Bible Basics: Reduced Version

A free hard copy of the complete book *Bible Basics* is available from biblebasicsonline.com or bible-basics.info .

*All quotations are from the New King James Version unless otherwise stated.*

**Part 1: THE BIBLE**

The Bible we hold in our hands today has an amazing history and is nothing short of a miracle.  It claims to be the Word of God and presents us with a challenge to search out the Truth of its message and to confirm for ourselves that this is indeed the only revelation available from our Creator.

**God’s Spirit**

The Bible is an expression of God’s spirit. His spirit was seen at work in the creation: “By His Spirit He adorned the heavens’ (Job 26:13).The spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters to bring about the present creation (Genesis 1:2).  Yet we also read that “by the word of the Lord” the world was made (Psalm 33:6); Genesis records how “God said” and things were created. God’s spirit, therefore, is very much reflected in His Word.  Likewise our words express our inner thoughts and desires – the real ‘us’ – very accurately.  David spoke of how God’s Word and His heart are parallel: “For Your word’s sake, and according to Your own heart,  You have done all these great things.” (2 Samuel 7:21). So God’s mind / spirit is expressed in His Word.  God achieved the miracle of expressing His spirit in written words by the process of **inspiration**.  This term is based around the word “spirit”: **In-spirit-ation.**

“Spirit” means “breath” or breathing.  “Inspiration” means “in-breathing”.  This means that the words which men wrote while under “inspiration” from God were the words of God’s spirit.

Paul encouraged Timothy not to let his familiarity with the Bible lead him to forget the wonder of the fact that it is the words of God’s spirit, and therefore provides all that we need in order a true knowledge of God: *“From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.  All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:15-17).*

**The Bible Fully Inspired**

This unwillingness to accept the huge spiritual power which is in God’s Word has led many Christians to question whether all the Scriptures are fully inspired by God.  They have suggested that much of what we read in the Bible was just the personal opinions of the writers.  But Peter effectively disposes of such erroneous reasoning: *“We have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it … 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 1:19-21 NIV).*

We must “above all” believe that the Bible is inspired.  The doctrine of inspiration is so often emphasised in the Bible text:

* *“For God commanded, saying …” (Matthew 15:4)*
* *“For David himself said by the Holy Spirit …” (Mark 12:36;)*
* *“… which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David …” (Acts 1:16);*
* *“The Holy spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet …” (Acts 1:16);*
* *As the Holy Spirit says …” (Hebrews 3:7; see also 9:8; 10:15).*

If these men were only partly inspired, we do not have access to the true Word or spirit of God.  If what they wrote really was the Word of God, then it follows that they had to be completely taken over by God’s spirit, during the period of inspiration – otherwise the product would not have been God’s Word in purity.

**Inspired  Words Can Motivate**

An acceptance that God’s Word is completely His, provides us with more motivation to read and obey it: *“Your word is very pure, therefore Your servant loves it” (Psalm 119:140).* A comparison of 2 Timothy 3:16 with 4:2,3 shows how an appreciation of an inspired Bible can motivate action from us:

Because the inspired word is profitable …

for doctrine *therefore*

preach the word; be ready in season and out of season (i.e; whether you naturally feel in the preaching mood or not).

            for reproof *therefore*

                         convince (reprove)

            for correction *therefore*

                        rebuke

            for instruction in righteousness *therefore*

                        exhort with all long-suffering and teaching.

**What it can Mean to Us**

If we believe that the Bible is inspired, we will feel the passion and power of it the more, and thereby its impact upon us will be the greater.  Take for example the quote from the Old Testament: *“You have seen that I have talked with you from heaven (therefore) you shall not make anything to be with Me – gods of silver …”(Exodus 20:22,23).*

Because of the wonder of having heard God’s voice, therefore idolatry of any form will be meaningless for us.

The Apostle Paul felt the passion of God’s word.  It wasn’t just black print on white paper to him.  Thus he speaks of how “Isaiah is very bold and says … Isaiah also cried out concerning Israel …” (Romans 9:27; 10:20).  Paul had meditated deeply upon Isaiah’s words, even to the point of considering the tone of voice in which he first spoke them.

It was because the rulers of Israel “did not know … the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath” (Acts 13:27) that they crucified the Lord.  Paul speaks of the prophets’ “voices” rather than merely their words.  The men who crucified Jesus didn’t feel the wonder of inspiration in their attitude to the Bible – even though they would have devoutly upheld the position that the Bible texts were inspired.  Here we have a lesson for ourselves. Although we might agree that the Bible is the inspired word of God, it is quite possible that we might fail to feel this as we should when we read it.

**Part 2: THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

The focus of the true Christian hope is the coming Kingdom of God on earth. The Lord’s prayer shows this: *“Your kingdom come (that) your will be done on earth, as it is (now) in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).* At Christ’s return, “the kingdoms of this world (will) become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (Revelation 11:15). Then God’s will and desires will be completely and openly performed in this earth.

**The Kingdom on Earth**

The “kingdom of God” is a phrase interchangeable with “the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 13:11 cp. Mark 4:11). The Bible never speaks of ‘the kingdom *in* heaven’; it is the kingdom *of* heaven which will be established by Christ on earth at His return. As God’s will is completely obeyed by the angels in heaven (Psalms 103:19-21) so it will be in the future kingdom of God. Entering the kingdom of God at Christ’s return is the end result of all Christian endeavour in this life (Matthew 25:34; Acts 14:22); as such, it is important to have a correct understanding of it. The doctrine of the Kingdom of God forms a vital part of the Gospel message (Acts 8:12; 19:8; 28:23,31). “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22), it is the light at the end of the tunnel of this life, and therefore the motivation to make the sacrifices which the true Christian life involves.

