The book of Acts records how the early church dealt with internal and external crises.

This was the second internal crisis. **What was the first?**

#### **What external crisis did they face?**

The Jewish population of the first century was split geographically into two groups, those who lived in Israel and spoke Hebrew, (NIV say Aramaic speaking, but the Greek specifies Hebrew, in other places the NIV acknowledges this in a foot note saying 'or possibly Hebrew.') and those who lived in the diaspora and spoke Greek. The diaspora Jews lived in the gentile countries of the Roman empire. As you read Acts you will discover that in all but one city Paul visited, he found a Synagogue and a substantial Jewish population. The differences between the groups were linguistic and cultural. They had their own Synagogues. Acts 6v9. The same situation exists within Judaism today.



#### **Which of these two groups did Jesus minister to?**

#### **Which of these two groups did the disciples come from?**

They were all Hebrews, the only contact with Greeks is John 12v20-21.

The Greek speaking Jews are often called Hellenists (Greek culture is known as Hellenist culture). It is understandable that many Jews born in gentile lands and serious about their faith should wish to visit Jerusalem or even live there. This issue was not just about widows but to do with two groups in the church one of whom felt neglected.

If you compare Stephens sermon in Acts 7, you discover he held a harder line than is evident in the practice of the apostles. (eg. attitude to the temple.)

#### **Which group did Paul come from?**

By rights Paul should have been a Hellenist, he was born in the diaspora and spoke Greek. Yet his claim is to be a Hebrew of Hebrews, and he was a Pharisee, a group known to despise Hellenists. This means the division is not as simple as geographical. Culture and theology must play a part. Some have suggested that the Hellenists only spoke Greek.

It is known that many older Jews moved to Jerusalem at the end of their lives, wanting to be buried there. So the number of widows was disproportionately large. These widows were supported from the funds held in the temple accumulated from the half shekel temple tax, which all male Jews across the whole world paid. On declaring a faith in Jesus, the widows were refused this help and were in danger of becoming destitute. The church themselves had to support them. This is why they had all things in common. Acts 4v32-37, 2v44-45.

#### **If the widows had continued to be neglected what might have resulted?**

The church might have split with the two sides hostile to each other. It is interesting that it was the Greek Jews who were much more aggressive in dispersing the gospel. Had this wing of the church floundered the spread of the gospel would have slowed dramatically. It is also clear that the Temple authorities and the Sanhedrin, were much more tolerant of the Hebrew believers than the Greeks. In Acts 8v1 when it says all except the apostles were scattered, most commentators believed it was the Greek church that was expelled while the Hebrew Church (ie the apostles) was largely untouched.

#### **Why do you think the Hellenist were more aggressive in spreading the Gospel?**



#### **Who did the apostles blame for the widow problem?**

#### **What did the apostles attribute their failure to?**

#### **What did they say they needed to concentrate on?**

#### **What does this tell us about the duties of a Pastor?**

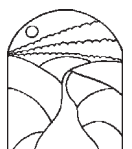
#### **What does this tell us about delegation?**

#### **How did the disciples solve the problem?**

They delegated the job and along with it the resources and authority to do it.

#### **What happens if you only delegate the job?**

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The church effectively set up two streams, Hebrew and Greek.

**Do you think this was an ideal situation?**

**How should we treat cultural divisions in the church?**

Most of us do not like this, we feel that in the Church, people of all cultures should be able to worship together. In practice church history seems to prove that the church grows best when people of like culture worship together. People like to be around others who they have the most in common with. This is especially true of people coming to church for the first time.

**If this is true, how can we ensure we stay one body not two?**



**Did the Apostles dictate a solution or propose a solution?**

**Who selected the seven? Who appointed them?**

**What criteria were they to have?**

The church as a whole picked the people, but the apostles endorsed them. It is clear from their names that they were all from the Hellenistic community. They needed to be full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom.

**What job were the seven to do?**

**What did they end up doing?**

The sevens job was to wait on tables, to provide food for the widows and that is all! They ended up as the spiritual leaders of the Greek community. Stephen proclaimed the gospel, Philip became an evangelist. We have no idea whether they were already in this position when the Apostles laid hands on them or they grew into this position with time. We do not even know whether the apostles intended them just to just serve tables or whether the apostles anticipated that they would become spiritual leaders as well. Laying on of hands in this context, means being ordained, or set apart for a task. Acts 13v3, I Timothy 4v14, 5v22

One of the words used of the function of the seven is *diakonia*, it is from this family of words that we get *decon*, someone who serves the church physically or in financial management. The Apostles dealt with this problem admirably. Their action not only solved an immediate problem it prepared the ground for the church to grow further. This is a practical example of a word of wisdom, 1 Corinthians 12v8, guidance by the Spirit of the right action to take.



**The big question.**

If all they were doing was distributing food, why did they need to be filled with the Spirit. It's obvious why they needed wisdom. (**Why?**) But why did a physical job require spiritual qualifications? We assume that most of the people in the early church were filled with the Holy Spirit, the implication is that these were people in whom the Spirit was very evident, they 'moved in the gifts'.

**What do you think, why did they need to be full of the Spirit?**



No job in the church is just physical. All jobs have a spiritual aspect.

**Is the person in church who does the accounts is responsible to pray for the finances? Can you think of other examples?**

This is especially true any job that requires working with people. As long as we see anything we do in church only for it's physical side we will miss out. Nothing we do in the church should be done in our strength alone. We need to rely on the Holy Spirit. Our attitudes and decisions need to be Spirit led. If they are not, there is a real danger that individuals will start doing their own thing and the church will lose it's harmony and direction.

**Why did the Apostles need to be able to trust the seven?**

**Did they need to be able to trust their decision making?**

The seven were given substantial authority, they needed to be spiritual and mature people.



Here was a job that was always going to grow or lead on to something else. Such jobs need people that will grow and expand through them. That will do what the seven did and mature to other things. All jobs in the church provide scope to start using spiritual gifts, to turn the job into an opportunity to expand personally.

**Are there dead end jobs in the church?**



It is the natural progression of all things to slip from an organised state, to one of disorder. For any church or individual, maintaining a Spirit filled life is a challenge.

The tendency is always to slip back to the normal, to human means, methods and wisdom. To lose our spiritual edge. If a church is to avoid this, it needs to ensure that those who serve and those who lead are spiritually active.

**What will happen if those in leadership neglect spiritual gifts?**

**How do we avoid slipping back this way?**



God wants us all to be filled with the Spirit. It is important to Him and He considers it as normal. We must all aspire to be full of the Spirit.

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Eph 5v18  
But eagerly desire the greater gifts. 1 Corinthians 12v31

# Bible Studies

## What makes a person difficult to live with?

There are some huge dangers involved in a study like this. The worst of which is that we start enumerating the fault of those that we live with. This does both them and us harm. Jesus once spoke about taking the plank out of our own eye before trying to remove a speck from someone else's. This study is about taking the plank out of our own eye, perhaps it should be called "what makes me difficult to live with?"

Human beings are social creatures, we live in societies. This means that we all deal with multiple relationships at home and work. We are surrounded by people with whom we interact. These relationships come in many varieties, some are governed by rules directing how we must behave, but most of them are not.

**Which are the most important of these relationships?**

**Why is it important that these relationships work?**

1 Peter 3v7

1 Peter 2v12

Proverbs 27v15.

Life becomes miserable when they don't, it damages our spiritual life and destroys our witness. Who we are at home becomes a test of who we really are. It is in the home where the fruit of the Spirit is going to be matured in us. If you can show the fruit of the Spirit at home you can show it anywhere. To that extent home becomes a training ground for our maturity and spirituality. Without exception all of us need to work on our character. Our behaviour cannot be divorced from our maturity and spirituality.

Most of us would be horrified to think of ourselves as selfish. But our actions speak louder than our word. It is our actions that betray our true characteristics. We must evaluate behaviour, free from excuses and not our claims. We tend to think of ourselves as better than we are. If you think about yourself as a kind person, it would be good to have some actions that prove it.

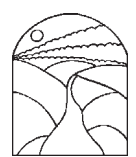
It has often been noted that those closest to us receive our worst behaviour.

**Do you think this is true? If so why?**

We are now going to come up with a list of things that make you hard to live with. In this list we are looking for root behaviour rather than examples (examples would be a very long list). Not being on time for dinner, is an example not a root problem.

**What would be the root problem?**


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**For each item on this list:**

**Explain what it means**

**Think of an illustration,**

**Describe the attitude it is likely to create in the other person.**

**State what needs to be done to overcome the fault.**

**If your behaviour hurts those around you, what kind of environment will it create?**

**If people do not like the way you behave, how will they treat you in return?**

Most of us are blind to our own faults. We tend to make allowances for our own failings while being critical of others.

The disturbing thing about this list is that if we are honest it is not hard to think of examples of most of these things in our own life.

**What should we do about it?**

**Is it good enough to say "accept me the way I am or not at all"?**

**Why-Why not?**

**What attributes make a person easy to live with?**

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4v32

Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Philippians 2v4-5

You cannot change another person. With the help of the Holy Spirit, you can change yourself. When you do, it is amazing the effect that this change elicits in those around you. Your behaviour has the ability to bring out the best or the worst in those around you.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Galatians 5v22-23

**Some Suggestions.**

**Think about the effect of your behaviour on others.**

No person is an island. Our actions directly or indirectly effect others. If we are aware of the effect our actions have on others, we will be more circumspect in our behaviour and easier to live with.

**Is this the only consideration?**

**Try to understand things from the others point of view.**

This is called empathy, it is the ability to see a situation through another person's eyes and to identify with their feelings, hopes and aspirations. When the other person is close to you, this should not be hard to do. It does require us to step outside our own world, something we are often reluctant to do. It is also something that we continually need to remind ourselves to do, it needs practice.

**How is this going to help you?**

**Be controlled by the principle, not the feeling.**

Our actions come from our feelings, if we want to do something we do it, if we don't want to do something we don't. Often our feelings are good and lead us to do the right thing. But we cannot afford to allow our feeling total control of our behaviour. Instead we must behave in accordance with what God has told us to do in Scripture. We do not love or forgive our enemies because we feel like it, but because God has commanded it (and done so for our best).

**Can you think of any examples?**

**In marriage**

**Never entertain negative thoughts about your husband or wife.**

Your feelings follow where your thoughts go. If you continually think negative thoughts about your partner, you will inevitably find barriers going up between you. If you think positively about your partner you will ensure that your love for each other remains strong.

**Think of what is best for the relationship not what is best for either individual.**

In marriage, two become one. That means they have to think one, not two. In marriage we no longer do what is best of us, nor naively, what is best for our partner, instead we always do what is best for the marriage, the two together.

# Bible Studies

## Facing the impossible

From time to time every church and individual will be faced with what seems an impossible crisis. It may be that someone close to you is diagnosed with a fatal illness, or some similarly dire circumstance. It is all very well to trust God in the small things where in the end it often doesn't matter, but what about trusting God when life and limb are on the line? In these circumstances we find lots of different reactions and lots of different ideas about how we should pray. This study is aimed at creating a healthy approach and some guide lines for these kinds of problems.

Someone in church is diagnosed with a terminal illness. **What do you do?**

This requires a physical and spiritual response. Physically, you need to visit, comfort, encourage and just be there. It is amazing how the fear of these illnesses, cause us to avoid people when they need us most. In our physical response we need to be sensitive to the wishes of the person and the circumstances. The right thing to do may be different each time.

**If they were angry, and told you to get lost, how would you respond?**

**What kind of things would you talk about? How long would you stay?**

It is important to realize that your behaviour can have a great response on the person, if you are negative, condescending or patronizing in your sympathy, you could do great harm. As a starting point, think how you would want to be treated.



Spiritually the obvious thing to do is to pray for healing

Is anyone of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; James 5v14-15  
And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name.... they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well. Mark 16v17-18



**Are these promises for today?**

Divine healing is part of what we believe. Within the Christian community it is not at all hard to find people who have been diagnosed with a fatal illness who are alive and well.

**Is it ever wrong to pray for a persons healing?**

There may be the odd exception (Isaiah 38?), this excepted, we should pray in faith for healing.

**What are the dangers of praying for healing?**

It could be misunderstood by unbelievers, it could prevent the person preparing for death, but the biggest danger is that they might not get healed and our faith may be seen as having failed.

**Does God always heal?**

Theological some might answer yes, but in experience it is clear that God does not always heal.

In Acts 12, Peter is arrested and thrown into prison, he is about to be executed. **What happened?**

James faced exactly the same set of circumstances, Acts 12v2. **What happened to him?**

**Which story is more important to our faith?**

**How do you reconciler James death with passages like Psalm 91v3-8?**

The Bible is a whole and it must be interpreted as a whole, Psm 91 can't be divorced from Acts 12.



**Why was Peter rescued and James left to die?**

There are 101 possible reasons, but the bottom line is we do not know, we are not told, we do not need to know, it is kept within the sovereignty of God.

**Was it because those praying for Peter had more faith than those praying for James?**

The Bible seems to indicate that the opposite was true.

**Why are some people healed and others not?**

The answer is exactly the same, there are 101 possible reasons, but the bottom line is we do not know, we are not told, we do not need to know, it is kept within the sovereignty of God.

**Did God fail when James died? Does God fail when someone does not get healed?**

There are times and seasons in God's purpose, there are times, such as under revival conditions, when everyone does get healed. We must always pray. We are commanded so to do.



**Read Isaiah 57v1-2**

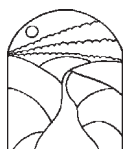
**Why do the righteous sometimes die prematurely?**

**What is the result?**

**What kind of evils do you think they are going to be spared?**

It could be some kind of trial or grief they would otherwise have experienced. Maybe had they lived on, they would have backsliden and abandoned the faith, maybe in doing so they would have caused others to do the same. Mark 9v42

Verse 2 points out that those who so die enter into peace and rest. Paul points out that our hope in God is not only for this life. When a child dies, though disease or accident it is always



a tragedy. But for a Christian it is a mitigated tragedy. Our life on earth is short and eternity is long. Spafford wrote "the sky not the grave is our goal." This life is just a prelude to eternity, eternity is the real thing, it is our goal and our final state.



**Read Philippians 2v19-27**

**What conflict is Paul struggling with?**

**What is the good side of both the possibilities he foresee?**

**What is he confident will happen?**

**Does he know for sure what the outcome will be?**

At this stage of his life Paul is in prison in Rome awaiting trial and possible execution. He is confident he will be released but he does not know for sure. He faces both possibilities and sees no terror in death.



**Do we sometimes cling to life because we fail to see the bigger picture?**

**What does this say about us?**

For death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart. Ecclesiastics 7v2

But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God." My times are in your hands; Psm 31v14-15

No man has power over the wind to contain it; so no one has power over the day of his death. Ecclesiastics 8v8



**Read Romans 4v18-21**

**To which area of Abraham's life was this referring?**

God had promised Abraham a son, this was a long standing promise, God had delayed fulfilling it until it seemed an impossible dream.

**Why do you think God waited so long before giving Abraham a son?**

In this passage Abraham does two things; **He faces reality.** He faced the fact that his body was as good as dead and that Sarah's womb was also dead. **He maintained his faith anyway.** Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed, ...Without weakening in his faith, He faced reality and he exercised faith. We must do exactly the same.



**How would this apply to praying for someone with a terminal illness?**

**Are reality and faith opposites?**

**What is the difference between faith and positive thinking?**

**Does acknowledging reality deny faith?**

**Having learned this how should we approach the sick person?**

In this account Abraham had a God given specific promise to hold on to.

**If we do not have a word from God to say a person is going to be healed should we categorically state that they will be healed?**

**What if a person has a word from God that they will be healed and they are not?**

This is a dangerous area, where ever our emotions are deeply involved, hearing God's authentic voice becomes much more difficult. Our desires cloud our sensitivity and it is very easy to make a mistake. In addition to this we may be tempted to assure the person that we have heard from God because we feel pressured to comfort or encourage them. It could also be because we ourselves cannot cope with their predicament or the idea that God should not heal them. Be slow to claim a word from God under such circumstances.

There is nothing to be gained for not exercising faith. Even in a circumstance where we have prayed for a person and they have subsequently died, our prayers are not futile or wasted. To have failed to pray would not have helped the situation. If faith had not been there, fatalism, depression, anxiety would have been. Faith is always the way to go and it never needs to be apologized for (unlike some of our behaviour). Faith pleases God. Faith lifts the situations where it is exercised. *Why pray for anything that does not require faith.*



**Does our praying control God?**

**If we pray wrongly will it confuse God?**

**What will happen if we pray wrongly?**

If we pray in sincerity and faith God will do two things, firstly He will listen to our hearts not our words and secondly, if we remain open to His guidance He will change the way we pray to bring it in line with His perfect will.



**Does our lack of faith restrict God?**

Yes sometimes it does. Matthew 13v58 at other times, like Peter's deliverance God chooses to act despite our lack of faith.

We need to bring faith into every situation. How else can we act? It is far better for us to pray earnestly for God to heal and Him not do so than to fail to have prayed and faced the challenge no differently from someone who does not believe in God. Faith always wins. The very idea of adopting a position that is based on doubt, fear, inaction or straight humanism, an attitude no different from an unsaved person is abhorrent, always be found in faith.

**Having done this study, how you change the way you approach a situation like this in the future?**

# Bible Studies

## Why do we need Church?



Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10v25

This is the clearest verse in Scripture reminding us of the importance of attending church. This study is not just about why we should attend church regularly, it is designed to ask a larger question why we need church.

**What did the early believers feel the need to do?** Acts 2v46, 5v12

The answer is they meet together. It doesn't seem to have been a strongly regulated thing, just something they needed to do.

**Why do you think they felt the need to meet together?**

This emphasis continues through the New Testament. When Paul addresses church discipline in Corinth, he uses the phrase 'when you come together' 1 Cor 11 & 14. It was obvious that there were times when believers came together to worship God, and to be taught.



**What would have happened if the early believers had not formed themselves into groups?**

Church structure runs through the New Testament, the church could not survive or grow without it.