**Old Testament Prophecy of the Kingdom of God**

Daniel 2 is one of many prophecies in the Old Testament which speak of the Kingdom of God. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, wanted to know the world’s future. He was given a vision of a great statue, composed of different metals. Daniel interpreted the head of gold as representing the king of Babylon (Daniel 2:38). After him there was to come a succession of major empires in the area around Israel, until there would be a situation in which “as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly fragile” (Daniel 2:42). This speaks of the present balance of power in the world split between many nations, some strong and some weak. Daniel then saw a little stone hit the image on the feet, destroying it. The stone grew into a great mountain which filled the whole earth (Daniel 2:34,35). This stone represents Jesus (Matthew 21:42, Acts 4:11; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:4-8). The “mountain” which will fill the earth represents the everlasting kingdom of God, which will be established at His return to the earth. Thus the kingdom will be on earth, not in heaven: *“And in the days of these kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed … it shall stand forever” (Daniel 2:44).*

**Christ the King**

Christ will be the king and His personal return to earth will mark the start of the Kingdom of God. He will reign as supreme ruler over all the earth.

* *“He will reign … forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32,33).*
* *“The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (Revelation 11:15).*
* *“He (Christ) shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth” (Psalm 72:8).*

**Co-rulers**

Christ will share His rulership over the earth with His followers: “[Christ has] made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:10). “A king (Jesus) will reign in righteousness, and princes (the believers) will rule with justice” (Isaiah 32:1; Luke 19:17; 2 Timothy 2:12).

**The Capital**

Christ will reign from Jerusalem, the capital of the future Kingdom. Whilst people will be praising God at various places worldwide (Malachi 1:11), Jerusalem will be the focal point of the world’s worship (Ezekiel 40:48). Nations “shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts” around the temple in Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:16). This annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem is also prophesied in Isaiah 2:2,3: “*In the last days, the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains … and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways … for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem”.*

There will be worldwide enthusiasm to learn the ways of God. People will be so motivated by this desire that they will travel from all ends of the earth to Jerusalem in order to gain more knowledge of God.

**One Universal Legal System**

Instead of the confusion and unfairness created by man’s legal systems there will be one universal legal code – “the law, and the word of the Lord”, which will be pronounced by Christ from Jerusalem. “All nations shall f*low* unto” these teaching sessions. The true knowledge of God will lessen the friction between nations. Respect will be paid to those who reflect God’s characteristics of love, mercy, justice etc. in contrast with the present exaltation of the proud and self-assertive: “In His days the righteous shall flourish” (Psalm 72:7).

**Agricultural and Environmental Change**

The absolute authority of Christ and total justice of His arbitration in disputes will result in the nations willingly changing their military hardware into agricultural machinery: “Nations … shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isaiah 2:4). The Bible describes the dramatic solution to the current environmental crises the earth currently faces. We will see a fertile, fruitful earth in God’s kingdom: “There shall be an abundance of grain in the earth on the top of the (once barren) mountains; its fruit shall wave like (the crops of) Lebanon” (Psalm 72:16). “The wilderness … shall be glad … the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; it shall … rejoice even with joy and singing … for waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool” (Isaiah 35:1-7). Even the natural aggression between the animals will be removed: “the wolf and the lamb shall feed together”, and children will be able to play with snakes (Isaiah 65:25; 11:6-8). Life spans will be increased (Isaiah 65:20). Women will experience less sorrow in childbirth (Isaiah 65:23). “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing” (Isaiah 35:5,6). This will be due to the miraculous Spirit gifts again being possessed (cp. Hebrews 6:5).

**The Ultimate Purpose of the Kingdom**

The ultimate purpose of the Kingdom of God is to give glory to God. “Truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord” (Numbers 14:21; Habakkuk 2:14). Glory to God means that the inhabitants of the earth will appreciate, praise and copy His righteous attributes. “The meek shall inherit the earth (in the Kingdom), and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (Psalms 37:11). Possessing eternal life will almost be incidental to the real reason for our being in the Kingdom – which is to glorify God. Just a few years of living in the joy of absolute perfection and good conscience with God would be worth all the trauma of this life. That this glorious state will last forever takes us beyond the limits of human comprehension!

**An Outline of Events at Christ’s Return**

1. The responsible dead (those who know God’s ways) will be raised and taken, together with the responsible living, to the judgment seat.
2. Those who knew of God’s ways but refused to obey will be punished with death, and the righteous given eternal life. Judgment will also be given to the nations who resist Christ.
3. The righteous will then rule over those people who are then alive, but who are not responsible to God; they will teach them the Gospel as “kings and priests” (Revelation 5:10).
4. This will last for 1,000 years. During this time all the mortal people will hear the Gospel and therefore be responsible to God. These people will live much longer and happier lives.
5. At the end of the Millennium there will be a rebellion against Christ and the saints, which God will put down. (Revelation 20:8,9).
6. At the end of the 1,000 years, all those who have died during that time will be resurrected and judged (Revelation 20:5,11-15).
7. The wicked amongst them will be destroyed, and the righteous will join Christ and His saints in having eternal life.

**The Meaning of the Kingdom for us Today**

Being in the Kingdom of God should be a believer’s supreme motivation to despise worldly advantage and materialism. Everything which we can now imagine and strive for is incomparable to the ultimate fulfilment of being in God’s Kingdom. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:30-34). A believer needs to seek “(God’s) righteousness”, i.e. try to develop a love of God’s character. We want to be in God’s Kingdom because righteousness will be glorified there, because we want to be completely morally perfect; rather than just because we, personally, want to escape death and live an easy life for eternity.

If we are “seeking first the Kingdom of God” our perspective about this life will change. We will shun materialism and the effort which it demands. If we selfishly build up our own possessions through ignoring the needs of others, we have denied God’s ways – even if we understand all the doctrines of God (1 Timothy 5:8; 6:10).

The fact that the Kingdom will be on *earth* not in heaven, means that we will not strive for present possession of it, neither will we be swayed by the pressure groups and political parties who only look at the state of the world as it now is (1 John 3:13).

By having this hope, we “draw nigh to God” (Hebrews 7:19). The Hope we have compels us to God’s service. And that same Hope inspires us to repentance, too. For if Christ is soon to return, what manner of persons ought we to be? We will want to tell others of this hope (Matthew 10:7; Mark 6:12).