For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." Matthew 18v20

I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD." Psalm 122v1

**What do these verses tell us about Church?**



**Read Hebrews 10v25 again.**

**Why do you think the writer of Hebrews did not want them to stop meeting together?**

**Why do you think some of them have done so?**

**What do you think the word habit implies?**

**What reason does he give for the need to meet?**

Habit implies it is a general tenancy.

**What is likely to happen to an individual who neglects church?**

**Is there a time curve involved here?**

Christians are compared in the bible to sheep, (a not entirely flattering metaphor). When a wolf attacks sheep it will always go for the isolated sheep. The isolated sheep is the most vulnerable.

**How does this apply to the Church?**

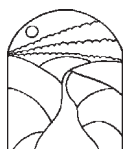
The idea is that the church can support and protect the individual. That together we can be stronger than our individual parts and that together we can grow more and serve Christ better. This is implied by Hebrews telling us to encourage one another. This is not just to encourage people to attend church, but to encourage them in their faith.



**When a person who attends church hits a crisis (physical or spiritual) what should happen?**



**If a person does not attend church and a crisis hits what is likely to happen?**



**What reason do Christians give for not wanting to attend Church?  
To what extent are these reasons valid?**

Reason	Validity

As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things. 1John 2v27

In theory Christian can survive without being a part of a group.

**Are Christians who do not attend church except for the commands God has given? (eg. Great Commission)**

**How can such a person compensate for the lack of involvement in a church?**

The Holy Spirit will teach them, they have the Bible, countless books and Christian TV. Things like worship and prayer can all be done individually, they can still witness and give to mission, they can even find ways to fellowship with other Christians.

**What dangers face this kind of Christian?**

They might intend to do all these things, they may even start out doing them, but over time they, their good intention will fall by the wayside. They end up a believer in Jesus, but neglecting all the things He commands us to do. Their faith becomes a personal thing between them and God.



**Is our faith just a personal thing?  
What are the dangers of it becoming so?**

We are here to do God's will, in worship, service and evangelism. When our faith becomes introverted it ceases to achieve what God intended for it. It is God's aim not only that the individual makes it to heaven, but that we become salt for a fallen world and that on earth His will is done.

Those who don't fellowship fall into three categories;

- 1 Those who backslide.**
- 2 Those who stagnate and introvert.**
- 3 Those who grow and mature becoming active in their faith.**

The first group is by far the largest. It takes an outstanding Christian just to hold their own without the support of a church. Even then they tend to be unproductive in their faith. The last group, those who against all the odds pull through, are very few and far between. To those who do not want to fellowship the message is clear, the numbers are against you.



**As a solo believer you see a friend saved.  
What do you need to do now? What happens if you don't do this?**

You don't believe in attending church, but you need to disciple them, this means meeting with them to teach them how to pray and understand the bible, so you meet with them regularly.

**What have you just done?**

Congratulation, you have just reinvented the wheel, church by another name.



# Bible Studies Worksheet

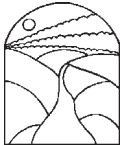
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*On a personal level why do we need church?  
What does church provide for us?*




*On a collective level why do we need church?  
What does church provide for us?*

## **Why do we need Church?**



### **Environment.**

Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character. I Corinthians 15v33

#### **What happens if you swear in church?**

We conform to the standards of the company we keep. When any group of people spend time together they develop what are called norms, expected types of behaviour. We have to be careful we do not get drawn down to the norms of the people we interact with. Church creates an environment where godly norms can be built into our lives. Without this environment, our behaviour tends to deteriorate.

Church is a redemptive community.

#### **How is this similar to peer pressure?**



### **Teach, Motivation and correction**

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. 1 Timothy 4v13

It is in church that we learn about God.

Church provides us with motivation to continue to grow and correct the things in us that are wrong. We need others who will speak into our lives and help us to move forward. We need church to stimulate us and provoke us. This happens not only through teaching but through interaction with others.

We also need others that will keep us from wrong doctrine and wrong practices. We need accountability.

#### **What happens where there is no accountability?**

Church is to be a healing community.



### **Organization**

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Mark 16v15

We are surrounded by church and para-church organizations, without the church few of these would survive. This is most clearly seen in mission and large-scale outreach, both rely on organized churches for their support.

#### **Without churches how would the face of Christianity change?**

#### **How would the lack of churches effect the great commission?**

#### **What does this say about those who don't want to be part of a church?**

Church is to be a prophetic community



### **Fulfill God's commands**

These include worshiping and praying collectively. They also include service. Beyond this we need to be involved, church facilitates this.

Church is an active community.



### **Fellowship and the removal of isolation.**

Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honoured his name. Malachi 3v16

#### **Why do we need fellowship?**

#### **What happens when we get isolated?**

Church is to be a united community

#### **What other things do we need Church for?**

#### **Why do you think our Children and young people need Church?**

# Bible Studies

## Psalm 103



**Read Psalm 103 What is the major theme of this psalm?**

Perhaps our relationship with God, His compassion upon us or mans status before God. This is a simple Psalm all about basics. It's very refreshing!

**Who is David talking to in this Psalm?**

David is addressing himself, his soul, it is a psalm reminding him of what he knows to be true. He is encouraging himself.

**How do you think King David wanted us to feel after reading this psalm?**

This psalm has three sections, It starts and ends with praise.v1-5 and 20-22. between these it talks about God's attitude towards us and our sin.

**Do we praise God enough?**

**Why is it important that we praise God?**

**When should we praise God?**

**What part of us needs to praise?**

**What is the difference between praising God and worshiping God?**

**What is the difference between praising God and praying?**

In Hebrew the word praise also means bless, (*bless the LORD O my soul, KIV*). It includes the idea of honouring, acknowledging and giving thanks. In Jewish culture this was considered very important. To this day Jews have blessing to be said at all manner of occasions. These blessing start with the same words as this psalm, *Baruck Ata*, Bless (or praise) the Lord.

**Do you think this is a good practice? Should we emulate it?**

Have you notice how quick we are to resort to prayer instead of praise? For example when we say grace before a meal, it is intended to be a time to thank God, not to ask God for things, yet this is what we often end up doing. **Why do you think this is?**



Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5v16-18



**What three things does this verse tell us to do?**

**How are you going to include praise into your daily life?**

**What will the result of praising God be?**

**What benefits (how kind God's been) of knowing God does the Psalmist state?**


**What do each of these mean? What are we to do with these six benefits?**

We are told to remember them. They are reason to bless the Lord.

**What effect will remembering/forgetting them have on us?**

If we don't give thanks for them we will forget them.

**What does verse 6 tell us about God?**

**What does this mean for us?**

**What does verse 7 tell us about God?**

**What does this mean for us?**

**What does verse 8 tell us about God?**

**Does everyone see God this way?**

**What does verse 9 tell us about God?**

**What does this mean for us?**

**What might He be angry about?**

**Why won't He stay angry?**

**How does this compare with us?**

He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.v10

**What would happen if He did?**

**Does this mean that God is soft on sin?**

**Why is this verse important to us?**

**How does He deal with us?**





**Read Psalm 32v1-2      How is this blessing received?**  
**Read Psalm 130v3-4      What does forgiveness enable us to do?**  
**Why should we fear God?**  
**How does this contrast with pagan religions? Why do they fear God?**

**How far has God removed our sins? v12      What does this mean?**  
**How far is the east from the west?**



You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. Micah 7v19  
 “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” Jeremiah 31v34  
 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, Acts 3v19

**How do you think God feels when we come to him and ask for forgiveness?**  
 Many of us have the idea that God is reluctant to forgive our sin, that we trouble Him or that coming to Him is a burden. These verse seem to make it clear that God delights to forgive our sin. It is something He really wants to do. He is quick to forgive.

**Whose idea was forgiveness in the first place?**

Forgiveness puts Christ’s work on the cross into perspective. In a sense being able to forgive our sin makes the pain and the grief worthwhile. When we refuse to come for forgiveness as far as we are concerned we make Christ’s death to be for nothing.



**Why do we need forgiveness?**  
**What are the results of forgiveness?**

The psalmist goal in this passage is not to encourage us to ask God for forgiveness, but rather to appreciate the forgiveness that we have received. To comprehend the blessed state of being forgiven. Often we fail to acknowledge what this means.

Complete the following phrase at least 10 ways. **If I am forgiven then....**

**Why do you think Satan works so hard to stop us from feeling forgiven?**

For he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. v14

**What does this verse mean?**

God knows what we are made of, He knows what is in our hearts, He knows our frailties propensity to sin. He has taken all these things into account and has provide a way for allowances to be made (ie forgiveness). We don’t have to be superhuman to please God. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Hebrew 4v15-16



**What is verse 15&16 saying about mans life and destiny?**  
**What do verse 17 say about mans destiny?**  
**How do the two compare and connect?**

We are temporary, God is eternal. It is God’s hold on us that gives our lives significance and permanence.

**Three places in this Psalm it says there is a result of fearing God, what is it?**  
**What does it mean to fear God?**

**Practically, what does it mean for us to fear the Lord?**

Verse 18 likens fearing the Lord to keeping His covenant, remembering and obeying Him. In effect, it is respect for God and living your life in awareness that you are in God presence and that He is watching you.

Three dimensions are mentioned in this Psalm. God forgives us as far as the east to the west. He love us as high as the heavens from the earth and from eternity to eternity. God love is like the huge expanse of the heavens focusing in on us.

**What does this Psalm say about our acceptance before God?**

It is based on our forgiveness and upon God’s love for us. It is not based on our works because we are made from dust. It is founded in covenant and requires us to fear and obey Him



Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word.  
 Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will.  
 Praise the LORD, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the LORD, O my soul.

**Having studied this Psalm want do you have to praise God for?**

# Bible Studies

## A time for everything



### **Read Ecclesiastes 3v1-8**

Solomon tells us that for every event there is an appropriate time. The theme of Ecclesiastes is to find out what is worthwhile to do during our lives. To this end, Solomon gives a list of things that people do to find fulfillment. Work, wealth, pleasure, wisdom, fame etc. He concluded that none of these things in itself brings the fulfillment he desires. His advice in the end is to make the most of what you have, to enjoy what you do and to make relationships your priority. Ecc 2v24-26, 5v18, 8v15, 9v7-10. Unsaved people who live happy lives invariably and unknowingly follow this advice. To these things Solomon adds a spiritual dimension. Happiness comes from pleasing God, remembering your creator and living in awe of God.

The word time, means occasion or season.

There are two basic ways to understand this passage.



That the things listed are, for better or worse, what everyone must face in life. We will all know peace and war, mourning and dancing.

### **If this is the case, how should we respond to what Solomon is saying?**

We should make the most of the good times. And realise that the bad times are inevitable and transient. In the bad, we must trust God and make the most of everything. From this comes happiness.

When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. Ecclesiastes 7v14



The second way to interpret this passage is to say that happiness comes from doing the right thing at the right time. Understanding the different seasons of your life and acting appropriately. Wisdom comes from interpreting the times.

### **If this is the case, how should we respond to what Solomon is saying?**



There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:

### **For each of these items ask, when is the right time and why.**

Bear in mind that many of these verses have a physical and a spiritual application.



a time to be born and a time to die,

These mark the boundaries of our lives. Many of the Bible characters understood their birth and death to be destined by God. Their lives were a part of God's plan. This is still true. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. Psalm 139v16

### **Is there a time to die? What implication does this have for us?**



a time to plant and a time to uproot,

Uproot could mean harvest. **What happens when you get the time wrong?**



a time to kill and a time to heal,

### **Does this have to refer exclusively to human life?**



a time to tear down and a time to build,

The above three lines all talk about establishing and destroying.

### **When do things need to be destroyed? 2 Cor 10v4-5 1, Timothy 1v20**

For even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than pulling you down, I will not be ashamed of it. 2 Corinthians 10v8

For each of these dichotomies, it seems that an individual is drawn to one extreme. Some of us are excellent at pulling down, but poor at building. We tear down what should be torn down and we tear down what should be built up. We can laugh but we can't cry, or we can cry but we can't laugh. Perhaps Solomon is calling on us to balance our extremes.



a time to weep and a time to laugh,

Even Jesus wept. John 11v35, Luke 19v41

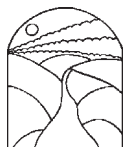


a time to mourn and a time to dance,

One of the symptoms of emotional health is to be able to respond appropriately, to laugh and cry when the time is right. It is healthy to be able to laugh and cry.

### **When do we weep and laugh?**

Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Romans 12v15





a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,

**What do you think this means?**

There are several possibilities; It could refer to building or demolishing a house. Making a field productive unproductive. 2 Kings 3v19. It could refer to the Jewish burial custom of placing stones on a grave or as the Good News Bible has it, it could be a euphemism for sex.



a time to embrace and a time to refrain,

**What do you think this means?**



a time to search and a time to give up,

**How are you going to know when it is time to give up?**



a time to keep and a time to throw away,

**What application might this have?**

**What are keeping and throwing away associated with?**



a time to tear and a time to mend,

This could be associated with mourning.

**What can happen if you fix someones problem to quickly?**

Never give the prodigal son Mc. Donald's in the pig sty.

He told them this parable: "No-one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one.

If he does, he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old.

Luke 5v36



a time to be silent and a time to speak,

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, James 1v19



a time to love and a time to hate,

**When is the time to hate?** Exo 18v21, Lev 19v17, Psm 45v7, 139v21, Jude v23

**Isn't it always a time to love?**

Perhaps it also means a time to show love.



a time for war and a time for peace.

**Is there really a time for war?**

He has made everything beautiful in its time. Ecclesiastes 3v11



**Read**

**1 Chronicles 12v32**

**Ecclesiastes 8v5**

**Esther 1v13**

**Psalms 31v15**

**What do these verses tell us?**

**What times or seasons, were there in Moses life?**

Moses life falls into three periods of 40 years, education in Egypt, shepherding in the desert, leading the children of Israel. The junctures between these held dramatic events.

**What times or seasons, were there in Jesus life?**

Thirty years of anonymity, forty days in the wilderness, three years of ministry and three days in the grave.

**What times or seasons are there going to be in our lives?**

In our lives there will be mountains and valleys, triumphs and defeats. There will be times to concentrate on different things, time to make family a priority, time to make money, time to train and time to serve God, time to wait and time to rest.

**What happens when you do the wrong thing at the wrong time?**

**How are you going to know what time it is for you now?**

The simple answer is ask God. Change in life is inevitable.

There are some things in life that it is always time to do, eg. Like worshiping God. But there are also times when these things need to take the primary place in our lives.



**Read John 7v6-8**

**What do you think Jesus meant by this?**

Jesus knew he was following God's plan and to do so meant keeping to God's timing. For so many of us every time is right. As a result we act precipitously. The right thing at the wrong time is really the wrong thing.

**Why do we often feel pressured to act before the right time?**

**Does this demonstrate a lack of trust?**

It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way. Proverbs 19v2

Humans are always in a hurry.

And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this? Esther 4v14b

# Bible Studies

## Mary and Martha



### Read Luke 10v38-42

Mary and Martha lived at Bethany on the far side of the Mt. of Olives a short distance from Jerusalem. Jesus seems to have stayed there often, using it as a base while he was ministering in Jerusalem. He was especially close to Lazarus, their brother, he is described as "the one Jesus loves." If Jesus and his disciples were visiting, there must have been much work to be done. Martha is busy organizing food and beds. Some think this might have been the first time Jesus had stayed there and Martha wants everything to be just right. Mary is listening to Jesus, leaving Martha with all the work.. Martha is probably the older sister

### Who invited Jesus to stay?

Many of us find difficulty with this story.

**Opinion poll: Who was right?**    **Mary**    **Martha**  
**Who are your sympathies with?**    **Mary**    **Martha**

Mary has found a place close to Jesus and is listening as He teaches. The phrase *sitting at Jesus feet* is a euphemism. It is used in the Greek of Acts 22v3. **What does it mean?**

It means to learn as a disciple. Culturally this was not a women's place, most would even consider it a sin. **What does this tell us about Jesus attitude to women?**  
**Why might Martha have asked Jesus to rebuke her?**

### How do you think Martha felt, left to do all the work alone?

Instead of being a pleasure to offer service, it had become a duty, an obligation, a struggle a chore. The joy of having Jesus stay had become a burden.

### Can anyone identify with that attitude?

"Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

### What was Martha's attitude? What was Mary's attitude?



Martha: Don't you see how much needs to be done? Thinks Mary is lazy.

Mary: Wants to know Jesus and here is the opportunity He is in her house.

Martha: Overly occupied and too busy AMP. Working herself into a state.  
Emotions are all awry. Distracted. Missing what was most important.

Mary: Sees her priorities, knows what is important.

Martha: Can only see the work.

Mary: Can only see Jesus.

Martha: Stressed out and anxious, maybe jealous. Lord tell her to help!

### What was important to Mary? What was important to Martha?

**Was calling out like she did the best way to deal with the situation?**  
**In Martha's position what would you have done?**

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Martha walks away totally confused. **What has Martha done wrong?**

Jesus never says that Martha has done anything wrong. Martha was a servant and being a servant is good. He did not tell her off. However He was concerned about the anxiety and stress that her service for Him had created in her. He calmed her down.

### What was Martha worried about?

**When Jesus says 'Mary has chosen what is better' what does the word better imply?**

**Do you think Jesus wanted a meal that night? Do you think He got one?**



### Many things

Luke 10v2

Ephesians 2v10

There is so much work to be done in the Kingdom of God.

Luke 19v13

Ephesians 4v12

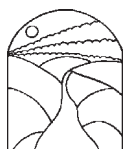
### What happens if we neglect this work?

There are multiple warnings in scripture for those who neglect the work that God has called us to do. The danger is that in doing this we emulate a Martha attitude. This story identifies two personality types and ways of serving God. One Jesus identified as what was best.



### Martha's attitude.

What Martha was doing was necessary. It was not what she was doing that was the problem but how she was doing it. Jesus is saying that her work is important but there are things that are more important. This passage is not about actions, if it were Martha would be the hero, it is about attitudes and priorities.