If we will eternally walk in God’s ways in the Kingdom, we should strive to do so now: “We labour and strive because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all men” (1 Timothy 4:10 RV). The Kingdom of God is not just a time of personal, physical benefit. Jesus Christ spoke of it as a time of peace, a time when God’s principles would triumph over men’s selfish desires. This can begin right now in a quiet way, in the hearts of those who will be in the future Kingdom. If we believe we really will be there, then we will look more earnestly for the day to come. We can never be truly enthusiastic about the Lord’s return if we are unsure He will accept us into God’s Kingdom. The Apostle Paul encourages those who take on the hope of the Kingdom: “When Christ … appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth; fornication …” etc. (Colossians 3:4,5). The salvation God offers is by grace. This enables us to look forward with eagerness rather than uncertainty to Christ’s coming and our lives are thereby changed: “The grace of God … teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts … looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ” Titus 2:11-13).

**Part 3: GOD’S PURPOSE REVEALED IN PROMISES**

The Bible gives a consistent message of the purpose of God. His plan is to fill the earth with men and women who show His character and give Him glory. He has given great promises which show the way this will be accomplished when His kingdom will be established in the earth.

In order for God’s purpose to be achieved, He provided His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Because of Christ’s life, death and resurrection, men and women have a way of being part of God’s great kingdom if they respond and believe in Him.

**The Promise in Eden**

Adam and Eve sinned by eating the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden. Both they and the serpent were punished. Men and women would die, and would be unable to save themselves from this. But a ray of hope for man comes into this dark picture when God says to the serpent: *“I will put enmity (hatred, opposition) between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He (the woman’s seed) shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15).*

A “seed” means a descendant or child, but it can also refer to the people associated with the particular “seed”, e.g. we become the seed of Abraham if we are “in” Jesus by baptism (Galatians 3:27,29).

**The Seed of the Serpent**

The serpent, because of his lie, came to represent a sinful way of thinking. The seed of the serpent refers to those with the family likeness of the serpent, those who distort God’s Word, lying and leading others into sin. They allow these characteristics to rule their life. In the time of Christ the corrupt religious rulers were referred to as a “brood of vipers” (Matthew 3:7).

**The Seed of the Woman**

The seed of the woman refers to one who would bruise or crush the serpent’s head, i.e. sin, dealing it with a death-blow. This was a prophecy of Jesus Christ and his work: *Jesus Christ, who has (by the cross) abolished death (and therefore the power of sin – Romans 6:23), and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10). “God, by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh” (Romans 8:3; see also 1 John 3:5; Matthew 1:21).*

Christ was ‘wounded in the heel’ through his death for three days. Yet His resurrection proved that this was only a temporary wound, compared to the death-blow that He gave sin.

**What does this mean to us?**

On the cross Jesus destroyed the power of sin in Himself. He has invited us to share in His victory. If we are “baptized into Christ” we can share in the promises about Jesus, like that in Genesis 3:15. No longer are they just interesting parts of the Bible, they are prophecies and promises which are made directly to us! Although sin and death are still experienced by true believers, by being baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27-29), they can have forgiveness of their sins now and eventually be saved from death. God has promised a time when the righteous will be raised from the dead and given eternal life: *“The dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:52-54).*

Jesus was the true ‘seed of the woman’, but we can be part of that seed of the woman too by being baptized into Christ. Our lives will then reflect the words of Genesis 3:15 – there will be a constant sense of conflict (“enmity”) within us, between right and wrong. The great apostle Paul described a conflict between sinful thoughts and the love of God’s ways that raged within him (Romans 7:14-25). But he concludes this by saying: *“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24-25).*

So right from the beginning God promised Christ as a Saviour. This incredible promise given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden has been fulfilled in Christ, and we too can benefit from it.

**THE PROMISE TO ABRAHAM**

**The Gospel preached to Abraham**

The Gospel taught by Jesus and the apostles was also given in a series of promises to Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel. God, through the promises, “Preached the gospel to Abraham” (Galatians 3:8). If we can understand what was taught to Abraham, we will then have a very basic picture of the Christian Gospel. There are other indications that the Gospel is not something which began at the time of Jesus: *“We declare to you glad tidings (the Gospel) – that promise which was made to the (Jewish) fathers, God has fulfilled” (Acts 13:32,33; see also Romans 1:1,2; Hebrews 4:2).*

**Two Themes**

The promises to Abraham have two basic themes:

1. Things about Abraham’s seed (special descendant)
2. Things about the land which was promised to Abraham.

The New Testament comments on these promises. By letting the Bible explain itself, we can combine the teachings of both Testaments to give us a complete picture of the promises made to Abraham.

**Abraham – a Man of Faith**

Abraham originally lived in Ur, a prosperous city in what is now Iraq. An extraordinary call of God came to him – to leave that sophisticated life and embark on a journey to a promised land. This required faith because exactly where he was to journey was not made completely clear. It turned out to be a 1,500 mile journey. The land was Canaan – modern Israel.

During his life, God appeared to Abraham and repeated and expanded His promises to him. Those promises are the basis of Christ’s Gospel. so that same call comes to true Christians as it did to Abraham, to leave the transient things of this life, and go forward in a life of faith, taking God’s promises at face value and living by His Word. *“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out (from Ur) to the place (Canaan) which he would afterward receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going” (Hebrews 11:8).*

By showing a similar faith and acting upon it, we can have the same honour as Abraham – to be called the friends of God (Isaiah 41:8), to find the knowledge of God (Genesis 18:17) and to have the sure hope of eternal life in the Kingdom. To truly believe in the Christian message we, too, must firmly believe what God promised to Abraham. With eager eyes we should therefore read and re-read the dialogues between God and Abraham.

**The Land**

1. “Get out of your country. To a land that I will shew you” (Genesis 12:1).
2. Abraham “went on his journey….as far as Bethel (in Central Israel). And the Lord said to Abram. Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are – northward, southward, eastward and westward: for all the land which you see I give to you, and your descendants forever…walk in the land…..for I give it to you” (Genesis 13:3,14-17).
3. “The Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates” (Genesis 15:18).)
4. “I will give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession” (Genesis 17:8).
5. “The promise that he (Abraham) would be the heir of the world” (Romans 4:13).

We see here a progressive revelation to Abraham:

1. ‘There is a land which I would like you to go to’.
2. ‘You have now arrived in the area. You and your children will live here for ever.’
3. The area of the promised land was more specifically defined.
4. Abraham was not to expect to receive the promise in this life – he was to be a “stranger” in the land, although he would later live there for ever. The implication of this is that he would die and then later be resurrected to enable him to receive this promise.
5. Paul, under inspiration, saw the promises to Abraham as meaning his inheritance of the whole earth.

Abraham did not receive the fulfilment of the promises in his lifetime: *“By faith he sojourned (implying a temporary way of life) in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents” (Hebrews 11:9).* Abraham *“died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13).*

Notice the four stages:

1. Knowing the promises;
2. Being “assured of them”;
3. Embracing them – by being baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27-29);
4. Confessing to the world by our way of life that this world is not our real home, but we are living in hope of that future age to come upon the earth.

God “gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on. But …He promised to give it to him for a possession” (Acts 7:5). God keeps His promises. There will come a day when Abraham and all who have those promises made to them will be rewarded. *“These all died in faith, not having received the promises. God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us” (Hebrews 11:13,39,40).*

All true believers will therefore be rewarded at the same point in time, i.e. at the judgment seat at the last day (2 Timothy 4:1,8; Matthew 25:31-34). In order to be judged, Abraham and others who knew those promises must be resurrected just before the judgment.

**The Seed**

As with the promise of a seed in Genesis 3:15, this seed of Abraham applies primarily to Jesus and, secondarily, to those who are “in Christ” and therefore are also counted as the seed of Abraham:

1. “I will make you a great nation, I will bless you…and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:2,3).
2. “I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered …

all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever” (Genesis 13:15,16).

1. “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them. So shall your descendants be. To your descendants I have given this land” (Genesis 15:5,18).
2. “I give to you and your descendants after you, the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God” (Genesis 17:8).
3. “I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 22:17-18 KJV).

Again, Abraham’s understanding of the “seed” was increased as God gave him further promises.

1. Firstly he was just told that somehow he would have an extraordinary number of descendants, and that through his “seed” the whole earth would be blessed.
2. He was later told that he would have a seed who would come to include many people. These people would spend eternal life, along with himself, in the land at which he had arrived, i.e. Canaan.
3. He was told that his seed would become as many as the stars in the sky. This may have suggested to him that he would have many spiritual descendants (stars in heaven) as well as many natural ones (as “the dust of the earth”).
4. The previous promises were underlined with the additional assurance that the many people who would become part of the seed could have a personal relationship with God.
5. The seed would have victory against his enemies.

Notice that the seed was to bring “blessings” to be available to people from all over the earth. In the Bible the idea of blessing is often connected with forgiveness of sins. After all, this is the greatest blessing a lover of God could ever want. “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven” (Psalm 32:1).

The only descendant of Abraham who has brought forgiveness of sins to the world is Jesus, and the New Testament commentary on the promises to Abraham provides solid support. *“He (God) does not say, ‘And to seeds’, as of many (i.e. in the plural), but as of one (in the singular), ‘And to your seed’, who is Christ” (Galatians 3:16). “…the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus (i.e. the seed), sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities” (Acts 3:25,26.*

Notice here how Peter quotes and interprets Genesis 22:18:

The seed = Jesus

The blessing = forgiveness of sins.

**Joining the Seed**

The basic elements of the Gospel were understood by Abraham. But these vital promises were to Abraham and his seed, Jesus. Can anyone else be involved? Even physical descent from Abraham would not automatically make someone part of that one specific seed (John 8:39). To share these promises we have to become intimately part of Jesus. This is by baptism into Jesus (Romans 6:3-5); frequently we read of baptism into His name (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5). *“As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek (Gentile), there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male or female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s (by baptism into him) then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:27-29).*

The promise of eternal life on earth, through receiving the “blessing” of forgiveness through Jesus, is by being baptized into Christ, the seed, so that we can share the promises made to him. Romans 8:17 calls us “joint heirs with Christ”. The blessing was to come on people from all parts of the earth, through Christ’s work. The seed was to become a world-wide group of people, like the sand of the sea shores and the stars of the sky.

**In Summary**

We can summarise the two strands of the promises given to Abraham:

1. **The Land**

Abraham and his seed, Jesus, and those in Him will inherit the land of Canaan and by extension the whole earth, and live there for ever. In this life they would not receive it, but would do so when Jesus returns.

1. **The Seed**

This was primarily Jesus. Through Him the sins (“enemies”) of mankind would be overcome, so that the blessings of forgiveness would be made available world-wide.

By baptism into the name of Jesus we become part of the seed and share in the promises to Abraham.

**The Hope of Israel**

Paul could define his hope as “the hope of Israel” (Acts 28:20). The true Christian hope is the original Jewish hope, the promises made to Abraham the father of the Jewish people (see also John 4:22).

The Early Christians preached:

1. “The things concerning the Kingdom of God and
2. The name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12).

These were the very two things explained to Abraham under slightly different headings:

1. Promises about the land and
2. Promises about the seed.

The good news about this Kingdom which was preached to Abraham played a big part in the early preaching of the Gospel (Acts 19:8; 20:25; 28:23,31).

**A Life of Faith**

Just technically being Abraham’s seed through baptism does not mean that we are acceptable with God. The Jews are Abraham’s seed naturally speaking, but this does not mean that they can be saved without being baptized and conforming their lives to Christ and the example of Abraham (Romans 9:7,8; 4:13,14).

The “seed” must have the characteristics of its ancestor. If we are to be the true seed of Abraham we must therefore not only be baptized but also have a very real faith in God’s promises, just as he had. Abrahamwas *“the father of all those who believe, who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had” (Romans 4:11,12; see also Galatians 3:7).*

Real faith must then show itself in action, otherwise, in God’s eyes, it isn’t faith (James 2:17).