Martha's attitude was wrong. **How?**



She had got herself into a state, she was anxious, upset and resentful. She assumed that because something was her job it also made it Mary's. She placed the physical over the spiritual. The temporal over the eternal. Frustration caused her to lash out at others and complain to Jesus. Martha had lost her focus.

There are traces of selfishness, Jealousy, guilt and insecurity in the ways she acts.

**How do we do these things today in church life?**

**What dangers are there in this attitude?**

What Martha did was good but what Mary did was better. There is a need to find a balance between these two attitudes. It is easy to be hard on Martha. This passage is written for our benefit not to solve a domestic dispute. Behind it is a fundamental tension in the Christian life, in which both extremes are wrong. The story calls us to balance our Christian life and service. Mary represents worship, devotion and knowing God. Martha represents service, work and action. **Is Jesus denigrating the importance of service?**

No, He is not, He is stating a priority and an order. Relationship to Jesus must come first. The story is written this way because we tend to be by nature Martha's. It is much easier to be a Martha than a Mary and Marthas in the church outnumber Marys. Marys position is the fragile one.

It is where Martha's attitude leads and the tone of resentment in it, that is the danger. I'm busy for the Lord, my work for him should be recognised and puts me in good standing with him. Work is more important than faith. Work is more important than my relationship with God. I'm sacrificing for God, I'm working hard, no one seems grateful, no one wants to help. Everything is achieved by human effort and God owes us something for our work.. It is all works orientated.

**Can you really be distracted by serving God?**

Martha represents those who neglect their personal relationship with Christ in favour of service for Christ. In reality both are needed, but the first is more important. **Why?**



**Do you think Martha realized her attitude was wrong?**

**What would she have put her service down to?**

People who have Martha attitudes are usually blissfully unaware of them.

**Do you think Jesus was too hard on Martha?**



**Read Numbers 11v10-15 & 20v10-12**

**What are the similarities between Moses and Martha?**

It was this attitude in Moses life that caused him to strike the rock and in the end kept him out of the promised land. Numbers 20v12

Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labour in vain. Psalm 127:1



**Mary's attitude**

**What does Jesus commend Mary for?**

**Does he commend her for being lazy and avoiding work?**

**Was she being lazy?**

**What does Jesus want more, us or our service?**

In Christian ministry and maturity you cannot rise above your relationship with Jesus.

Be still, and know that I am God; Psalm 46v10



**Read Hebrew 4v7-11** The Bible talks about entering God's rest.

**Does this mean that we stop all our work for God?**

The rest here is an attitude of heart a place of trust and security before God. Relying on Him, listening to his word obeying Him and not trying to do everything through our own effort. The Christian life does not have to be a strain and a burden. If it is, maybe there is too much Martha in us and not enough Mary. The necessary distracts us from the needed.



"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11v28-30

It is from this position of rest that you serve God.

**What would happen if Mary only ever sat at Jesus feet?**

The Martha's of this world, keep the drug companies in business, they build edifices but do not achieve much for God, they drive their families, churches and probably God, crazy. They suffer from stomach ulcers and die of heart attacks before their time. They never know God's rest.



**What should we do when we get into a Martha state?**

**What is the one thing that is needed?**

A relationship with Jesus. An attitude of trust. It is only from this that the Martha's of this world loose their stress and serve God well.

**What things have to come first in our lives in order that we serve God well?**



# Bible Studies

## Why things go wrong



### **Read 1 Peter 1v3-9**

As you might have noticed, things go wrong in life. There is a need to mention this because, some of you may not have noticed and others are in denial.

There is an idea that if you are a Christian nothing will ever go wrong, nothing bad will ever happen and your life will be on triumph laid upon another. If it does go wrong, it is because of sin in your life or a lack of faith. Christians never suffer loss, get sick, experience trials, problems, persecution, heartaches or suffering and no one ever dies.

### **Is this a realistic view? Is it Biblical?**

Some people seem to read the Bible with their eyes closed. There isn't a righteous man in the Bible of whom some grief isn't recorded. **(for example?)**

The problems we face range from minor irritations to major problems.

Have you ever noticed that what seems trivial to you may be major for someone else?

### **Why do you think this is?**

We are all at different levels of maturity and faith, we all have different weaknesses and hangups from the past. Sometimes something small can be the last straw, or 'reference' some hidden weakness in a persons life. Today's goal is not only to understand why things go wrong but to look at how we should act when they do.



### **Some things in life are inevitable.**

If you own a 15 year old washing machine, it is going to break down sooner or later. It's not God's fault, it's not the devils fault, it was just old. Things wear out. It is inevitable.

### **What other examples are there?**

Parents will eventually die, children will get chickenpox and tires will wear out. These things are part of life.



### **Who should we blame when it happens?**

### **How should we prepare for these kinds of problems?**

### **How should we react when this kind of problem faces us?**

### **How should we not react?**

We need to accept these things. We need to be prepared for these kind of things, that may mean taking care of the washing machine or it may mean spending time with your parents while you can. When these things happen we need to be strong in the Lord, to trust Him and to ask Him to help. Problems tend to reveal our strengths and weaknesses, our level of faith and maturity.

If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses? If you stumble in safe country, how will you manage in the thickets by the Jordan? Jeremiah 12v5

### **What do you think this verse means?**

Talking about the trials in his life, Paul once said. But none of these things move me, Acts 20v24 kjv



### **The enemy.**

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; John 10v10

There are times when the enemy brings grief into our life. Job is a good example, as is Paul. There was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 2 Corinthians 12v7

### **Why does the enemy bring grief into our lives?**

To distract us from our calling, to disillusion us, to dishearten us, to weaken us spiritually making us vulnerable, to draw us into sin and to stop us from trusting God.

The enemy can only be active in our lives where God allows, for what is intended to weaken us can also strengthen us, depending on how we respond.



### **How should we react to trouble from the enemy?**

### **What tools do we have to help us overcome?**

### **How should we not react?**

### **Do you think the enemy often gets credit for what he didn't do?**



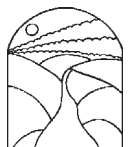
### **The consequence of our own stupidity.**

We all make mistakes, we are all careless at times and do the wrong thing instead of the right thing. No one is perfect. Like the first category, these things are inevitable.

### **How should we react? How should we not react?**

### **Why is it important how we react?**

We learn our limitation and we learn from our mistakes, we forgive ourselves and ask for God's help. We do not dwell on the past but press on to the future, we do not lose confidence.



**Read Hebrews 10v35-39.**

Sometime our unrealistic expectations compound this problem. We expect perfection from ourselves and become self critical when we fail to attain this. We concentrate on our weakness and failures, ignoring our strengths and successes.

**What is the inevitable outcome of this? How should we see ourselves?** Gal 6v4

**4**

**Time and Chance.**

Thaveseensomethingelseunderthesun:Theraceisnottotheswiftorthebattletothestrong,nordoesfoodcometothewiseorwealthtothebrilliantorfavourtothelearned;buttimeandchancehappentothemall.Ecc9v11

This is the closest the Bible comes to admitting the existence of luck.

**How should we react? How should we not react?**

**5**

**The Consequences of our Sin**

By definition when we sin we move out of God's will for our lives and consequently we open ourselves up to all kinds of griefs and problems. We can't blame God, (though we often seem to try) We can't blame the devil (ditto) sin is our responsibility.

**How should we react when we become aware of a problem caused by our sin?**

**How should we not react?**

When we confess our sin God always forgives our sin. Sometimes in His grace, He remits the effects of our sin, sometimes He does not and we are left with the consequences of our sin. We might need to make restitution or apologize to people effected by our sin.

**Can you think of any examples? What should we do?**

We ask God for grace to cope with it. We stand up and are responsible for our action and we make the most of our current situation.

In God there is always a way forward and he has promised us that all things work together for good. When faced with this kind of situation Christians are often at a loss to know what to do. The answer is very simple. *Do what is right and just in God's eyes now.*

**6**

**Sometimes things go wrong as discipline from the Lord.**

**Read Hebrew 12v4-13**

Some things that 'go wrong' don't go wrong at all, God just has a plan that we haven't understood. Hebrews says treat hardship as discipline. These 10 reasons why things go wrong are not mutually exclusive, often there is a combination of reasons. What the enemy means for harm God means for good. Even hardship that is not discipline needs to be treated as discipline. Everything God does is only ever for our best.

**Why do we need discipline?**

Discipline has two meanings; correction for where we are wrong and constrains that help us learn.

**?**

**How should we respond to God's discipline?**

**How should we not respond?**

**What will discipline achieve in us?**

**7**

**We learn through suffering.**

**What can we learn through suffering?**

We can learn to trust God and we can learn to sympathies with others.

**In light of this, how should we respond to suffering?**

**8**

**Sometimes suffering is intended to strengthen us.**

**Read Romans 5v3-5**

**How does suffering strengthen us?**

Mountain top experiences are very encouraging and it is where everyone wants to be, but it is in the valleys that we learn and develop and grow stronger. Suffering may come because God wants to change us. Often we pray for a situation to change when God put it there so that we would change.

**If suffering is to strengthen us, how should we respond to it?**

**9**

**God wants to achieve something in someone else's life.**

God has set you up to be observed, someone is watching you to see how you will act, how you will respond. You are to be an example to others.

**If this is the case how should we respond?**

**How should we not respond?**

**10**

**Because we are Christians.**

**Read Philippians 3v10, 1 Peter 4v12-19**

Christ suffered and we share His sufferings. The word witness in the New Testament is same word as martyr.

**!**

Different reasons for suffering require different responses, we accept hardship as discipline but we reject the enemies junk. What is important is that we respond well in every situation if we do we will grow from every problem we face.

# Bible Studies

## The Image of God.



### **Read Genesis 1v26-28, Genesis 5v1.**

The Bible tells us that we have been made in the image and likeness of God.

The word image in Hebrew is 'Tzulem', it develops from the root meaning shadow it can be translated likeness or shadow. This word is used of idols in the Old Testament. In modern Hebrew it means photo. Likeness is the word *Domuot* it means; like, similar to or representing. Some of the older theologians found a difference between image and likeness (one being lost at the fall the other not.) No difference is intended, these words are effectively synonymous.

The New Testament also tells us that we are made in the image of God

### **Read 1 Corinthians 11v7, James 3v9**

#### **Without going into specifics, what does it mean that we are made in God's image?**

It means that there are similarities between God and us. There are things about God that have found their way into human nature, because God designed them into us.



#### **What it doesn't mean.**

**God looks like me.** Most people assume that if we were made in God's image that means that God has two legs, two arms and a head. That physically we are made to look like God.

#### **What is God's basic nature?** John 4:24

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen. 1 Timothy 1:17 God is spirit, God is not flesh and blood. God does not have a body. All matter was created by God, how then can God be relented on a physical body. Isaiah 66v1-2.

#### **How then do you interpret verses like Isaiah 59v1?**

The Bible is simply using language we can understand to explain God, God's arm in this passage is His ability to save, His omnipotence, His ear is His omniscience.

At times God may choose to reveal himself as looking like a man, but this is not to say that God is inherently tied to a human like body. When God the Son, became incarnate as a human being, He really did take a human body. But then again how could the Word become flesh, if the Word was already flesh?

**I am divine.** Being made in God's image does not make us incarnations of God or little god's. God and humans are separate. You are not God, we do however have God like attributes within us, a spark of the divine. To claim to be God is a serious self delusion and blasphemy. We are totally reliant on God. Cf Psalm 82v1&6

#### **Do some people or religions claim to be god or claim they will become gods?**

Some people have taken this to mean that man can only ever be good and do good, because he is the image of God. Others say this refers to our dominion over the earth, we are god's in that we are in charge. **What do you think of these arguments?**



#### **What it might be.**

Theologians have argued for years over which part of us was the image of God.



Some believe it is our soul.

Others our intellect or ability to reason. No animal is capable of abstract thought.

Our complex personality.

Our ability to make moral choices.

It could be our free choice. **(Does God have free will?)**

Some restrict it to our 'original righteousness' ie what we were like before Adam's sin.

For others, it is all the things that make us different from animals.

Each of these definitions is in some way true but they are also restrictive. It is dangerous to assume that God's image in us is a single characteristic.

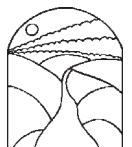


#### **The image of God.**

#### **What things are found in God that are also found in man?**

This is a long list. Most of God's attributes are found in people in a lesser sense. God is moral so are we. God is love, we are capable of love. God is all powerful, we are powerful, God is all-knowing we are capable of knowledge. God is the only creator, we are creative. God is good, we are capable of doing good. God is holy we are capable of holiness. God is spirit, we have a spirit.

The analogy of a photo is helpful here, just as a picture can show a landscape in perfect detail, yet only be a two dimensional representation, completely inadequate compared to the real thing. So we are a 2D image of a 3D God.



4

**Did we lose the image of God at the fall?**

Does this image refer only to our nature before the fall? Some theologians would say yes.

**Read Genesis 9v5-6**

**Why is it wrong to kill? Does the image of God remain in man?**

**Read Romans 2v14-15**

**How is it possible for people ignorant of God, to instinctively do what is right?**

Clearly we did not lose the image of God, however in every area it was marred. In so many ways man does not reflect the nature of his creator, or reflects that nature poorly or inconsistently.

**What evidence can you see of this marred nature in humans?**

**What evidence can you see that the image of God remains?**

5

**Evidence of God's image. Read 1 John 4v7-8**

It is only because of God's image, as a loving God that we are able to love at all.

**Is it only Christians who know God who can love?**

No God's image is in all humankind, but becoming a Christian changes the way we love, we begin to love as God love, we start to love the unlovely and our enemies, our love changes from a conditional or selfish love to an unconditional giving love.

✓

The fact that I can love is evidence of God's image in me.

The fact that I struggle to love is evidence that His image in me is marred.

Our curiosity and our thirst for knowledge are all part of God's nature.

Karl Barth made a famous statement describing God as "Wholly other". He wanted to emphasize that God is so much above us in all His ways. Isaiah 55v8-9. His statement is helpful in understanding God. But God is not wholly other because we are in His image.

✓

The ability to understand God even to the extent that we do is evidence of God's image.

The ability to respond to God is evidence of His image.

The ability to come into relationship with God is an attribute of His image in us.

**If we were not made in God's image could we understand Him or respond to Him? Would we even want to?**

He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.. Ecclesiastes 3:11

✓

Our desire to find & worship something greater than himself is evidence of God's image.

Man's sense of immortality and desire for it is proof of the image of God in us.

Our desire to bring order and to find order in the universe is part of God's image.

Our desire to do good and be moral, despite our overwhelming inability to do either.

✓

It is because we are made in God's image that when Jesus came in the flesh He could adequately reveal to us what God is like. John 14v8-9, Colossians 1v15, 2 Corinthians 4v4. Jesus is the only absolute image of God.

Man is mortal yet he was made to inherit immortality. 1 Corinthians 15v53. This is possible because we are made in the image of God.

Because we are made in the image of God we are different and separate from animals.

**In what way are we like animals?** Cf Ecclesiastes 3v8

We are made from the same DNA as all living creatures. Genesis separates man's creation from that of animals, we are different, we are made in God's likeness.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. Psalm 139:14

**Do you think one reason God loves us is that He has invested His image in us?**

6

**Recreated in God's image.**

**Read Romans 8v29 1 Corinthians 15v49**

Put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator Colossians 3:10

**What happens to the image of God in us when we come to salvation?**

**Do you think this happens all at once or gradually?**

Theologically you could make an argument to say that it happens all at once (it's an indicative-imperative deal, become what you already are 1 Corinthians 5v7). Practically behaving in God's image is evidence of being recreated in His image. It is a process that we work through which requires our cooperation.

We need to become daily more like Jesus, more conformed to his image, to God's likeness. Romans 12v2. It is only because we are made in God's image that we can be like God in our behaviour and attitudes. It is only because we are made in God's image that we can be Christlike.

**What obligation does this put on us as Christians?**

If we are made in God's image and after salvation recreated in that image. It can only be that we are intended to show the image of God to others. People are supposed to see God in us, Matthew 5v16, 1 Peter 2v12. We are called to be the image of God to the world around us.

**What kind of behaviour does this require from us?**

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 1 John 3:2

# Bible Studies

## The First and the Last

But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first. Matthew 19v30  
These words are recorded on Jesus lips four times in His ministry, He probably used them many more times, they were almost a catch phrase. Why did He use them so often? and what did He mean by them?

These words are considered one of Jesus 'hard sayings'. **Why do you think this is?** They undermine our way of looking at things. If we are first we expect the reward for being first, we do not expect it to go to someone else. What is more being first is very important to us, large parts of our society are driven by competition.



**Read Matthew 19v16-30, Mark 10v17-31**

**In this passage, who was the first? What made him first?  
Why did he end up last?**

**In this passage, who was the last? What made them last?  
How did they end up as the first?**

**On a broader level, how does this apply to the world today?**

**Does Jesus say that all first are going to be last?**

No, He uses the word 'many', He does not say all. Luke 13v30 confirms this.

**Was the rich man automatically last?**

No, he was only last because he could not respond to Jesus.



At first reading, this proverb contrasts the rich man and the disciples, Jesus promises those who have sacrificed in order to follow Him, great blessings and rewards in the eternity. But at closer reading, it seems that Jesus is also issuing a warning to his disciples.

**What warning is Jesus giving them?**

He is saying that position in the kingdom of God cannot be bought even by the amount we humble ourselves, or what we sacrifice.

**Does this mean the least significant person in church is always the most important?**

The greatest in the Kingdom of God is not automatically for the one who gives up the most. Jesus is warning the disciples that their sacrifice alone will not make them first in God's Kingdom. Cf Matt 20v23. The rules of status we use in the world do not pertain to the Kingdom of Heaven, even when applied inversely. The last are not always first.

**What does this say to people in leadership?**

**What does this say to those who want to push themselves forward?**

I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism Acts 10v34



**Read Matthew 20v1-16**

**Who was first in this parable? How did they become last?  
Who was last in this parable? How did they become first?**

The first were those who struggled through the heat of the day. The last were those who worked only an hour.

**In a hire pool, who gets picked first? Who gets picked last?**

The first in this parable refer to the Jews who bore the law of Moses, through the heat of the day, working hard for their salvation, only then to be saved through Jesus and not their own efforts. The last are the gentiles who were given salvation without keeping the law or working for what they received. This can also apply today, the first are those who know and serve God all their lives, working hard, sacrificing and keeping away from sin. The last are those who accept Christ only at the end of their lives, having done nothing to deserve what they are paid.

At the end, in this parable there is not first and last, all are equal and receive the same. However hard you work you can never earn salvation, it is only and always a gift.

**What then does this parable say about human effort?**

God's rewards are given by grace, they are not earned.

**If the last will be first does that mean there is no point in trying to do your best?**

It does mean that we need to change why we are doing things. We need to do them to please God not in order to make ourselves first.



**3**

**Read Luke 13v22-30**

**Who are the first in this passage? Who are the last?**

**What made some of the first last?**

**What made some of the last first?**

Here the first are good, honest, religious people, the advantaged and the privileged, who acknowledged Jesus but never responded to him. The last are ordinary people who respond in faith. **Who are we in this passage?**

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. Matthew 21v31

**How does this apply to us?**

Make sure your Christianity is real.

**4**

**Read Mark 9v33-37**

**What does Jesus say here about being first and last?**

**Is Jesus encouraging us to want to be first?**

Jesus is saying the route to greatness in the Kingdom of God is through service. The problem is that it is a different kind of greatness. We are not called to be servants so that we can become the greatest in God's eyes, being the servant is greatest. Jesus is not encouraging us to be the least so we can become the first, He is encouraging us to ditch our ideas of what it means to be first, what it means to be great.

**What things are great in God's sight?**

Many of the things on this list we are in control of, humility, love, service, but as we have already seen, these things do not of themselves make us first in God's sight. Some of them we have no control over, we are great in God's sight because He loves us.

**✓**

**Some other examples**

**Luke 16v19-31 The rich man and Lazarus How was the first last?**

**Mark 12v41-44 The widows offering How was the first last?**

**Matthew 5v3-10 The beatitudes How was the first last?**

**1 Samuel 16v1-13 David chosen as king How was the first last?**

**1 Cor 1v26-31 Who was called How was the first last?**

**Luke 14v7-11 Choosing seats How was the first last?**

**According to what we have learnt so far, who are the first that will be last?**

**If we look on outward appearances are we in danger of confusing the first and last?**

**In what way do we need to change our attitude towards being first?**

**Should being first be a controlling factor in our lives?**

In society being first is everything, being top, having the most, is everything. In the kingdom, our ambitions must be different, we want to please God, we want to obey God, we want to serve others.

**?**

**In what ways do Christians want to be first?**

**In what ways do churches want to be first?**

**How much of this is productive?**

Consider. Billy Graham arguably the most successful evangelist of modern times, he obeys God and does all that God requires of him. **Will he be first or last?**

A widow, never achieves fame or notoriety, but quietly thorough the year in prayer and service obeys God and does all that is required of her. **Will she be first of last?**

**Which of the two will God consider more important or worthy of more honour?**

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves. Romans 12:10

Who is first is not in our hands it is in God's. It is God who makes the last first and the first last. This proverb of Jesus is supposed to make us think about how we view the kingdom of God. God's standards are not our standards, he has a different value system. We should desire to see others be first, rather than try to make ourselves first, in doing so we have nothing to lose.

Who is the most important, what makes you important and why it's important to be important.

It is suppose to make us rethink the effects of works and the importance of grace.

It is suppose to make us reassess who we think of as most important.

**?**

**What examples of this verse can you think of in the world today?**

**What examples of this verse can you think of in the church today?**

**How do we have to change if we want to take this verse seriously?**

**What does this say about equality in the Church?**

**Is it OK to be competitive in spiritual things?**

# Bible Studies

## Why do people backslide?

**What is a backslider?**

A backslider is someone who accepted Jesus into their life and started to follow Him, but for a variety of reasons, stopped following Christ and started to live as an unbeliever. To turn your back on Christ and move away from Him. Those in the process of giving up.



**Read Matthew 13v1-9**

The parable of the sower is well known, it describes four scenarios but three kinds of people. There are those in whom the word finds no place, it never germinates, Satan steals it before it can start to grow. In another group the gospel takes hold and becomes fruitful. It is the two other groups that interest us for the sake of this study. Those where the seed germinated but never reached fruitfulness.



**What happened to these two seeds?**

**What caused the seed on the rocky ground to fail? v20-21**

**What was the reason the person backslid?**

**What caused the seed among the weeds to fail? v22**

**What was the reason the person backslid?**

**What proportion would you assign to each group?**

**Why do people backslide?**


**What part will the enemy play in a person backsliding?**

The enemy is active in them all. Perhaps each one of us has a tendency to backslide at a given one of these points. If so the Enemy will do all he can to exacerbate the problem and exaggerate the issues involved.

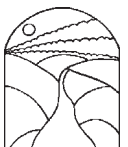
**Can you think of any famous backsliders in the Bible?**

Probably the most famous backslider was Judas.

**Why do you think Judas backslid?**

At this point we have to admit that we rarely know why anyone backslides, often the reasons are hidden, even by those who backslide. The reasons that are given are often a smokescreen

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and the real reasons are never admitted to. Maybe we do not ask often enough. In Judas case, it seems to be a mixture of greed (temptation/undealt with underlying sin) disillusion and disappointment. Jesus had not turned out to be what Judas had hoped and the position of power he wanted, had not materialized.

***In what way was it a good thing that Judas backslid?***

Judas was left with a choice, change or leave. In such situations it is always our desire to see someone change, but if they will not, think of the damage an unchanged Judas would have done in the early church.

Hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord. 1 Corinthians 5:5, 1 Timothy 1v20

(hand over to Satan means no more than treat as an unbeliever. Matthew 18v17

This is a hard thing and it is for the end of the matter, not the beginning, God is working in all of us to root out our faults from within the church.



***If Judas could backslide after 3 years under Jesus ministry what does that say for the rest of us?***

***Why did Achan backslide?*** Joshua 7v1

***What caused Hymenaeus and Alexander to backslide?*** 1 Timothy 1v19-20

Hebrews was written to a group of priest on the point of backsliding because of doubt.

John talks about those who went out from us and were never part of us. 1 John 2v19

Large crowds stopped following Jesus because His teaching was too hard. John 6v60-69

Peter came within a hairs breadth of backsliding. Mark 14v29-30

Israel as a people, backslide frequently .

Jesus predicted that in the last days the love of many would grow cold. Matthew 24v12

Backsliding is a whole Biblical phenomenon.

Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.” Matthew 11:6

Following Christ is a narrow and difficult road. No one ever said it would be easy and an easy road would not achieve in us the things God is looking for.

And, “If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? 1 Peter 4:18

So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! 1 Corinthians 10:12



Hebrews contains many warnings against the dangers of backsliding. Hebrews .3v7-18, 5v11-6v12, 10v26-39, 12v14-29.

***What is the difference between backsliding and becoming apostate?***

Backsliding is often a gradual process. Long after a person has removed all behaviour from their life that is associated with being a Christian, they may think of themselves as a Christian and even claim to be one. An apostate makes a deliberate choice to turn their back on Christ.

This may be because they stop believing God exists, because they are rebelling against Him or because they choose to indulge a life of sin.

***What are the dangers of backsliding being a gradual process?***

***Do you think people make a conscious decision to backslide?***

Backsliding is a decision, it comes as a result of choices we make, but it is not always a conscious decision. Very few people decide, “I think I’ll backslide this week”.

In reality a person starts to backslide long before they do so or evidence of backsliding can be seen. Spurgeon spoke about those who ‘backslide in heart’. ***What does this mean?***

***At what point does a backslider cease to be a Christian?***

Clearly there is a line over which you step. If you can choose to follow Christ, it stands to reason that you can also choose not to follow Him. Fortunately, exactly when a person stops being a Christian is not a call we need to make, such judgments are in God’s hands alone. The dividing line will be in a different place for each person.

***What was Jesus attitude to the backslider?*** Matthew 12v20

Return, faithless people; I will cure you of backsliding. Jeremiah 3:22



***Do backsliders ever return to God?***

***What is God attitude to the returning backslider?*** Luke 15v20

If truth is told most of the people in churches today have backslid to some degree.



***What tell tale signs are there that a person is likely to backslide?***

***How should we treat backsliders?***

***What should we do to try to draw them back?***

Go back to the original list. ***What could be done for each instance?***

***What can you do to protect yourself from backsliding?***

***What should you do if you sense yourself starting to backslide?***



# Bible Studies

## The Water Shaft

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**Read 2 Samuel 5v4-8** 1 Chronicles 11

This passage records David's conquest of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the last major city to be taken. It completed the capture of the land, started 400 years earlier by Joshua with the capture of Jericho. (Jerusalem may well have been captured before this but for some reason was not held.) Jerusalem became David's capital, it was the site of the Temple, where God's glory resided and the place where Christ was crucified. It was quite important.



### **Impregnable**

#### **How difficult was Jerusalem to capture?**

The Jebusites who lived in the city claimed that it was so impregnable that it could be defended by the blind and the lame. Jerusalem stood on a spit of land between two valleys. The valley sides were steep, the city walls were strong and there was little room to maneuver in the valleys. The city was easy to defend and hard to attack.

**Do you think this could be a reason it was left until last?**



### **Overconfident**

#### **Do you think the defenders were overconfident?**

Yes they were, but they had reason to be confident, the city had held for 400 years when every other city had fallen.

**What effect did this have on the defenders?**

**What effect were their claims intended to have on David?**

They were trying to discourage David, to make him fearful and get him to give up. They wanted him to despair. To David the city must have seemed impregnable, how could he possibly succeed? There was a good reason to leave this city until last. Today our enemy tries the same tactics.

**How does the enemy use this tactic against us?**



### **Intelligence**

#### **What would have happened if David had tried an assault on the city walls?**

**Why didn't he?** A massed attack on the city, even if it had in the end succeeded, would have cost many lives. David knew of a better way. Jerusalem's main weakness was its water supply. Maybe he had waited until he had discovered this weakness, maybe that was the reason for leaving Jerusalem until last and for attacking it now. It is very tempting to rush to deal with a situation or a problem before we have God's intelligence and wisdom. We do the 'faith thing' or the 'righteous' Without ever finding out from God the wise thing. (Often the faith thing is in reality presumption or impatience, and the righteous thing is human thinking, tradition or just our blinkered assumptions. Storming the city is often not the answer. The obvious solution may not be the best one.

**Why do we so often feel pressured to act precipitously?**

**Can you think of any examples where the obvious thing is not the best thing?**



### **The water shaft.**

Jerusalem's main water supply was in the valley. It was vulnerable. It was accessible using a series of tunnels constructed at different times. The most famous of these was Hezekiah's water tunnel. This shaft may be identified with Warrens shaft, or it may have been one of the other tunnels above the shaft. The archaeologist currently believe there was some kind of a wall protecting the spring at the base of the valley. David had an eye for the weakness.



### **Taking Jerusalem.**

In our lives there are going to be Jerusalem's to conquer. They may be a problem, a challenge or a difficulty to overcome. It could be a sin, an addiction or habit. It could be something God is calling us to do or it could be a crisis that stands in our way. It may be personal or in our ministry.

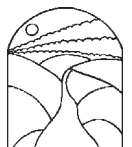


Identify your Jerusalem.

From the outside this situation seems impossible and hopeless. It may be long standing and the enemy is probably trying to feed you the 'blind and lame' story.

Every Jerusalem has a water tunnel.

In every problem you face there will be some way in, (or out, or through.)



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### **Read 1 Corinthians 10v13 Revelation 3v7-8**

Just because you cannot see the water tunnel or do not yet know it is there does not mean there isn't one.

**As one of David's troops, preparing to take the city, but not being privy to David's knowledge, how would you feel?**

Somewhere in your Jerusalem there is a water tunnel. God has promised this and it needs to be accepted in faith and given thanks for. Even though as yet you may not have found it.



### **Intelligences**

**How are you going to find the weakness in your situation?**

Things that will help are;

An overall understanding of Gods word. **Why overall, why not just an individual verse?** Praying. Often we understand situations best after we pray especially if we take time to listen. Wait and Watch. David waited until he found the weakness to act.

A word of wisdom. This is a spiritual gift that sheds light on how to proceed. (prophecy and knowledge can do the same thing.) We need to ask God for a word of wisdom.

**Why don't we do this?**

Wise council. What is invisible to us, is often obvious for someone else. Talk to someone who is spiritually mature.



### **Some water tunnels**

Maybe you can think of an example for each of these or describe how and when they might be used.

**Prayer** Prayer is a water tunnel. Prayer can blow a problem right open. However it suffers from the problem of not being visible or dramatic. It does not give you a sense of doing something important. Throwing yourself at the walls of Jerusalem to be killed by the defenders may not be wise or successful but at least it makes you look like a hero. You feel you are solving the problem or at least trying. Water tunnels like prayer are much less spectacular but they are successful. Perhaps this is why we pray less than we should. It is hard to see any water tunnels that do not include prayer.

**Fasting** Mark 9v29 KJV Some situations may require extended prayer or even fasting. The solution is not always a fast one.

**Giving thanks** 1 Thes 5v18. Often when we start to give thanks to God despite an impossible situation. Thanking Him that He is in control and that all things are going to work together for good, it blows a situation wide open. It is a form of prayer.

**Speaking a word of authority** Matthew 17v20. It has been commented that Jesus never prayed for the sick, He told them to be well. To speak a word of authority you need a word from God.

**Binding the enemy** Matthew 18v18. We need to resist the enemy where we see that he is at work. Ephesians 6 reminds us that we are in a spiritual battle.

Spiritually we tend to have one track minds, the thing that we know best is the solution to all problems. Binding the enemy is not going help if the situation requires obedience. Giving thanks may be important but not the key factor where prayer and fasting is required. We need to lose our one track minds.

**Speaking in Tongues** Especially when we do not know what or how to pray.

**Declaring scripture.** Ephesians 6v17. Using the sword of the spirit which is the word of God. Standing on a promise that God has given and declaring it.

**Jehosaphat approach** 2 Chronicles 20v17. Jehosaphat had to do nothing, just take up position and watch while God dealt with the problem.

**Joshua approach** Joshua 6v4. Joshua had to obey even though what God told him to do seemed pointless, when he did, God brought the victory.

**Faith declaration** Judges 6v12. Speaking or acting in faith on a promise that God has given even though we have not seen it fulfilled. Declaring what will be.

**Use of the gifts of the Spirit.** 1 Corinthians 12v7-11. Using the Gifts of the Spirit can be a water tunnel into a problem. This after all is why they are given.

**What other Water Tunnels can you think of?**



Often the skill is to know which of these spiritual tools is appropriate to the situation.

Every city and every problem has a water tunnel, find it and use it.

# Bible Studies

## Kinds of Sin

It is quite obvious that there are different types of sin. This study is aimed at examining the different areas in which people sin and some of the terms used to describe them.



### **Sins of omission.**

**Read James 4v17. According to this verse, what is a sin of omission?**

A sin of omission is the failure to do something that is good or the failure to obey a command. The opposite of 'sins of omission' are 'sins of commission' or action, where we do something that is wrong.



**How does the person in 1 John 3v17 sin?**

**In what way did the priest in Luke 10v31 sin?**

**In what way did the goats sin in Matthew 25v41-46?**

**What kinds of implications does this have for us?**

It is possible to disobey God not only by doing what is wrong, but by failing to do what He has commanded us. This is as much sin as any other deliberate act of rebellion. If you are unsure of this ask Jonah the prophet!

Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you Matthew 5:42  
It says of Jesus that He went about doing good. This is also an obligation upon us as well.

**Does this mean we have to give to every good cause that asks money of us?**

**What other ways can we sin by not doing what is right?**



**Are sins of omission always clear cut?**

Taken to it's extreme this would require us to do the ultimate good. Feed every beggar comfort every grieving person. Something not even Jesus did. Mat 26v11.

**How would you reconcile this problem?**

Sins of omission require us to make more of a value judgment than sins of commission. They require us to find a healthy and personal balance.

Sins of omission beg the question: **What aren't you doing that you should be?**

**Which is more serious a sin of omission or a sin of commission?**

We tend to think of holiness and righteousness in terms of the absence of sin (a holy person is someone who does not sin). This is wrong, holiness and righteousness have positive aspects too, they require that we do good, not just avoid wrong.



### **Sins of weakness**

**Read Romans 7v14-24. Did Paul sin because he wanted to or chose to? Why did he sin?**

Paul's sins were not calculated or deliberate, he did not consciously chose to sin or even want to sin, he fell into it. Only after the event, did he look back in horror and realise what he had done. This is something we all identify with.

This is to do with the motivation for a sin rather than the sin itself. This is where we sin due to a weakness in our lives rather than a defiant act.



**Does weakness make sin an excuse?**

**Does it make it any the less sinful?**

**What did Paul put his failure down to?**

The unexpectedly strong power of sin over his life and his nature as wretched person.

**How do you account for this prevalence of sin among humans?**

We have a predisposition to sin, it is this we call original sin, it is the result of the loss of our righteous nature that occurred when man fell. It is hard to account for our weakness when it comes to sin without belief in this doctrine.

For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. Galatians 5:17

Sins of weakness tend to be inherited from our parents and our environment. Areas of weakness for different individuals can be very different. We tend to excuse our own areas of weakness while criticising others for lack of self control in theirs.

**What was God's approach to sins of weakness?** Genesis 4v7



Sins of weakness end up becoming habitual sins.

Sins of weakness often become deliberate sins.

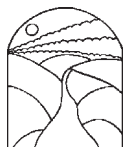
**Do you think we claim sins to be from weakness when in fact they are deliberate?**

Sin and deception go together, we are always finding ways to excuse sin.