**The PROMISE TO DAVID**

David, like Abraham and many other recipients of God’s promises, did not have an easy life. After many trials of faith he eventually became king of Israel. To show his appreciation of God’s love toward him during his life, he decided to build God a temple. The reply from God was that David’s son, Solomon, would build the temple and that God wanted to build David a house (2 Samuel 7:4-13). Then followed a detailed promise which repeats much of what was told Abraham, and which also filled in some other details:

* *“When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the blows of the sons of men: But my mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established for ever” (2 Samuel 7:12-16).*

The promise in Eden (Genesis 3:15) and the promises to Abraham (Genesis 12:22) talk of a promised “seed” coming. Having seen that the “seed” in those promises pointed forward to Jesus, it would be logical to assume that the seed promised to David is none other but the Lord Jesus Christ also. The Bible presents a consistent message and the promises of Christ are a key theme of the Old Testament. His description as the son of God (2 Samuel 7:14) confirms this, as do many other references in other parts of the Bible:-

* *“(Jesus), born of the seed of David according to the flesh (Romans 1:3).*
* *“From this man’s seed (David’s), according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a saviour – Jesus” (Acts 13:23; see also Revelation 22:16).*
* The angel told the virgin Mary concerning her son, Jesus: *“The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and of his Kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32,33).* This is applying the promise of David’s seed, in 2 Samuel 7:13 to Jesus.

With the seed firmly identified as Jesus, a number of details now become significant:-

**1. The seed**

*“Your seed, who will come from your body. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son.” “I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body” (2 Samuel 7:12,14; Psalm 132:10,11).*

Jesus, the seed, was to be a literal, bodily descendant of David, and yet have God as his Father. This could only be achieved by the virgin birth as described in the New Testament. Jesus’ mother was Mary, a descendant of David (Luke 1:32), but he had no human father. God acted miraculously upon Mary’s womb by the Holy Spirit in order to make her conceive Jesus, and so the Angel commented, “therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the son of God” (Luke 1:35).

**2. The house**

*“He shall build a house for My name” (2 Samuel 7:13).*

This shows that Jesus will build a temple for God. God’s “house” is where He is willing to live, and Isaiah 66:1,2 tells us that He will come to live in the hearts of men who are humble to His word. Jesus is therefore building a spiritual temple for God to dwell in, made up of the true believers. Descriptions of Jesus as the foundation stone of God’s spiritual temple (1 Peter 2:4-8) and of Christians as the temple stones (1 Peter 2:5) now slot into place.

**3. The throne**

*“I will establish the throne of his (Christ’s) kingdom forever…your (David’s) house and your kingdom. Your throne shall be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:13,16; see also Isaiah 9:6,7).*

Christ’s kingdom will therefore be a re-establishment of David’s kingdom of Israel. To fulfil this promise, Christ must reign on David’s “throne” which was literally in Jerusalem. The kingdom must be established here on earth in order to fulfil these promises.

**4. The kingdom**

*“Your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you” (2 Samuel 7:16).*

David would witness the establishment of Christ’s eternal kingdom. He must therefore be resurrected at Christ’s return so that he could see with his own eyes the kingdom being set up world-wide, with Jesus reigning from Jerusalem.

**Salvation promised**

These things which were promised to David are absolutely vital to understand. David joyfully spoke of these things as “an everlasting covenant…this is all my salvation and all my desire” (2 Samuel 23:5). These things relate to our salvation too; rejoicing in them should likewise be all our desire.

These doctrines are important and it is a tragedy that Christendom teaches doctrines which contradict these marvellous truths:

* If Jesus physically ‘pre-existed’, i.e. he existed as a person before he was born, then this makes nonsense of these promises that Jesus would be David’s ‘seed’ or descendant.
* If the kingdom of God will be in heaven, then Jesus cannot re-establish David’s kingdom of Israel, nor can he reign from David’s “throne”. These things were literally on the earth, and so their re-establishment must be in the same place.

**The Implications of the Promises**

Through baptism, the promises to David and also the other great promises of the Bible can apply to us – we too can have the hope of salvation in God’s Kingdom. We can become spiritual Israel, and therefore the people of God, separated from this world. Abraham, the natural father of the Jewish race, can become our spiritual father.

**Separation**

Having looked at this promise, and also the promise to Abraham, implications emerge in relation to the way we live if we accept them through baptism. For example, we become a separate people. We become spiritual Jews. What God spoke to men like Jacob, Abraham’s grandson, He therefore spoke to us (Hosea 12:5; Geneses 28:15; compare Hebrews 12:5,6). We therefore will seek all our associations only among the people of God, with whom we will share the kingdom of God.

Abraham’s example of consciously shunning the things of this world will be matched in his ‘children’. If we truly believe the promises, we too will separate ourselves “from the corruption that is in the world” (2 Peter 1:4). We would be happy to have a light hold on possession of property, knowing that this earth is ours. For now, we are just passing through it, surveying it, like Abraham did.

**Commitment**

All those in true covenant relationship with God will realize the fullness of commitment which He has entered, and will make a whole-hearted response and sacrifice (Malachi 2:4,5). Psalm 103:18 parallels “such as keep his covenant” with “those that remember his commandments to do them”. The extent of the implication of being in covenant with God ought to preclude the possibility of worshipping any other god. The covenant we can enter into demands loyalty.

If we take part in the promises of God, it should enable us to live godly lives now in this evil world. We can be sure of God’s mercy and truth towards us, so that whatever happens to us in this life we can have confidence that God will bring us to His kingdom.

**Unity**

Galatians 3:27-29 explains that through baptism into the covenant made with Abraham, there is a special unity between all in that covenant. Slave and free, male and female, Jew and Gentile are all thereby united, as they were in the early church. Through the power of the most basic facts of the Gospel preached to Abraham, this incredible unity is possible amongst believers. Believers are all united in Christ as ‘Abraham’s seed’, therefore they must show kindness, patience, etc.