*We know it's weakness, but the weakness is so strong, Iolanthe*

**How should we deal with sins of weakness?**

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### 3

#### **Sins of ignorance**

A sin of ignorance is a sin where you did not know what you were doing was a sin.

**How did Paul sin in ignorance?** 1 Timothy 1v13

**Is ignorance an excuse for sin?**

**Does it make it any the less sinful?**

**How did Paul receive the mercy he was shown?**

**What was Jesus teaching on sins of ignorance?** Luke 12v47-48

There are degrees of sin, some sins are worse than others. John 19v11. Sin is not graduated, sin is either sinful or it is not, it cannot be half a sin.

### ?

**What should we do when we become aware of a sin of ignorance?**

**Do we have to identify and ask forgiveness for every sin we have ever committed to be saved?**

No, we do need to be open to God and ask forgiveness for the things He brings to our attention. There is no point in going on a fishing exercise.

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. 1 John 1:7

Walking in the light is essential to dealing with each of these three kinds of sin. It means walking in openness and honesty with God. Letting Him show you what you should be doing and obeying Him. Asking forgiveness when we become aware of sin.

My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. 1 Corinthians 4:4

Sins of ignorance include accidental sins. Sins where we had no idea what we were doing was going to end in sin or hurt someone. These are sins out of our ignorance rather than because of our ignorance. An example would be, saying something on the spur of the moment that hurt someone.

### 4

#### **Sins of malice**

**Read Numbers 15v22-25, 30-31**

**What distinction in the kind of sins does Moses make?**

**What are unintentional sins?**

Sins of malice are defiant or deliberate sins, sometimes they are called sins of high hand. Under the law of Moses there was no atonement for deliberate sins.

### ?

**What is deliberate sin?**

**Why do people commit deliberate sins?**

**Why are deliberate sins so serious?**

The Catholics call them mortal sins, unintentional sins they call venial sins. They claim only mortal sins bring about eternal judgment. Venial sins do not lead to death.

**Read 1 John 5v16-17 Do you agree with them?**

It is the evangelical position that all sins lead to death, a sin committed in ignorance still comes under God's judgment.

**What sins don't lead to death?**

The answer is simple, sins that are forgiven.

### \*

**Read Hebrews 10v26-27**

**Does this mean that we cannot be forgiven for deliberate sins?**

If it did, none of us would be saved because we have all at times sinned deliberately. Nor is this verse talking about habitual sins of weakness. In the New Testament there is forgiveness for deliberate, even defiant sin. The deliberate sin Hebrews is talking about is sin that we cherish and refuse to repent of, for this there is no atonement. Until they repent every unbeliever finds themselves in this position. The sin in question in Hebrews is a deliberate rejection of Christ, it stands to reason that while we reject Christ's forgiveness we cannot be forgiven!

**What should we do about deliberate sin?**

**What should we do when we 'enjoy' a sin and don't want to repent of it?**

Keep your servant also from wilful sins; may they not rule over me. Psalm 19:13

### 5

#### **Sins of disposition**

Sins of disposition are different again. Sin can occur in thought, word or action.

**What is an example of a sin in our thoughts?** Matthew 5v28

Sins of disposition occur in our character

### ?

**How did Ahab sin?** 1 Kings 21v4

**How did the prodigal sons' elder brother sin?** Luke 15v28-30

**How did Jonah sin?** Johna 4v3-4

**How did Michal sin?** 2 Samuel 6v16

We become aware of sins of disposition in our thoughts. They invariably end up being seen in our actions.

**Irrespective of whether we act on them are bad attitudes sin?**

**Is the claim, 'it's just the way I am' an excuse?** (yes but it's not a valid one)

**What should we do about our sins of disposition?**

# Bible Studies

## Blasphemy



### **Read Deuteronomy 5v11**

Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain: for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. Deuteronomy 5:11 KJV

Traditionally Christians have given a specific meaning to taking the Lord's name in vain.

#### **What do we normally mean by it?**

We usually think of it as using a name for God in the same way we would use a swear word.

#### **Is this blasphemy?**

Yes it is, but it's not the only meaning of blasphemy, nor is it probably what this verse is intended to outlaw.

#### **What does "the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who missuses His name" mean?**

#### **What attitude does using God's name as a swear word, show towards God?**

Blasphemy is a bad idea for anyone who hopes to get to heaven!

#### **How do you feel when someone blasphemes? What do you do?**



For us the Bible goes further:

Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. Ephesians 5:4

But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language from your lips. Colossians 3:8

For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. Ephesians 5:12

There is much debate about what constitutes a swear word. Sometimes this is in order to justify what we suspect is wrong. Paul is very clear that we must avoid all obscenity, filth and shameful talk.

#### **Why do you think it is wrong for a Christian to swear?**

#### **Blasphemy is:**

#### **Does this include using God's name as an exclamation?**

Generally yes, but sometimes, faced with a sudden or difficult situation, assuming our motives and relationship with God are right, it may not be intended as irreverent, but rather a cry for help. In which case it is not blasphemy.

#### **Blasphemy is:**



### **Read Leviticus 24v10-16**

#### **What did blaspheme the name of the Lord with a curse mean?**

It may mean he used God's name as a swear word, it may mean he called a curse on his opponent in God's name. He was the son of an alien, which may account for both his irreverent action and the query over what to do with him.

In a Jewish context, to use God's name as a swear word would have been all but unthinkable, they associated this command with using God's name carelessly, by speaking irreverently about God or by making a promise or oath in God's name and then not keeping them.

#### **What was Jesus attitude to this?** Matthew 5v32-37

There are times in Scripture where oaths were taken in God's name. Deut 6v13, Jer 4v2, Rev 10v6, (Paul comes close several times Rom 1v9, 9v1, 1 Cor 15v31) Jesus is saying if you are a person of your word then you do not need oaths to strengthen your statements. He is also discouraging this practice because of the danger of blasphemy inherent in it.

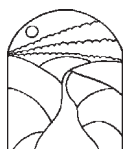
By the time of Christ the Jews took this command so seriously that they avoided speaking directly about God. They used euphemisms like the Name, the Power or Heaven to avoid carelessly speaking about God. The names of God could be used in prayer or when reading scripture but not in general conversation. The most sacred name, Yahweh could only be used by the high priest.

#### **Blasphemy is:**

#### **Blasphemy is:**



The word blasphemy is the English version of the Greek *blasphemia*, meaning *blapto*, to damage or harm, and *pheme*, to speak. The Hebrew for blaspheme *nekav* means to curse, pierce or strike.



The Hebrew translated by the KJV as 'in vain' and the NIV as 'misuse' means to desolate, to lie about to treat as false, vain, empty or worthless

The NIV translates the Greek *blasphemia* as slander or insult. It can mean to rail against, speak evil of or revile. We assume that blasphemy means taking God's name in vain, but in original use blasphemy could be against anyone. (eg. Acts 13v45 & 18v6 NIV abusive = *blasphemia*, 2 Pet 2v11- blaspheme angels)

**As relating to God, how would you now define blasphemy?**

Perhaps, showing disrespect for God, or speaking evil of God, to revile His name, to mock God in your actions or your words. In this case it is the opposite of the "fear of the Lord", respect or reverence for God. It is not just a spoken sin, it may be acted, but above all it is an attitude or way of life.

**Blasphemy is:**

Do not blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people. Exodus 22:28

Deuteronomy 5v11 describes blasphemy as against God's name.

**What does name mean?**

Name here means far more than just the words we call God by. It means His very nature, His identity or character, It can even mean His commands or teachings.

But anyone who sins defiantly, whether native-born or alien, blasphemes the LORD, and that person must be cut off from his people. Numbers 15:30

**According to this verse what is blasphemy?**

**Why is this blasphemy?**

**Blasphemy is:**

When Jesus was interrogated before his crucifixion it says he was blasphemed. Luke 22v65 NIV- Insulted.

 **Read Ezekiel 37v22-23**

**How had the exiles profaned the name of God?**

It is this passage that Paul paraphrases in Romans 2.

As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." Romans 2:24

According to Ezekiel this is something God's people do, According to Paul it is the what the gentiles do as a result of what God's people do. Both are true both are blasphemy.

**How do we as Christians cause this kind of blasphemy?**

When by our actions we bring God's name into disrepute. When we fall short of our own standards and cause people to say things like, "If that's what God is I don't want him" or "if that is what it means to be a Christian I don't want to be one."! Timothy 6v1

**Blasphemy is:**

 **Read Revelation 16v9**

**What does it mean to curse God?**

**Is cursing God the same as using God's name as a curse?**

No it's not, but both are blasphemy. To curse God is an act of defiance against Him. It is an act of apostasy, making a choice that you will not follow or believe. In this verse, it has inherent in it, an acknowledgment that God exists. (It is this kind of blasphemy that Jesus is referring to in his teaching about blasphemy against the Spirit.)

**Blasphemy is:**

 **Read 1 Corinthians 15v15** Job 2v9

One last kind of blasphemy which the Bible does not directly refer to is claiming something to be of God when it is not. For example; claiming a prophecy or a course of action, to be from God, when it is not. Many a blasphemous statement started "God told me..."

**Why is this blasphemy?**

**Blasphemy is:**

**When should we and shouldn't we say "God said"?**

The answer is sparingly even when you know it to be true and never when in doubt.



**Is there anything else you would consider blasphemy?**

**Do you think society has lost the idea of a thing being sacred?**

**Is atheism blasphemy?**

**Is questioning the word of God blasphemy?**

Christians have made an argument for this and in a sense they are, but if it lacks the idea of a malice it is probably not the kind of blasphemy this study has looked at.

**When sacred things are treated blasphemously in the media what should we do?**

# Bible Studies

## Original Sin

It has been observed that no one ever had to teach a child to do evil, it just came naturally. On the other hand it is necessary to teach a child to know and do what is right. Why is this? Why do good acts require encouragement, while evil acts seem to come naturally? To this we can add another observation. It is possible to teach a child to be more evil, and it is possible to teach a child to be and do good. Humans are capable of both good and evil, but evil always seems to be the natural inclination.

**For example; which is easier, to be selfish or selfless?**

It is this tendency towards evil which theologians call original sin. It is a much misunderstood doctrine. This bible study is intended to explain what we need to know about original sin.



**Read Psalm 51v5**

**How does David describe himself?**

**What does he mean by this?**

The context helps us to understand what King David is saying. David like the rest of us, thinks of himself as basically good. He has just committed adultery and murder, but he still thinks he is basically good. Nathan the prophet points out to David the awfulness of his sin. David goes into shock, how could someone who is basically good do something so terribly evil? David is brought face to face with his true nature. He is appalled at what he sees, he realizes that he is by nature a sinner he needs God to forgive him and change his heart. v10.

Many people today still live life blissfully unaware of their sinful nature despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary they consider themselves basically good, they manage this by discounting the evil they do and exaggerating the good. Ignoring history also helps, the holocaust was after all committed by one of the most civilised best educated nations in the history of the planet.



**Read Ephesians 2v3**

**On what basis are we objects of wrath?**

The Greek uses the word *phusis*, by nature. It is our sinful natures that make us objects of wrath.



**Read Romans 5v12**

**How did sin come to all men?**

Adam was created righteous, but he was also created with the ability to disobey God. When he sinned he lost his inherent righteous nature and could not pass this nature on to his descendants.



**Read Romans 5v16**

**What two things happened as the result of one mans sin?**



**Read Romans 5v18-19**

**What contrast does Paul make in this passage?**

**What was the extent of the 'trespass'? (Who was condemned?)**

**What happened as a result of the disobedience of one man?**



**Read Romans 3v23**

**How many people in the history of earth have never sinned?**

**How do you account for this universality of sinfulness?**

**If mankind is inherently good, why do we do so much evil?**

**How else can you explain so much evil in human behaviour?**

**Do you think people today are more, or less evil, than in past generations?**

**How do you think an evolutionist would explain this propensity to evil?**

This is interesting, (it's very hard to believe in evil if you do not believe in God.) They would see it in terms of competition for resources. They would see our drive for good in the need, to cooperate for mutual benefit.

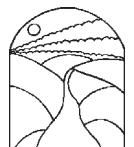
The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? Jeremiah 17v9

The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. Genesis 6v5



**Read Romans 7v15-24**

Of all the passages in scripture this one most graphically describes the human plight. We know what is right, we have a desire to be good and to do good, but an inability to carry it out.



### ***To what do you attribute this desire for good?***

God made man good, man is made in God's image. Man however because of mankind's fall, that image was marred. While evil is so prevalent, good cannot be underestimated. Good is present in even the most wicked people and everywhere many people strive to do what is good. **(Why do you have to strive to do good?)**

"This only have I found: God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes." Ecclesiastes 7:29



The upshot of all these scriptures is another phrase Paul frequently uses, he says we have a sinful nature. Eg (Romans 8v8, 21 times in Paul's writings) It is this sinful nature that original sin describes.



**To help us to understand this, it is good to define some terms.**

**Original righteousness.** This was the righteous nature that God created Adam with, the propensity to do good with the possibility of doing evil, Adam went against his nature to do evil. After the fall Adam no longer had a righteous nature to pass on to his children only a corrupt one. Job 14v4. As a result man became subject to the 'law of sin and death' Romans 8v2. Original sin is the habitual tendency to evil. For us this means the propensity to evil but the possibility for good. We are the opposite of Adam, we go with our nature to do evil.



**Original pollution.** This is a phrase some theologians use instead of original sin. It is used because it gives a better description. Think of it as a river, if a toxic spill enters the river at it's head everything down stream becomes polluted and dies. Adam was the head of mankind his sin effects us all.



**Actual sin.** Original sin is something that is done to us not something we do. We are all guilty because by nature we are sinners. But it is only actual sin that we are held accountable for. God judges actual sin, not a tendency to sin. No one goes to Hell because of Original sin. As Romans 5 pointed out, judgment follow or resulted from Adam's sin, the connection is indirect not direct.



**Original guilt.** This is slightly different from original sin. Although we might not yet have sinned, we are already objects of wrath, because our sinful nature is alien to and opposed to God righteous nature.



**Total depravity.** This phrase is also used by theologians. It does not mean that man is as bad as he can possibly be. Just as no human (excepting Jesus) has never sinned, no human has ever completely avoided doing some good. It means that sin has effected every part of our nature. Although man is capable of good even the good we do is tainted by sin.

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. Isaiah 64:6

It also means that by ourselves even the best of us cannot meet God's righteous requirements.



**Is God unjust in giving us a sinful nature?**

He would be if he had. He gave us a righteous nature and the ability to lose that nature (you cannot have one without the other). Human kind chose sinfulness.



**Is God unjust for condemning us when we are predisposed to sin?**

Although we have a sinful nature each individual sin is voluntary. Original sin is the predisposition, but it includes the possibility of righteousness. Individual sin is not inevitable, people are without excuse.



**Does this doctrine mean that we have no choice in the way we behave?**

No, it explains why human nature is the way that it is. The doctrine of original sin does mean we have no choice in our actions. If it did the Adam's original righteousness would have meant he could not have sinned. The bible strongly teaches that we do, that we must chose right over wrong, even if it is the more difficult choice.



**What would you say are the implications of what we have learned so far?**

The bottom line of all this is that mankind needs to be saved. We cannot be right with God by ourselves, through our own efforts or good works. We need Jesus to live and die for us in order to be made right with God. Both the fall of man and the cross of Jesus are universal in application, all men may be saved.

For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. Romans 11v32

**How are we bound over to disobedience?**

**How has God had mercy on us?**

We were bound over to disobedience in that God imparted the effects of Adam's sin not only to himself but to all human kind. He has had mercy on us in providing a way to be reconciled to God through the cross. When we believe God imparts the effects of Jesus sacrifice to each of us.

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 1 Corinthians 15:22



# Bible Studies

## Why Read The Bible?

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We are often reminded that as Christians we need to read the bible. The question this study seeks to answer is why? Why is it necessary that we read the bible, what will happen if we do and what is likely to happen if we don't. It is fitting that in doing so we check out as many scriptures as possible.



**What the bible says about itself.**

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3v16-17

**What does this verse tell us about the origin of the bible?**

**What are the scriptures to be used for?**

God breathed, means inspired by God, it means that although the books of the bible were written by some 40 individuals over a period of 1500 years, reflecting different genres and the individual authors personal style and experiences, it was God who caused what they wrote to be written, He directed the material and the method, His authority is behind what is written.

The above verse tells us that the bible is there as a guide and standard for our lives. We sometimes say that the bible is our final authority. This means that the bible gives us the standard of what we are to believe.



**What would happen if we did not have the bible?  
What other things could we base our faith on?**

If we did not have the bible we would have to base our faith on personal revelation and experience. This is always subjective and open to error. The bible removes this uncertainty, it gives an uniform revelation of truth.

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1v20



**What is more authoritative, your experience or the bible?  
What should you do when they differ?  
What is more authoritative, a preachers sermon or the bible?  
What should you do when they differ?**

It is important to realise that the bible has to be interpreted correctly and consistently. Many things the bible says are plain and straight forward, other things require thought and some background knowledge. 2 Peter 3:16

**What should you do if you do not understand a passage of scripture?**

You could ask someone who knows the bible well, or check it out in a commentary or bible dictionary . Sometimes you just have to file it away and wait until you do understand it. The first thing you should do is to ask the Holy Spirit to guide you. John 16v13

The bible contains 'all that is needful for salvation' this means that if it is not in the bible, it is not binding upon us. Eg 1 Timothy 4v3. People frequently seem to feel the need to add things to the requirements for salvation.

**If someone comes up with some new teaching that goes beyond the bible what should we do?**



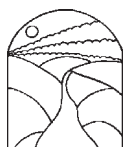
**What the bible is like?**

The bible describes itself using a number of metaphors. Check out each verse.  
**What do each of these tell us about the bible.**

Psalm 19v10

Psalm 119v105

Jeremiah 23v29

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Isaiah 55v10

Luke 8v11

Ephesians 5v26

Hebrew 4v12

Hebrews 5v12-14

James 1v22-25

1 Peter 2v2



**Why we should read it?**

**What effect will reading the bible have on the reader?**

2 Timothy 3v15

Joshua 1v8

Psalms 1v2-3

Psalms 119v130

Psalms 119v11

**In addition to this, what do you think will happen as you read the word of God?**

So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. Isaiah 55v11

The bible is called the word of God. Above all else this means that it is through the bible that God speaks to us. Jesus is also called the word of God, the meaning is the same. God speaks in many way but the bible is chief among them. Therefore, as you read the bible God will speak to you, you can develop a relationship with God through the study of the word.

**If we are not reading the bible can we complain if God does not speak to us?**

Even when God does speak in other ways how will you be able to test it and know it is God if you do not have a firm bible knowledge?

As you read the word of God you will find that a process of osmosis takes place, God's word enters your life almost subconsciously. You will also find that the more you read the more you will gain sudden insights, you will make connections with other scripture and with your daily life.

**What effect will not reading the bible have on you?**

Matthew 22:29

Hebrew 5v12

**What else is likely to happen if you do not read the word of God?**

**Why is it not enough to listen to sermons or read Christian paperbacks?  
How should we read the bible?**

# Bible Studies

## My Father's Business

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**What were Jesus first actual recorded words?**  
You will find the answer in Luke 2v49.

The NIV says "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" the KJV says "I must be about my Father's business?" (The word house/business is assumed in the Greek, a literal translation would be, "I must be about that of my Father" or "In the [no noun] of my Father.") This verse is fundamental to Jesus ministry. His job was to be about His Fathers affairs, His Interests, His house, His business. This is one of the verses that defines Jesus ministry.

But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house... Hebrews 3:6



**Read Hebrews 3v3-6**  
**According to this passage what is God's house?**  
**How did Moses behave in God's house?**  
**How must we behave in God's house?**



For us this verse is also important. It presents us with:  
**A Calling**                      We too are to be about our Fathers business.  
**A Challenge**                    You need to be about your Fathers business.  
**A Test**                             Are you about your Fathers business.

**How much of our time should we spend about our fathers business?**

We need to realise that even when we are earning a living or feeding our children we are still to be about our fathers business, the divide between physical and spiritual is artificial.

**For Jesus, what was His Fathers business?**

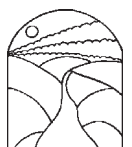
1 John 3v8, John 12v27, Luke 10v22, Acts 10v38, Matthew 20v28, Luke 4v18


**For us, what is the Fathers business?**


**What parts of these are core? What parts are peripheral?**



Our Father has a business.  
We need to understand what that business is.  
We need to be involved in our Fathers business.



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Each of these passages warn or exhort us about this.

**What do each of them have to say about being involved in our Fathers business?**

Matthew 25v24-26  
2 Timothy 2v4  
1 Corinthians 9v16  
Philippians 1v21  
1 Corinthians 4v2  
Luke 12v4-8  
Jeremiah 48v10

By definition a Christian is someone who is about their Fathers business. How well we know our Fathers business and how well we do it are indicators of our maturity as Christians. Being a Christian is not just about me and God. We have to be active in our Fathers business. This means reaching the world around us.



**Read Matthew 5v14-16**  
**How does this parable apply to us?**

**What is likely to happen if our faith is introverted?** (ie just about God and us)  
Our faith is a personal thing and it needs to be about God and us. But when it is just about God and us it tends to become stagnant and often deviant or aberrant. We get caught up on minor things, we get pedantic and our faith seems to end up in a blind alley. (Pedantic = obsessed by rules, and insists on following the exactly right way of doing things. Concentrating on the small picture.)

Being about our fathers business has collective and individual implications.



**What is our Fathers business for the church?**  
**What is our Fathers business for the individual?**  
**How much do they overlap?**



**Are there public and private parts of our Fathers business?**  
**What are they?**



**What are the likely results of being about our fathers business?**  
**What are the likely results of neglecting our fathers business?**

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom. Ecclesiastes 9:10

**Do you need to have a call or ministry to be about your fathers business?**

Sometimes this stands in our way rather than helping us. We seem to wait until a calling falls from heaven onto our lap instead of doing the things that we see. Not having a calling becomes an excuse to be inactive. Some people have long lists of things they won't do for God. Some people neglect the things they can do because they are not important enough, not what they want or not rewarding enough.



**If you have no idea what your calling is, what should you do in the mean time?**

**Is our Fathers business the same for every individual?**

In any firm there are many different jobs. This is also true in our Fathers business.



**Read 1 Corinthians 12v12-28**  
**What does this tell us about our place in the body of Christ?**

We are all different .

We are all needed

We need to cooperate not compete

We operate as a whole

we are arranged according to Gods order

we are should not look down on others roles

Unpresentable parts require special treatment -greater honour.

**Are you about your Fathers business?**

# Bible Studies

## Why Shepherds?



### **Read Luke 1v8-20**

Jesus birth was a strange mix of the very public and the very private. While the entire Roman world and even most of Bethlehem had no idea what was happening, God went to great lengths to inform certain people. A star and wise men from the east were public events, as was the appearance of angels in the night sky. While the events of this long-awaited night seem random or even haphazard, it is clear that God arranged them carefully. The events surrounding Jesus birth are intended to demonstrate from the outset who He was and why He came.



**Where were the shepherds when the angel appeared to them?  
What were they doing?  
What was the angels message?**

The message the angel (singular) brought was that the Messiah had been born. There was a high expectation concerning the coming of the Messiah at this time. The shepherds were watching their sheep. The Talmud implies that these flocks were kept outside all year round, so their presence on the hillside does not help us to date the events of Jesus birth. The Talmud is Jewish religious writing from after the exile, which helps us to understand how Jews of Jesus day understood their faith.

The scriptures firmly state that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. Micah 5v2 and that He was to be born of David's line. Bethlehem was of course David's home town. However Jewish tradition (Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Gen 35v21, what was revealed to Jacob about the Messiah) the arrival of the Messiah would be declared from *Migdal Eder*, the watchtower of Eder or the watchtower of the flocks, this stood between Hebron and Bethlehem on the Jerusalem road. (The Targum is a Jewish translation and commentary of the the OT scriptures.) This tower was associated with sheep prepared for the temple. Edersheim bk2:ch6. According to Jerome, (who translated his Latin version of the Bible in Bethlehem in the 4<sup>th</sup> century) it stood one mile outside Bethlehem. Whether it was here that the angels appeared and whether the shepherds were associated with this place we cannot know. But the connection is fascinating.

**Read Micah 4v8** **What was to happen at the tower of Eder?**



**Why do you think the shepherds were terrified?  
How do you think the shepherds felt about the news they were given?  
In what way were strips of cloth and a manger a sign?**

The news itself must have made them very excited, almost incredulous. As for the sign, being wrapped in strips of cloth was the common way of protecting a baby for the elements Ezekiel 16-4-5 associates failure to do this with a lack of parental care. Laying in a manger was far from common. The sign told the shepherds the kind of place to look and how to recognize the child. Perhaps the language is intended to be reminiscent of Isaiah 7v4 (the LORD himself will give you a sign). Perhaps it was the first inkling of the kind of Messiah Jesus was to be.

**How would the shepherds feel about a baby laid in a manger?**

This was their territory, someone they could immediately relate to. Others might have despised a baby so born.

At this point a whole host of angels.

**What message did they give the shepherds?**

The first message they received from the single angel, tells them who has been born and where, this second message tells them what the effects of His birth will be.

**What are these effects?**

The angels give glory to God for the birth of this child, but the indication is also that the child's birth will itself display God's glory. The angels tell us that this birth is a demonstration of God's good will towards mankind, but again the indication is that it is this birth that will bring about peace between God and man and extend God's grace to us.

**How did Jesus accomplish these things?**

The promise is of peace between God and man, rather than peace on earth.

**How much of this do you think the shepherds understood?**

**What was their response to these things?**

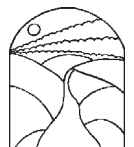
The shepherds probably understood more than we think. Their response was to hurry off to find the child.

This brings us back to the original question, why shepherds? Here are some reasons.



**Shepherds were the true Israelites. Read Genesis 46v32-34  
Traditionally what kind of people were the Israelites?**

The Israelites had long since ceased to be nomadic shepherds, but this was their origin.  
**What does this tell us about Jesus?**



Perhaps that Messiah represented true Israel, or that He came for true Israel. He was the real thing, tied into the roots of Israel, connected to the heartland. A true Jew who came for true Jews just like the first shepherds who recognized Him.

**Why was it appropriate that shepherds first visited Him?**



**David was a shepherd. Read 2 Samuel 5v1-2**

**What kind of a shepherd was David?**

David was a shepherd of people and of a nation. God had promised David that one of his descendants would reign over Israel forever. Throughout the prophets and long after his death, the name David is used to identify the Messiah. He was David's son.

**What does this tell us about Jesus?**

**Why was it appropriate that shepherds visited Him?**

Jesus was to be a king and a shepherd like David and was in fact David's greater son. It is appropriate that the shepherd should be laid in a manger and visited by shepherds because it tells us who He is.



**Shepherds were despised.** Despite the fact that the Israelites had originally been shepherds, by this time shepherds were generally despised, their work made them ritually unclean. Their lifestyle gave them a reputation for being dishonest and unreliable.

**What does this tell us about Jesus?**

**Why was it appropriate that shepherds visited Him?**

There is a clear contrast here with the wise men. The magi represented the top strata of society, the shepherds, it's lowest. (There are other contrasts, the shepherds came from close by the wise men from afar, the shepherds were Jewish the wise men gentiles etc.)

**What does this mean for us?**

Jesus spent much time with those who society considered outcasts, the shepherds started this pattern.



**The shepherds were awake.** While the rest of the world slept, the shepherds were awake, they were watching. It is almost as if God in his excitement had to tell someone what he had done and the shepherds were the only ones available to tell.

**What does this tell us about Jesus? What does this mean for us?**



**The shepherds responded.** Beyond this the shepherds heard and responded, they were willing to leave their sheep and search until they found what they were looking for. They acted in faith and they believed. They understood and accepted what they were told. They did not doubt, question or intellectualise. They genuinely recognised, adored and we assume, worshipped Jesus. **What does this tell us?**



The shepherds also capture some of the excitement of finding Jesus, how in the darkness of our night we heard about an ancient hope extended to us, how we searched for Him, and found Him. And how He changed our lives.



**Jesus was the Lamb of God Read John 1v29**

**In what way was Jesus the Lamb of God?**

**What does this tell us about Jesus?**

Obviously it refers to sacrifice, but again it tells us how Jesus would behave, he was not to be a warrior or a regal person, he came to serve not to be served and he came in gentleness and humility.

**Why was it appropriate that shepherds visited Him?**

Shepherds represented the humble people, the kind of people who would make up the vast majority of those Jesus would minister to. They were simple people.



**Jesus was a sacrifice** It is highly likely that flocks kept this close to Jerusalem were intended to be sacrifices in the temple, the Mishnah, another Jewish sacred writing, confirms this. (Baba K. 80a). The shepherds were probably preparing lambs for sacrifice. Some people who put the date of Jesus birth earlier in the year believe that these lambs were destined for the passover sacrifices

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 1 John 4v10



**Shepherds represent those who care.** In the scriptures shepherds represent pastors or those who care for others, who are responsible to feed and protect others.

**What does this tell us about Jesus?**

**Why was it appropriate that shepherds visited Him?**

To this extent the shepherds tell us the kind of people God values and expects us to be.



**What did the shepherds do after they had left Jesus?**

Shepherds were the first evangelists, they told everyone what they had been told and what they had seen.

**Do you think people believed them?**

**What effect do you think their testimony had?**

I imagine it heightened the messianic expectation. It is quite likely that some of these stories were still circulating during Jesus ministry.

**How do you think this encounter affected or changed the shepherds?**

**What do you think the shepherds add to the Christmas story?**

# Bible Studies

## Groups Within The Church

Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. Mark 2:13  
Jesus often ministered to large crowds of people who came out to hear Him. It is interesting to work out who was in those crowds.



**Read Matthew 4v23-25**

**Who was in the crowd? Why did they come out to hear Jesus?**

**Read Matthew 14v13-14**

**Who was in the crowd? Why did they come out to hear Jesus?**

**Read John 6v24-26**

**Who was in the crowd? Why did they come out to hear Jesus?**

The crowds of people came out to hear Jesus for several basic reasons.



Some came because they heard the stories and were curious.

Some came because they had a desire to be right with God

Some came because they were dissatisfied with their lives and Jesus had the answer.

Some came because they were sick or had a specific need.

**What do you think characterized this group?**

The crowd was fickle, they had no deep connection to Jesus. Like many today they were consumers.



Within the crowd were those who genuinely believed in Jesus, they had been touched by His words or maybe even healed by Him. They believed in what He said and who He claimed to be. They genuinely tried to live according to His teaching.

They did not leave their homes but when Jesus was in the area they would go out to hear Him. Although the NT is silent about it, we know from church history that the church in Galilee during the 40 years after Jesus ascension was very large. It has been estimated that one in three Jews believed in Jesus at this time. These believers came from this section of the crowd.

**What do you think characterized this group?**



There were also those who traveled with Jesus, the women who followed him, the 70 disciples He sent out the 120 that were present on the day of Pentecost. These we will call followers, they were probably a fluid group of something over a 100.

**What do you think characterized this group?**



Within this group there were the 12 disciples. They were the core group and Jesus spent much of His time training and mentoring them. Their task was to continue the work after His departure. They went everywhere with Jesus and spent all their time with Him.

**What do you think characterized this group?** Mark 10v28



Finally from within the 12, Jesus had three disciples, Peter, James and John, who formed an inner core, Jesus often took them when he left the others behind.

**What do you think characterized this group?**

**Do you think Jesus taught the same things to each of these groups?**

**What do you think he wanted to achieve with each group?**

He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything. Mark 4:34

When you read Jesus teaching, it is important to work out who He is talking to.

**Read Luke 9v57 Which group did this man fall into?**

Jesus is no longer itinerating around Israel he is seated at the right hand of the Father. Interestingly enough, although it is not a direct parallel, we find we have a similar phenomenon in the church today.

**Four Groups in Churches** We will start from the outside in.



**Fringe**

These are those who come to church occasionally, maybe unsaved, interested, searching. They may be backsliders or those who are quietly drowning and coming up for air. They include friends of people in the church or people who for some reason have a connection or interest in the church. They represent the churches sphere of influence.

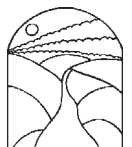
**What characterizes this group?**

**Why are they important to the church?**

**What do we want from them?**

**What do they need from us?**

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**What does God expect from this group?** John 6v28-29

It is from this group that the church has the potential to grow.

**Do we consciously think of this group as being important?**

**2**

**Regular/Committed**

These are people who attend church regularly, (once every three weeks or more.) They probably make up the bulk of the congregation on any given week. They are relatively inactive in church affairs. They do not have a specific job to do.

**What characterizes this group?**

**Why are they important to the church?**

**What do we want from them?**

**What do they need from us?**

**What does God expect from this group?**

**3**

**Dedicated.**

It is this group that does the work in church. They are the Sunday school teachers, home group leaders, administrators and youth leaders. They are likely to be in church every week. Often the only difference between them and group ,3 are that they have a job within the church.

**What characterizes this group?**

**Why are they important to the church?**

**What do we want from them?**

**What do they need from us?**

**What does God expect from this group?**

This group puts a lot of effort into the church, they tend to have a high expectation in return.

**4**

**Core Group.**

This is the heart of the church, They are the church leadership but not just the formal leadership, they include those who are influential and respected. It often includes those who are “post job”. Where they go, the rest of the church follows. When things go wrong in a church it usually starts in this group.

If group 3 put their work into the church, this group put their lives into the church. If group 2 are committed and group 3 dedicated, then this group are devoted.

**What characterizes this group?**

**Why are they important to the church?**

**What do we want from them?**

**What do they need from us?**

**What does God expect from this group?**



Needless to say this separation although helpful is artificial. Perhaps it is better represented as a line than as four separate groups. In a healthy church the numbers will be as represented above. **What is likely to happen in each of these examples?**



**How do you get into each of the groups?**

This view of a church may be considered elitist, but in reality the pastor does not chose who goes in each group. In reality God calls and we respond. Effectively the groups are self selecting. As we grow in God we should progress through the groups.

**Would you expect someone in the fringe group to be in church every week?  
Would you expect someone in the core group to be in church every week?**

Earlier we looked at the example recorded in Luke 9v57. This was a man who was in Jesus group 2 who Jesus called into group 3. **What stopped him?**

As you move from group to group the demand upon you grow, the cost of following Jesus increases. This is not only in the area of physical work, but in areas such as holiness and devotional life. We stop when the price gets to high.

**What group are you in?**

**What is going to have to change for you to move on?**



# Bible Studies

## Psalm 51



Psalm 51:1 For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba

Most of us try to cover up our sins, David immortalized his in poetry!  
This study is subtitled King David's midlife crisis

This psalm was written in response to one of the low points in King David's life. You are probably familiar with the story recorded in 2 Samuel 11-12. David sees a beautiful woman bathing on her roof top, he sends for her and commits adultery with her, she gets pregnant and he has her husband killed as a cover up. Nathan the prophet confronts David who realises his sin. Psalm 51 records how he repented.



### **Read Psalm 51**

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

As an interesting aside, within the peoples surrounding Israel the king was often considered to be above the law. But here the king is seen as subject to the law just like everyone else. We take this for granted today, but in ancient times it was quite a novelty.

If you are not familiar with the story, **Read 2 Samuel 11.**



### **What did king David do wrong?**

**What could he have done that would have helped him avoid falling for this temptation?**

It has often been noted that this occurred at a time when (arguably) David should have been with the army on the battlefield, 2 Sam 11v1. In addition to the other mistakes he made, he was in the wrong place to start with. Perhaps this made him more susceptible to temptation.