**Present and Future Blessings**

By being baptised we can have the blessings of forgiveness now (Acts 3:27-29), and also look forward to the blessings of the future Kingdom of God. In Galatians 3:15-20 Paul is pointing out that the promises to Abraham offer eternal inheritance in the Kingdom on the basis of faith and grace, and neither the Law of Moses nor any other form of legalism can change that basis. An appreciation of the promises will enable us to see the wonder of salvation by grace, to the point that we will reject all forms of legalism and seeking to justify ourselves by works achieved.

**The Promise to Abraham can be ours**

Abraham was promised that his seed would have the Almighty God as their personal God, and would eternally inherit the land. If we acknowledge Abraham’s God as our God and can see in faith that God has promised the true believer the world, we will live now in the confidence that one day these promises will be completely fulfilled and by God’s grace and mercy we can share in them. The time is coming when God’s purpose from the beginning will be complete, and the “earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14).

**Part 4: THE WAY TO ETERNAL LIFE**

Immortality Conditional

Immortality is conditional, and is not something which we naturally possess, as the following passages prove:

* “Christ has.....brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” (2 Timothy 1:10; 1 John 1:2).
* “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life (inherent) in you. Whoever eats My flesh….has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:52-54) – to give him this “eternal life”. Christ’s reasoning throughout John chapter 6 is that He is the “bread of life”, and that only through correct response to him, is there immortality (John 6:47, 50, 51, 57, 58).
* “God has given to us (believers) eternal life, and this life is in His Son” (1 John 5:11). There can be no hope of immortality for those not “in Christ”. Only through Christ has immortality been made possible; He is “the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him” (Hebrews 5:9; Acts 3:15 A.V. margin). Therefore immortality for men came through the work of Christ.
* The true believer seeks for immortality, and will be rewarded by the gift of eternal life – something he does not naturally possess (Romans 2:7; 6:23; John 10:28). Our mortal body “must put on immortality” at the return of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:53); thus immortality is something promised, not now possessed (1 John 2:25).
* God alone has inherent immortality (1 Timothy 6:16).

What is the Soul?

In the light of the foregoing it ought to be inconceivable that man has an ‘immortal soul’. The Hebrew ‘Nephesh’ and Greek ‘Psuche’, which are translated ‘soul’ in the Bible are also translated as: *body, breath, creature, heart, mind, person, himself.* The ‘soul’ therefore refers to the person, body or self.

There is no difference between people and animals in our fundamental nature and death:

* *“For what happens to the sons of men also happens to beasts: one thing befalls them (note the double emphasis): as one dies, so dies the other....man has no advantage over beasts….All (i.e. man and animals) go to one place (the grave): all are from the dust, and all return to dust.” (Ecclesiastes 3:19, 20)*

Death of the Soul

A very basic fact is that all “living creatures” eventually die. About a third of the words translated ‘soul’, are associated with the death and destruction of the soul. This shows that the soul cannot be something which is immortal. For example: *“The soul who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4).* God can destroy the soul: *“fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body”* (Matthew 10:28. See also Ezekiel 22:27; Proverbs 6:32; Leviticus 23:30; Numbers 15:27-31; Isaiah 53:10).

That the ‘soul’ refers to the person or body rather than some immortal spark within us is shown by the majority of verses where the word occurs. Some examples: “The blood of the souls” (Jeremiah 2:34).“If a soul sin….if a soul touch any unclean thing….if a soul swear” (Leviticus 5:1-4 A.V. See also Psalm 103:1, 2, 5; Mark 8:35).

This is proof that the soul does not refer to any spiritual element within man; here, ‘soul’ just means one’s physical life.

The Spirit of Man

The Hebrew (‘Ruach’) and Greek (‘Pneuma’) words for ‘spirit’ are also translated in the following ways: life, spirit, mind, wind, breath.

God uses His spirit to preserve the natural creation. The spirit of God within man is therefore the life force within him, as these verses demonstrate:

* “The body without the spirit is dead” (James 2:26).
* God “breathed into his (Adam’s) nostrils the breath (spirit) of life; and man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7).

The spirit of life is given to us at birth, and remains as long as our body is alive.

The Removal of God’s Spirit

When God’s spirit is withdrawn from anything, it immediately perishes. If God “should gather to Himself His spirit and His breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust” (Job 34:14-15). When God takes away His spirit from us at death, not only does our body die, but our entire consciousness ceases. “Do not put your trust in princes…. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish” (Psalm 146:3-4).

At death, “the dust will return to the earth as it was; and the spirit will return to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7). When we die we ‘breathe our last’ in the sense that God’s spirit within us departs from us. That spirit is absorbed into God’s spirit which is all around us; so at death “the spirit will return to God”.

Death is Unconsciousness

The Bible makes it clear that we have no consciousness during the death state: “(Man’s) spirit departs, he return to his earth; in that very day his plans perish” (Psalm 146:4). “The dead know nothing….their love, their hatred, and their envy, have now perished” (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6; see also verse 10).

Death is repeatedly referred to as a **sleep** or **rest**, both for the righteous and the wicked: “And many of those who **sleep in the dust** of the earth shall awake”; “But you, go your way till the end; for **you shall rest**, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days” (Daniel 12:2, 13. See also Job 3:11, 13, 17). Sufficient evidence has been produced for us to bluntly state that the notion of the righteous going to a state of bliss in heaven at death, is simply not found in the Bible.

Resurrection

The Bible emphasizes that the reward of the righteous will be at the resurrection, at the coming of Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Paul said that if there is no resurrection, then all effort to be obedient to God is pointless (1 Corinthians 15:32). Surely he would not have reasoned like this if he believed that he would also be rewarded with his ‘soul’ going to heaven at death? The implication is that he believed the resurrection of the body to be the only form of reward.

Christ encouraged us with the words “you shall be repaid at **the resurrection** of the just” (Luke 14:14). At his return, Christ “will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body” (Philippians 3:20-21). As he now has a literal bodily form, energized purely by Spirit rather than blood, so we will share a similar reward.

Our Hope – Life with an Immortal Body

At the judgment we will be rewarded for how we have lived this life in a bodily form (2 Corinthians 5:10). The ungodly retain their present mortal body, which will then rot back to dust. Those who have tried to overcome the mind of the flesh with that of the Spirit “will of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Galatians 6:8) in the form of a Spirit-filled body.