**How might this apply to us?**

**Is anyone exempt from temptation?**

**As you mature in Christ do you get tempted less or more?**

That is a hard question to answer, it could be different for each believer, it is safe to say that as you mature in Christ the temptations you face tend to change, as does your ability to cope with them. It is safe to say that they will not go away! It is also safe to say that their absence is not a mark of spirituality or maturity, even Jesus was tempted.

So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! 1 Corinthians 10v12



**What does this verse mean?**

**How did it apply to David?**

**How does it apply to us?**

**What attitudes did David show when faced with this temptation?**

David certainly did not recognise that he was being tempted. He does not see the consequences of his actions or even seem to realise what he is doing.

**Can the same be said of us when we are faced with temptation?**

The first step to resisting temptation is to recognise it as temptation.

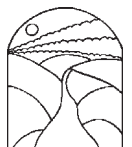
**Why is this?**



No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. 1 Corinthians 10v13

This verse could suggest the more able you are to resist temptation the more you are likely to be tempted!

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Within the Christian church there are always going to be leaders who fall into sin, just as King David did.

**What should our attitude be when this happens?**

When we see this happen our usual response is to distance ourselves from them and to state long and clearly that the rest of us are not like them. We are subject to the same weakness and temptations, a better response might be to say "but for the grace of God there go I".

The Bible tells us that If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1John1v9.



**How do we repent?**

**Is repentance a formula of words or an attitude of heart?**

For David repentance is an act of the heart, not of sacrifice or a formula to follow. David was a man who did everything wholeheartedly. He worshiped God wholeheartedly, sinned wholeheartedly and repented wholeheartedly. David never did anything in halves.

**What are the hallmarks of true repentance that we find in Psalm 51?**


**What do you think are the hallmarks of false repentance?**




**Why do you think David immortalized his sin in poetry?**

**Why is repentance important?**

**Do you think we sometimes forget how important repentance is?**

As new believers we are often acutely aware of our sin and our need to repent. As mature believers we often consign repentance to the early part of our Christian walk. Why do I need to repent I'm a Christian!

**Is this attitude right?**

**How often should we repent?**

We need to repent every day, we need to repent whenever we become aware of sin.



- Unconfessed sin – Keeps you from intimacy with God.
- Blocks the power of the Holy Spirit in your life.
- Makes you weak and ineffective.

# Bible Studies

## Create in me a clean heart



This series of two studies is really about one verse.  
Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Psalm 51v10  
As important to David as repentance is, he concentrates on what happens after repentance. He sees forgiveness as a start not a finish.

### ***Is repentance the end of the matter or the start of the matter? Why?***

We usually view repentance as a closed deal, we sin, we confess, God forgives us. Forgiveness is the end of the matter, the sin is erased and God forgets it ever happened. In reality repentance is about the future. It is because God forgives us that we can go on in a relationship with Him. To this extent forgiveness is always the start of the matter.

### ***What are the results of repentance that David sees?***

Psalm 51v13

Psalm 51v15 & 19

It is repentance that enables us to go on to serve and worship God. Without it none of us could do anything for God, our sin would have disqualified us for His service.

David also wants to go on to live in purity. He is concerned about next time.

He looks at what he has done with shock and horror. Adultery was bad enough but most people manage adultery quite happily without killing any one. Adultery is not enough for David, he as to throw murder in as well. David was a righteous man of God and king of his people. How could he have done this. If this is a shock to us today, it seems that it was more of a shock to David himself. Up until Nathan confronts him, he seems to have been in denial about his own actions and nature, almost as if someone else had done those terrible things or they had never happened at all. David sits with his head in his hands, horrified at what he has done and the sinfulness of his own heart.

Most people live in denial about sin. It is what other people do, my sin is not really sin it is excusable, it has mitigating circumstances, I am not responsible for it, it is a result of my past life, and it's not as bad as other peoples.

Most people live in denial about their true nature. I am a good person, others do evil. We extenuate the things we do right and excuse the things we do badly. We all seem to have a long list of things we would never do.

### ***Why do we have this kind of denial?***

David was a good man who did some incredibly evil things. The same human nature that was in him is in us. If we have not committed adultery and murder, it is not because we are any better than him. What he was capable of so are we.



### ***Why do good people do evil things?***

### ***What part does opportunity play in sin and temptation?***

### ***What opportunity did David have regarding Bethsheba?***

The opportunity was not only that he saw her and was filled with lust, he had the power to do something about it, He was king he could make it happen and could cover it up. This was a sin he could get away with. We do not know how willing a part she played in the sin, but even if she had been unwilling, refusing the king was never going to be easy.

There are many factors that are involved in sin and temptation, one that is often neglected is opportunity. It is often only when we are faced the opportunity to sin, the power to do it, cover it up and get away with it that we find the true pull to sin in our own nature. Don't be proud you have never murdered anyone if you have never had the chance or the reason to do so.

David comes to a realisation of what he has done and his own sinfulness, but he comes to a much more serious realisation, he will do it again. He looks into his heart and realises he is the same David and given the same circumstances he will do the same thing. If he is going to continue to be pure before God, if he is going to succeed next time, if next time he sees a beautiful woman bathing he is going to take a cold shower and forget about it. Something is going to have to change. His heart is going to have to change.

So after repenting he prays create in me a clean heart.

In Hebrew the word create 'bara' is the same word used in Genesis 1v1, it is a word that is only used of God in Biblical Hebrew, only God can create.

### ***What implication does this have for David's heart?***

Only God can change a heart, David can't change his heart and you can't change your heart. This does not make the whole thing fatalistic, you have to cooperate.

In Hebrew idiom the heart represents the seat of thought, not the seat of emotion as it does in the western mind. All our behaviour and our emotions come from our cognitive (thought) processes. We do not act unless we first think. Therefore the heart controls what we do and who we are.





**Read Jeremiah 17v9**

*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? KJV*  
**What does this mean? Is this true of my heart?**



**Read Jeremiah 17v10 What does this mean?**

The natural state of the heart is to be deceptive.  
**What does it mean when we speak about living in denial?**  
**How can it happen?**



**Read Matthew 7v3-5**

**How can we see the speck in someones eye and not the plank in our own?**  
**How is this possible?**

Very often people see situations as they think they are and not as they really are.  
**How is this possible?**

The only solution is for God to rule our heart.



**Read Proverbs 4v23**

The KJV says; Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.  
**What does above all else mean?**  
**What do we need to guard our hearts from?**


**How are you going to guard your heart?**

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**How do you guard your heart with the breastplate of righteousness?**

By using righteousness as a standard for your thinking, is this thought true, is it right, where will it take me. By using righteousnesses as a standard for your actions.

**Why do you need to guard your heart?**

If you have a problem in your life your heart is the first place to look.  
Why do I feel like this? Why do I think like this? Why do I want this? What are my motives?  
Psychology tells us that the things we think about are the things we will eventually do.



**Read Luke 6v43-45 What comes out of our heart?**

**Why do we need a clean heart?**  
**What does "out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks mean?"**

It is the heart that controls all you do and all you say. For your actions to be right your heart has to be right. Most of us think the answer for holiness is good self control.

**If your heart is rotten why is self control not the answer?**

Self control by itself is fighting the inevitable, at some point it will not be strong enough, it will slip.



**Read Col 2v20-23 What was Paul's attitude to this kind of self control?**

Self control is not enough, we do not have the resources within ourselves to be holy or to resist temptation. Self control sounds spiritual but it does not have the power to restrain sensual indulgence. A change of heart is needed.



**Read Ezekiel 36v26**

This is what happens at salvation God gives us a new heart. Everything becomes new, new nature, new ways of thinking, new standards.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 2 Corinthians 5:17

David is a man of God, he is 'saved' yet he still prays 'create in me a clean heart.' **Why?**

It is a case of becoming what we already are. 1 Corinthians 5v7

Beyond this, life, in this old sinful world tends to make us hard and old, it happens so slowly that we don't notice it. We need to be refreshed and renewed.

The word for clean in Psalm 51v10 is *tahor*, it means pure or clean, physically, morally and ethically

**What are the characteristics of a clean heart?**

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Our hearts need to be brought into conformity with God's standards, a heart that wants what is right. Just as a sinful heart leads us to sin a clean heart leads us to righteousness, we act out our nature.

Jesus told a parable about old wine skins, apart from the point of the parable (the old cannot contain the new) the process is interesting. If old wine skins cannot take new wine then effectively you can only use a wineskin once, this would make the production of wine expensive. Each year the old brittle wine skins would be worked over with oil to refresh them for another years use. This is what needs to happen to us. Matthew 9v17

**How is your heart going to be renewed?**

Ask God to create in you a clean heart and let the Holy Spirit renew your life.

# Bible Studies

## Sacrifices for today

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You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2v5

*The Old Testament is built around the concept of sacrifice.*

- Sin is forgiven through sacrifice.
- God is worship through sacrifice.
- Sacrifice goes along with a relationship with God.
- Covenant is entered into by sacrifice.

*The New Testament is also built around the concept of sacrifice. In this case it centres on the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. One ultimate sacrifice, once and for all.*

God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. Romans 3v25

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. 1 John 2v2

### **Why is Jesus death central to the New Testament?**



Because it is the single element on which relationship with God and forgiveness of sins is made possible. Without it we have no forgiveness, no acceptance, no reconciliation and no eternal life. It is the fulfilment of all that the Old Testament promises. It is the new and living way into God's presence. Hebrew 10v20

In the Old Testament sacrifices were offered so that sins could be forgiven. This involved the death of an animal as a substitute, sin always involves death.

We do not need to sacrifice in order for our sins to be forgiven.

### **What do we need to do?**

Our forgiveness is through Jesus sacrifice, He was our substitute. We need to confess our sins and ask forgiveness. This is an act of faith, we are applying or claiming Jesus sacrifice as the answer to our sins. Our forgiveness is through faith in His blood.

### **What else do we need to do to be forgiven?**

Something inside us wants to find answers to that question very badly. Yes, sometimes there is a need for restitution if we have hurt someone. There is a need to produce 'fruit of repentance', to live out the repentance we have received in positive ways, if we have been disobedient we must now show repentance by being obedient. There is a need to turn from sin and go on in holiness. All of these things are secondary, forgiveness is through what Jesus did for us and our faith in that act, it is not through what we do for ourselves.

Sometimes we still feel the need to sacrifice in order to 'buy' forgiveness. We may do this by giving money or time or by good works. These in themselves may be good and please God, but if they are done through guilt or a need to feel forgiven they show that something is wrong.

**Can you 'buy' forgiveness? Why would you try?**

**What would it say about your faith in Jesus sacrifice?**



We do not need to sacrifice to receive forgiveness for sin. But 1 Peter 2v5 remind's us that we still need to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. This raises two questions; what are these spiritual sacrifices? And what makes them acceptable to God?

### **Spiritual sacrifices**

Philippians 2v17

Ephesians 5v2

Romans 12v1

Philippians 4v18

Hebrew 13v15

Hebrew 13v16

Acts 10v4

Romans 15v16

A sacrifice always requires that you give something.

### **What do you think Paul meant when he described his life as a drink offering?**

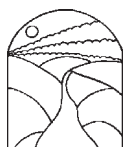
He wrote this in light of the probability that he would soon be martyred. He had given his life over to serving God and now, if continuing to do so meant death, he was not about to shrink from it.

### **In what way is a life of love a sacrifice?**

**What is a sacrifice of praise? How is it offered to God? When is it offered to God?**

### **When we do good and share with others who receives the sacrifice?**

"I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." Mat 25v40  
Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Gal 6v9



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***In what way are prayers sacrifices?***

Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. Rev 5v8

***What kind of prayers are accepted as sacrifice?***

Prayer in itself, whether it is our requests or just time spent communicating with God, is a form of worship, it is reaching out to God.

***In what way were the gentiles coming to Christ, an offering acceptable to God?***

***What does it mean to give our lives as a living sacrifice?***

Our whole life becomes an offering to God, everything we do, an ongoing, perpetual, sacrifice, a lifestyle sacrifice, a life of obedience and submission to God, a life pleasing to God. Our lives are given over to God, they become His to command and to do with as He wishes. We are the sacrifice, our lives become the altar. Most sacrifices are something that we give, a living sacrifice is something we are.



***Do all Christians live this way?***

***Should all Christians live this way?***

***What are the costs involved?***

***What might being a living sacrifice require of us?***

Sometimes we try to make other smaller sacrifices in order to avoid making this total sacrifice.



***Can you live as a believer without sacrifice?***

***What does avoiding sacrifice say about a believer?***

***Is sacrifice healthy for a believer?***

***What does a willingness to sacrifice show about a believer?***



Sacrifices are negative and positive, things we do for Jesus and things we don't do because of our love for Jesus. There are also levels of sacrifice, all sacrifices cost something by definition of the word, some sacrifices cost little, the cost of others can be huge. Some we willingly make, others are made with heavy heart, we know what is right and want to please God, but part of us shrinks at the sacrifice we are making.

He who sacrifices thank-offerings honours me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God." Psalm 50v23

***Acceptable Sacrifices***

When you sacrifice a fellowship offering to the LORD, sacrifice it in such a way that it will be accepted on your behalf. Leviticus 19v5

***What do these verses tell us about sacrifice?***

- Mat 9v13 Hosea 6v6
- 1 Samuel 15v22
- Proverbs 21v3
- Proverbs 15v8
- Proverbs 21v27
- Ecclesiastes 5v1

***What is a sacrifice with evil intent?***

***What is the sacrifice of fools?***

Sacrifice can never be a substitute for something else. It does not replace obedience or holiness, it cannot be used to manipulate God.

***For us is there a conflict between obeying and sacrifice?***

- 1 Chronicles 21v24
- Psalm 51v16-17
- Psalm 4v5
- Psalm 54v6
- Malachi 1v14

***What's a right sacrifice? (What's a wrong sacrifice?)*** Jud 11v30-34, 1 Cor 13v3

***Why does our heart need to be contrite?***

Sacrifice always comes from the heart, it is an expression of love, commitment and worship to God. If it is just a physical act of giving or doing, that has no sincerity or desire to do what is right behind it, then it is not a sacrifice just an outward show. An example of this would be the widow at the temple treasury. Mark 12v43, 2 Cor 8v12.

Sacrifice thank-offerings to God, fulfil your vows to the Most High, Psalm 50v14



***What's the connection between sacrifice and giving thanks?***

***What do you think makes a sacrifice acceptable to God?***

***What makes an offering unacceptable?***

***What is the result of our sacrifice?*** Hebrew 13v16

# Bible Studies

## The Field and the Pearl



### **Read Matthew 13v44-46**

Jesus often told parables in pairs, two similar stories making the same point or variations on the same point. These two parables are a good example.

### **Why did Jesus tell these parables?**

These are parables of the kingdom, He told them to describe what kingdom of heaven is like.

### **What aspect of the Kingdom of heaven do these parables address?**

The kingdom of God is a very broad theme in scripture, it describes where ever God is reigning. It has a past, present and future manifestation, it embraces heaven and earth. These parables describe the here and now aspects of the kingdom and especially entering or finding the kingdom.



### **The field**

#### **How is the treasure found?**

The treasure is found by chance. Maybe he was just wandering through the field. Maybe the man was ploughing a field when his plough hits something, he investigates and finds it is buried treasure, he reburies it and buys the field.



#### **How did the treasure get there?**

#### **Did the man own the field?**

#### **Was it legal/moral/ethical to hide the treasure and buy the field?**

The treasure got there because someone hid it, maybe to avoid war or danger. That it is unknown and unrecovered suggests it is ancient treasure. Whether it was ethic or not is irrelevant to the story. The only hint as to the law is that the finder equates owning the field with the right to the treasure. However, these details are important to the story. They remind us that it was not his treasure and he had to do something to acquire it.

### **How do you think he felt when he found the treasure?**

Finding buried treasure is the ultimate *good luck*. The bible characterises his response by the word joy.



#### **Who is the man?**

#### **What is the treasure?**

#### **What is the field?**

The man represents us, the treasure is the gospel, the field is the world or our lives.

### **In what way is the gospel like the treasure?**



### **Did the man deserve the treasure?**

#### **Did he work of it?**

What he found was at someone else's expense, the treasure was not his. For us, the gospel is entirely at God's expense, God's riches at Christ's expense. We did not, cannot earn it. We have no intrinsic right to it, we do not deserve it. We got lucky. Often because of our short term view we do not realise how lucky we are! Eternal life is an incredibly good deal.

### **What did the man have to do to possess the treasure?**

He had to somehow find the money to buy the field.

### **What is the equivalent for us today of buying the field?**

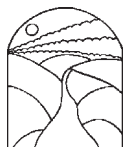
There is a cost, a sacrifice to be made in order to follow Christ and receive the treasure, the cost is our lives. We have to sell ourself to Christ, to follow Him and obey Him whatever He may ask of us. To us this cost may seem quite high, it may well have been hard for a hired labourer to find the money, he may have balked at the cost!

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. Mark 8v35

One of the points of this parable is that what it cost the man to obtain the treasure was disproportionate to the rewards.

The man went from being a hired hand to a wealthy land owner over night.

The moment he has the treasure, the cost of buying the field becomes insignificant, if he borrowed the money or sold his house, he now has more than enough to repay it. While the cost of following Jesus is high the blessings we receive here and now handsomely offset the cost.



Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?" Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. Matthew 19:27-29



### **The pearl**

#### **What happened to the merchant?**

The merchant found the most precious pearl when he found it he sold everything he had to buy it.

#### **How did the man find the treasure?**

#### **How did the merchant find the pearl?**

The man with the treasure found it by chance, the merchant was out searching. (found/looking). These are the two ways people still find Christ, for some it seems like chance, others were searching for truth.

#### **What did the merchant do when he found the pearl?**

- Both people recognised the value of what they had found.
- Both risked everything to obtain it.
- Both were ready to sacrifice to obtain it.
- Both had to make a deal to obtain it
- What they found changed both their lives.



#### **What deal do we have to make?**

#### **What choice did both people face?**

#### **What was the price of the pearl?**

#### **What does this say about it's value?**

The pearl was the missing part of his life, what he had been searching for, when he found it he was complete, he could rest, his life had found fulfilment even rest.

#### **How do these stories compare with Luke 18:18-23?**

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:21

#### **Why do you think Jesus used a pearl for his story?**

#### **Where do pearls come from?**

Pearls are rare and exotic. But there is an element of unlikelihood in both parables finding something rare, beautiful and expensive, in the most unlikely place. Both stories capture the wonder of finding Christ and of the relationship He has called us into.

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. Philippians 4:7-9

#### **What would have happened if the man in the parable had not been prepared to pay the price?**

#### **Do we always value our faith and relationship with God the way we should? Why?**

#### **Do you think familiarity breeds contempt?**



#### **Turning the parable on it's head.**

There is another way to interpret this parable. You can look at it from a totally different perspective. We have assumed so far that the person finding the treasure is us, but you can also look at this parable from Christ's perspective. He is the man who finds the treasure who buys the pearl.

Looking at the parable this way.



#### **Who is the treasure?**

#### **What is the price paid?**

#### **What risk did he take?**

#### **What does this say about our value to God?**

#### **What does it say about our relationship with Him?**

Christ came searching for us, and paid the ultimate price to bring us to himself, to make us his own

You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body. 1 Cor 6:19b-20



#### **What does this say about how God values your life?**

#### **What does this say about how you should respond to God?**

It is an inescapable fact that however we may value our lives, at the cross Christ paid what He thought you are worth.



# Bible Studies

## The Protagonist

Each year we look at the death of Jesus by examining one of the characters in the account. This year it is our goal to look at the role of the High Priest. As has been noted, the account of the crucifixion starts months before, with the resurrection of Lazarus.



### **The Problem.**

**How far from Jerusalem did Lazarus live?** John 11v18

**How well known was Lazarus?** John 11v19

**How public was the event?** John 11v33

**What was the net result of the miracle?** John 11v45

**What was the Sanhedrin's assessment of the situation?** John 11v47-48

Most of Jesus support was in Galilee, the crowd that came over the Mt. Olives on Palm Sunday, included many of his followers. Jesus had less support in Jerusalem. What happened to Lazarus changed the situation, suddenly Jerusalem is awash with speculation about Jesus. Lazarus' resurrection has upped the anti.

**According to Jesus, what would the result of Lazarus' death be?** John 11v4

This phrase is used seven times in John's gospel, this is the first time Jesus uses it. Each time it clearly refers to Jesus crucifixion. Jesus understands the consequences of His action, this is the first direct step to the cross.

Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." John 12v23



### **Read John 11v45-54**

The meeting of the Sanhedrin was called by the Pharisees. The Pharisees are conspicuous by their absence in the rest of the execution of Jesus. They are only mentioned two other times.

- There were Pharisees in the crowd that arrested Jesus, but they did not lead the crowd.
- The Pharisees and Priests approached Pilate to request a guard for Jesus tomb.



**The Sanhedrin.** The Sanhedrin was the ruling council of the Jews. Sometimes it was called the body of elders. Traditionally it traced its ancestry to the seventy elders appointed by Moses. In reality it probably had its origin in the time of Ezra after the return from exile. It functioned as a government and a supreme court. Its powers varied widely over the period of Roman rule.

The Sanhedrin was made of 70 elders and the high priest who acted as its president. To be a member you had to be over 40 and of excellent reputation. Traditionally it comprised 23 Sadducees, 23 Scribes and 23 others, most of whom would have been Pharisees. A second president made up the 70.

Most of what we know about the rules and practices of the Sanhedrin are recorded in the Mishna 150 years later. This makes it hard to know exactly how it operated in Jesus day. Most scholars believe the Mishna records an idealised account, what they wanted it to have been rather than what it was. The Sadducee's effectively controlled the Sanhedrin.

**Were any of the Sanhedrin sympathetic to Jesus?** John 19v38-39

Both Joseph and Nicodemus were members of the sanhedrin.



**The Sadducees.** The name means 'righteous ones' (from the word Zedek).

They were a group of wealthy landowners who made up a small powerful ruling elite.

All the high priests over the previous 100 years had been Sadducee's. Religiously they were conservative, they believed in the existence of God, but doubted anything supernatural. By this time they were basically a political party rather than a religious one. What mattered to them was not the issues the Pharisees argued over, what mattered to them was staying in power. The Sadducee's were hugely unpopular and had very little public support. The way they behaved in the death of Jesus fits the image we have of them from other places.



**The Scribes** The Scribes were experts in the law, judges, guardians of the scrolls, they are often linked with the synagogues. Sometimes the New Testament calls them 'the teachers of the Law.' They were not a party in their own right just a loose grouping.

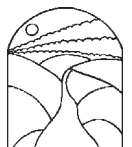


**The Pharisees.** The Pharisees were a large and popular group. Religiously they had a real faith, in modern language we would call them 'evangelical' almost 'pentecostal'. Most of the ordinary priests would have considered themselves

Pharisees. They were highly regarded by the people. They were mostly middle class, tradesmen and professionals. They were not concerned with temporal power. Most Christians demonise the Pharisees but this is unjustified. Of all the groups in Judaism of the day they were the closest to Christ's teaching. The Pharisees and Sadducee's were natural enemies. Because of the influence the Pharisees held, they were often a thorn in the Sadducee's sides, forcing them to do things the Pharisees way. There are hints of this in Jesus' trial.

**What was the consensus of opinion about Jesus Miracles?**

**What were they frightened the people would believe about him?**



Their fear is that the people will believe Jesus is the Messiah. There seems to be an unspoken fear that maybe He is. The problem was not the miracles but what they said about Jesus. **What are they frightened will happen? How could this happen?** The reference to our place reflects the Hebrew 'makom' it is one of the names given to the temple. They are frightened the temple will be destroyed and they will lose sovereignty. The only way this is likely to happen is if Jesus instigates an insurgency. Something He has shown no sign of doing.



**What conclusion does Caiaphas come to?**

**In what way was this prophetic?**

**How did Jesus fulfil this prophecy?**

**Did Caiaphas intend the prophecy, or intend the way it was fulfilled?**

**What did Caiaphas want to happen?**

**How could an evil priest give a true prophecy?**

John sees this prophecy as deeply significant, Jesus did die for the nation. One man on behalf of many In fact Jesus death was a sacrifice of all people. One man takes God's wrath so that no one else has to. One man bears our sins so that we may be free of it.

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. 1 John 2v2 This is the greatest truth of the gospel. Jesus died in our place so that the way to God will be open to whoever comes to Him in faith.



He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. John 11v51-52

**If Jesus gave his life for the Jewish nation, is it logical to blame His death on the Jews?** Anti Semitism dishonours God, makes a mockery of the bible and demonstrates a total failure to understand why and how Jesus died.

**What character traits does Caiaphas show? (v49)**

**Is the motivation behind getting rid of Jesus political or religious?**

Religion and politics of the time could not be separated, Jesus arrest had religious motivations behind it. But the primary reason was political, Caiaphas did not want to lose power personally. More honourably and as the de facto leader, he did not want the whole nation to suffer for the sake of one man. Like most motives Caiaphas mixed good and bad.

**When Caiaphas stands up and says "you know nothing at all" what does it imply?**

It suggests there has been disagreement over what is to be done about Jesus, in fact it is the kind of statement that you would make if strong opposing views had been expressed.



Caiaphas represented the Jews in that he was their appointed leader. Appointed by who? Caiaphas was appointed by the Romans not by the Sanhedrin or by popular assent. He was not a popular leader. In the Judaism of the day, Caiaphas and his party commanded the least public respect and support. Modern Judaism finds it's roots in the Pharisees not the Sadducees. The Sadducaic movement did not survive the destruction of the temple in 70AD.



**Who was the motivating force behind Jesus arrest, trial and execution?**

**Matthew 20v18**

**Mark 15v3**

**Luke 19v47**

**Matthew 26v3-4**

**Mark 14v10**

**John 18v35**

It is interesting that the Pharisees are only included in this list by the phrase elders, which refers to the whole Sanhedrin. Again they are conspicuous by their absence.

**What motive did Pilot believe was behind Jesus arrest? Mark 15v10**

**What was the high priest envious of?**

He obviously saw in Jesus something he wanted for himself. It may have been Jesus power, but it was most probably His huge popularity. It was this that made Jesus a threat. Somehow many Christians today have come to blame the Jews for Jesus death, they are Christ haters we are told, yet it was Jesus huge public support that led to His arrest.

Perhaps the real threat was that Jesus might be the Messiah. This suggestion is never mentioned, it is to scary a prospect.



**Had this idea previously been contemplated? John 3v1-2**

**Was it still being contemplated? John 12v42**

**What was the peoples current attitude towards Jesus? John 12v17-19**

**Why would the high priest not welcome the arrival of the Messiah?**

Among more obvious reasons, there was an idea current in the Judaism of Jesus day that when the Messiah arrived, the one of whom Moses spoke in Deuteronomy 18 everything would change, there would be a new covenant, a new law, a new temple and a new priesthood. Caiaphas knew this, if Jesus was the Messiah, his power was gone. He did not want the status quo changed.

**Was the idea of everything changing when the Messiah came correct?**

Yes we have a new covenant, a new law, a new temple and a new priesthood. What is more, this idea is foundational to the book of Hebrews, whoever it's writer was clearly believed this teaching.



The conclusion of all of this is clear, it is Caiaphas and the Sadducees who are the protagonists. The result of all this is that Jesus withdraws from Jerusalem until the time of passover.

# Bible Studies

## Caiaphas the High Priest.



**Read Matthew 26v1-5**

**When did the priest not want to arrest Jesus?  
When did they arrest Jesus?**

**Why?  
Why?**

It is an aspect of Jesus arrest and trial that it happened at the wrong time. Jesus is arrested right at the beginning of the feast. This is probably because of intelligences received from Judas. This dictates the whole nature of the trial, everything is rushed and has to be organised on the run, nothing is prepared. Once more these verses pre-suppose Jesus immense popularity. During the feast Jerusalem's population increased dramatically. (According to Josephus by a factor of 10.) The city became highly volatile, a riot was never far away.

- Judas visits the high priest at 7pm Thursday night at the earliest. (8pm is a more realistic time)
- Before Judas arrived the high priest had no intention of arresting Jesus for at least a week!
- Jesus is arrested at about 10pm on Thursday night.
- Jesus is executed before midday on Friday.
- Friday is one of the busiest days of the Jewish year.
- Friday evening is the passover meal.

**What has to be organised?**

- A troop has to arrest Jesus.
- Seventy members of the Sanhedrin have to be assembled.
- Witnesses have to be found.
- Pilate has to be persuaded to execute Jesus immediately.

This is a big ask.

**What kind of troop arrested Jesus?** Mark 15v43

John describes it as a detachment of soldiers, but the other gospels portray it as a mixed group comprising members of the Sanhedrin, servant and temple guards, some have swords, others clubs. It is the kind of group that Peter thinks he can withstand. They are so skilled at their task, that a fisherman can attack them before they know what is happening. The fisherman is so skilled at his task that he misses. (In case you had not realised he was not aiming for the ear.)

**Why such a mixed group?**

Because it's a rush job, they have been thrown together at the last minute.



**Read John 18v12-14**

The first place Jesus is taken is to Annas. **Why might this be?**

Caiaphas has many things to do that only he can organise. The Sanhedrin would not hear capital cases at night, some of them must have taken some persuasion. Caiaphas was the only person who would have the influence with Pilate to persuade him to execute Jesus.



**Read John 18v19-24**

Annas is called high priest, but Caiaphas is the true high priest. There are three reasons he may have been called the high priest. Annas is probably the 70<sup>th</sup> member of the Sanhedrin and it's second president. Annas himself was high priest between the years 7 and 15AD, in all, five of his sons and one of his grandsons held the position of high priest. Caiaphas was his son in law. This reminds us that the role of high priesthood and the Sadducee party were family heirachies. Bribery played a significant roll in the election of high priests at the time.

Jewish literature of the time is scathing about Annas. The Talmud condemns the house of Annas for their whisperings, intrigues and snake hissings.

**What does this account and Annas history suggest about his role?**

Clearly Annas was the power behind the ephod. Having said this, Caiaphas was no puppet, he held the position from 18 to 37AD. Longer than any of Annas' sons.

**What did Annas question Jesus about?**

**What do you think he was trying to achieve?**

Annas interrogation of Jesus was illegal. Private interrogations were not allowed under Jewish law. Jesus own word could not be used against Him, there was no such thing under Jewish law as a confession. What is more, the Jewish legal system was witness driven. The witness made the arrest, gave evidence and cross examined the suspect, they also cast the first stone in an execution.

**Who 'led' the arrest party?**

Judas did. It has been suggested that he was intended to be the key witness. That he did not continue in this role can only have been because he refused. This must have highly inconvenienced the high priest and opens the door to the later fiasco over the witness.

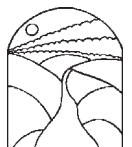


**Read Matthew 26v57-66**

To have assembled the whole Sanhedrin at 10pm on the day before passover would have been quite a feat, for normal business a quorum of 23 was sufficient.

Very tight rules governed the way the Sanhedrin heard capital cases, as has already been commented we know these rules from Jewish writings dating 200 years after this period, we cannot be sure to what extent they were normally practised. Among these laws are the following:

A trial for life could not take place at night. A trial and a sentence could not be given in the same day. (the Jewish day starts at sunset not midnight). A trial could not take place on a Sabbath or a festival. (The Friday on which Jesus was arrested was passover eve.)



**Which of these were broken in Jesus trial? Why were they broken?**

Jesus could not be kept in custody, the uproar would have been too great, it would certainly have sparked the riot Caiaphas professed to fear. Nor could Jesus be executed over the festival, the eve of Passover or the day of preparation as it is called in scripture was the last day Jesus could be executed. The high priest window of opportunity closed with the commencement of the Sabbath at night fall on Friday. Having arrested Jesus he was committed, his only choices were to release Jesus or break the rules.

The Sanhedrin did not like condemning people to death, doing so even when justified, it became known as a 'murderous Sanhedrin'. The whole process was weighted on the side of the defendant. Before the Sanhedrin one witness was no witness a minimum of two were required. The Sanhedrin traditionally asked the witness seven questions. If these did not materially agree, or could not be answered the case was automatically rejected.



**What happened with the witness?** Mark 14v56-59

**How difficult is it to get two people to lie coherently?**

**What does this tell us about the conditions of the trial?**

Again it reminds us of the rush they were in. Given just a few hours finding two witnesses who could say the same thing would have been easy. This also reminds us that while the trial was illegal in many aspects it has to maintain a semblance of legality. Caiaphas cannot get away with any old witness, the Sanhedrin won't let him. It may well have been the Pharisees who prevented this.



**According to Jewish law what should have happened now?**

When the witness could not agree Jesus should have been released. Instead Caiaphas does something that is highly illegal he questions Jesus directly and uses His own evidence to convict Him.



**Why does Jesus remain silent?**

It fulfils prophecy that Jesus would not protest his innocence, Isaiah 53v7. For Jesus to be questioned this way was illegal. He was under no obligation to answer.

**What question does Caiaphas ask Jesus?**

The word Christ is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Messiah.

**How does Jesus respond?**

**Was this blasphemy?**

No this was not blasphemy, it was true, Jesus had made similar claims throughout his life. Caiaphas would have been aware of this. It would have been blasphemy had it not been true and Caiaphas is not about to consider whether it is true.

**What is Jesus officially charged with?**

At this point the Sanhedrin have to make a choice, if Jesus is the Messiah, then he is guiltless, they must set him free, but they must accept the consequences of him being the Messiah, this is something no one is about to do. The only other option is to condemn Him. This they do.



**Read Matthew 27v1-2**

Jesus has been tried through the night illegally, but a semblance of legality is kept

**When is Jesus Condemned?**

In accordance with Jewish law Jesus cannot be convicted in the hours of darkness. He is taken to Pilate to be executed. This also has to happen with incredible speed, Jesus must be on the cross by midday. Caiaphas must have made an arrangement with Pilate to condemn Jesus without a time consuming trial and before Passover. Pilate does not play ball.

**What charge is presented to Pilate?** John 18v29-30

The Priests had not expected Pilate to try Jesus only endorse the Sanhedrin's verdict, they are caught without a charge.



**What charge do they eventually present?** Luke 23v2-3

**Was any of this ever mentioned at Jesus trial?**

**Why did the charge change for Pilate's benefit?**

Jesus had scrupulously avoided any insurrection against Rome. He had endorsed paying taxes.

**What charge eventually comes out?** John 19v7

Pilate is quite astute in the way he cuts through the high priest's smoke screen.



**Caiaphas was right.**

Of all the characters in the passion narrative Caiaphas is the villain, Judas and Pilate both have to take responsibility, but it was Caiaphas who against the backdrop of popular Jewish support, pushes through Jesus arrest and execution.

Each of the characters in the passion account tell us profound, fundamental truths about salvation.

**Why did Caiaphas want Jesus executed?**

Put yourself in Caiaphas' shoes. For a long time you have been able to ignore Jesus, but events have conspired against you. If Jesus is who he says he is, then you stand to lose everything you have worked for over the years, your power, wealth and prestige. Jesus is going to wreck everything, everything becomes new; priesthood, covenant, temple.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 2 Corinthians 5:17

Either you accept that Jesus is the Messiah and let Him change your life for ever, or you get rid of Him at any cost. Caiaphas made his choice.

Accepting the truth about Jesus and letting Jesus into your life is a risky thing to do, like Caiaphas, everything stands to change. You must surrender your very life for Christ.

**What does it mean for the individual that Jesus is the Messiah?**

The same choice faces you, you ignore Jesus for so long then you must make a choice, surrender or fight. You have to make Caiaphas' decision.

**What does Caiaphas tell us?**

If you want to live your own life, stay in charge and preserve the status quo – get rid of Jesus.