There is ample evidence that the reward of the righteous will be in a bodily form. Once this is accepted, the vital importance of the resurrection should be apparent. Our present body clearly ceases to exist at death; if we can only experience eternal life and immortality in a bodily form, it follows that death must be a state of unconsciousness, until such time as our body is re-created and then given God’s nature. Our present body will then be changed to an immortal one (Philippians 3:21).

Through baptism we associate with Christ’s death and resurrection, showing we believe we too will share the reward which He received through His resurrection (Romans 6:3-5). Through sharing His sufferings now, we will also share His reward (2 Corinthians 4:10; Romans 8:23). This hope of a literal bodily reward has been understood by God’s people from earliest times (Isaiah 26:19). Job knew that although his body would be eaten by worms, he would, in a bodily form, receive his reward: “my redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last **on the earth**: and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in **my flesh** I shall see God” (Job 19:25-26).

The Place of Reward: Heaven or Earth?

The following passages show that **earth,** not heaven will be the location of God’s Kingdom.

* The ‘Lord’s Prayer’ asks for God’s Kingdom **to come**, whereby God’s desires will be done **on earth** as they are now done in heaven (Matthew 6:10). We are therefore praying for God’s Kingdom to come **on the earth**.
* “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit **the earth**” (Matthew 5:5. See also Psalm 37, especially verses 11, 22, 34, 35) – **not ‘…..** for their souls shall go to heaven’. Living in the earth forever means that eternal life in heaven is an impossibility.
* “David…is both dead and buried…. David **did not ascend into the heavens**” (Acts 2:29, 34). Peter explained that David’s hope was the resurrection from the dead at Christ’s return (Acts 2:22-36).
* The righteous will say at the judgment: Christ has “made us kings and priests to our God: and we shall reign **on the earth**” (Revelation 5:9, 10).

Hell

The Bible teaches that hell is the grave, where all men go at death. The Hebrew word ‘sheol’, translated ‘hell’, means ‘a covered place’. A good translation of this word is ‘grave’. The following examples of ‘sheol’, should torpedo the popular conception of hell as a place of fire and torment for the wicked:

* “Let the wicked……be silent in the grave” (Psalm 31:17); they will not be screaming in agony.
* “God will redeem my soul from the power of the **grave**” (Psalm 49:15) – i.e. David’s soul or body would be resurrected from the grave, or ‘hell’.

Seeing that ‘hell’ is the grave, the righteous will be saved from it through their resurrection to eternal life. The supreme example is that of Jesus, whose “soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption” (Acts 2:31 KJV) because he was resurrected. That Christ went to ‘hell’ should be proof enough that it is not just a place where the wicked go.

What happens to sinners?

God does not impute sin to those ignorant of His word (Romans 5:13). Those in this position will remain dead. Those who have known God’s requirements will be resurrected and judged at Christ’s return. If wicked, they will be punished with death and stay dead for ever (Revelation 2:11; 20:6). It is in this sense that the punishment for sin is ‘everlasting’, in that there will be no end to their death. It is one of God’s principles that the punishment for sin is death (Romans 6:23; 8:13; James 1:15). Death is a state of complete unconsciousness. Sin results in total destruction, not eternal torment. (Matthew 21:41; 22:7; Mark 12:9; James 4:12).

Unconsciousness – the Practical meaning of Death

There can be no activity in the grave…. Therefore **now** is the time to live a life active to the absolute maximum in the Lord’s service (Ecclesiastes 9:10-13). Moses pleaded with God to make time-frittering Israel see the implications of their mortality; having eloquently spoken of the tragedy of our mortality, he concludes: “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12). The tragic brevity of life means that we should quit time wasting follies. The fact we are going to die relatively soon, and lie unconscious, drives the man who seriously believes it, to faith in the God of resurrection. Death being like a sleep, it follows that judgment day is our next conscious experience after death. Because death is an ever more likely possibility for us, our judgment is effectively almost upon us. And we must live with and in that knowledge.

**Part 5: WHO IS GOD?**

There is Only One God

Deuteronomy 6:4,5 states: “The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength”. So the LORD’s unity is strongly linked with His being our God, the sole Lord and unrivalled Master of His people. It was the unity of God, and the imperative from it to love Him with all the heart, which was programmatic for the Jews’ daily living. This is why it was Jewish practice to recite these words several times a day, and also on their deathbed.

If there is only “one” God, as this passage clearly maintains, where does this leave the popular doctrine of the trinity? The trinity is one of the greatest false doctrines of all time, in its claim that there are three “persons” in the Godhead. The word trinity is never even found in the Bible. The Bible teaches that God is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that the Holy Spirit is His special power. Three separate entities – not “three in one” – as the confusing doctrine of the trinity would have us believe.

**More About God...**

God is from Everlasting to Everlasting

See what Habakkuk 1:12 builds upon the fact of God’s everlasting nature: “Are You not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One? We shall not die”. If we truly believe that we are His people, not those of this world, and that we are truly part of His eternal family, then His eternity becomes a guarantee of our eternal salvation.

God is the Creator

Because of God’s awesome creation and the power of the Word that formed it all, we should likewise stand in awe of Him and recognize the power of His word (Psalm 33:6-9). Because we are created in God’s image; the structure of our very bodies is an imperative to give ourselves totally to His cause (Matthew 22:19-21). Whatever bears God’s image – i.e. our very bodies – must be given to Him. “It is He who made us, and (therefore) we are His (Psalm 100:3 NIV). We must be His in practice because He is our Creator. So it is not that we merely believe in creation rather than evolution; more than this, such belief in creation must elicit a life given over to that creator.

God Sees and Knows All Things, Through His Spirit

The Old Testament character of Job knew this, and therefore he commented, it was impossible that he would lust after a woman, if he really believed (as he claimed he did) that God was omniscient: “I have made a covenant with my eyes; Why then should I look upon a young woman?... (for) does He (God) not see my ways, and count all my steps?” (Job 31:1-4).

Likewise God had to remind Israel: "Can any hide himself in secret places, so I shall not see him?” (Jeremiah 23:24). The context is appealing to the people to quit their sins. We should labour to enter the Kingdom, because God knows absolutely our every thought and action of ours and will ultimately judge them (Hebrews 4:11-13).

God is a Real, ePersonal Being

God is a real person, as the following points prove:

* It is a fundamental tenet of Christianity that Jesus is the Son of God. If God is not a real being, then it is impossible for Him to have a Son who was the ‘image of His person” (Hebrews 1:3)
* Further, it becomes difficult to develop a personal, living relationship with ‘God’, if ‘God’ is just a concept in our mind. It is tragic that the majority of religions have this unreal, intangible conception of God.
* As God is so infinitely greater than we are, it is understandable that many people’s faith has balked at the clear promises that ultimately we will see Him: “Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).
* Jesus tells us that we should not swear, because “he who swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it” (Matthew 23:22).
* “God said, Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness” (Genesis 1:26). Thus man is made in the image and likeness of God, as manifested through the angels. Our creation in the image of God surely means that we can infer something about the real object, of which we are but an image. Thus God, whom we reflect, is not something nebulous of which we cannot conceive.
* The faithful are promised that they will inherit God’s nature (2 Peter 1:4).
* We will be given a body like that of Jesus (Philippians 3:21), and we know that he will have a physical body in the Kingdom.

The personality of God is, therefore, related to the Gospel of the Kingdom. There can be no sensible concept of worship, religion or personal relationship with God therefore until it is appreciated that God is a real being and that we are made in His image. We need to develop His mental likeness now, so that we may be made fully like Him in the Kingdom of God.

What Does This Mean for Me?

There is a vast difference between having a vague notion that there is a higher power, and actually being certain of what He is offering in return for faithful service to Him. Hebrews 11:6 makes this point, we “must believe that He (God) is” *and* “that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him”.

An awareness within us that there is a God, does not mean that we are automatically acceptable to God. If we seriously agree that we really do have a creator, we should “therefore keep His… commandments” (Deuteronomy 4:39,40). As we search the Scriptures in order to do this, we will find that our faith in God’s existence is strengthened.

**Part 5: THE REAL CHRIST**

True Christian faith is centred around the work of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. His life, death and resurrection form the basis for God’s plan of salvation. It is vital to understand the real reason for Christ, his true status as Son of God and how we can benefit from his work. Jesus prayed to his Father just before his cruel death: “This is eternal life, that they (true believers) may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent” (John 17:3).

The Virgin Birth

Over 2000 years ago the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary with this message: “You will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest…Then Mary said to the angel, How can this be, since I do not know a man? (i.e. she was a virgin). And the angel answered and said to her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:31-35).

Through the Holy Spirit (God’s breath / power) acting upon her, Mary conceived Jesus while still a virgin. Thus Joseph was not the true father of Jesus. Without the Holy Spirit acting upon the womb of Mary, Jesus, the Son of God, could not have come into existence. Jesus was “begotten” by God (John 3:16), rather than created as Adam was originally. This explains the closeness of God’s association with Jesus and also helps explain his natural aptitude for the ways of God his Father.

Christ’s Place in God’s Plan

God had a complete plan formulated right from the beginning of creation (John 1:1). His desire to have a Son was in His plan from the beginning. The Old Testament reveals different aspects of God’s plan of salvation in Christ; from the promises to the Jewish fathers, to the prophecies of the prophets and the types of the Law of Moses. Christ existed in God’s mind and purpose from the beginning, although he only came into existence physically through his birth of Mary.

Hebrews 1:4-7, 13,14 stress that Christ was not an angel; whilst in his mortal life he was less than angels (Hebrews 2:7), he was exalted to a far greater honour than them seeing he was God’s “only begotten Son” (John 3:16). The Apostle Peter sums up the position: Christ “was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times” (1Peter 1:20).

Jesus was the central pivot of the Gospel: God “had promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:1-4).

This summarizes the history of Christ:

1. Promised in the Old Testament – i.e. in God’s plan;

2. Created as a physical person through the virgin birth, as a seed of David.

3. Due to his perfect character (“the spirit of holiness”), shown during his mortal life He was resurrected;

4. Publicly declared to be the Son of God by the apostles’ spirit-gifted preaching.

The Foreknowledge of God

God has complete ‘foreknowledge’. We will be greatly helped in appreciating how fully Christ was in God’s mind at the beginning, while not physically existing, if we can come to terms with the fact that God knows all things which will occur in the ‘future’. God can therefore speak and think about things which do not exist, as though they do. God “calls those things which do not exist as though they did” (Romans 4:17). He declares “the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure” (Isaiah 46:10). Because of this, God can speak of the dead as if they are alive, and can speak of men as if they were alive before birth. The “counsel”, or word of God, had prophesied Christ from the beginning; he was always in God’s purpose or “pleasure”. It was therefore certain that at some time Christ would be physically born; God would fulfil His stated purpose in Christ.

Biblical Hebrew has a ‘prophetic perfect’ tense, which uses the past tense to describe future things which God has promised. Thus David said, “This *is* the house of the Lord God” (1 Chronicles 22:1), when as yet the temple was only promised by God. Scripture abounds with examples of God’s foreknowledge. God was so certain that He would fulfil the promises to Abraham, that He told him: “To your descendants I *have given* this land…” (Genesis 15:18) at a time when Abraham did not even have descendants (see also Genesis 17:5).

Christ was spoken of as existing from the beginning in God’s mind and plan, although physically he could not have done so. He was “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). Jesus did not die then literally; he was the “Lamb of God sacrificed about 4,000 years later on the cross (John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7). In the same way as Jesus was chosen from the beginning, (1 Peter 1:20), so were the believers (Ephesians 1:4; the same Greek word for “chosen” is used in these

Differences Between God and Jesus

There is a fine balance to be drawn between those passages which emphasize the degree to which “God was in Christ” (e.g.2 Corinthians 5:19), and those which highlight his humanity. The latter group of passages makes it impossible to justify from the Bible the idea that Jesus is God Himself. One of the clearest summaries of the relationship between God and Jesus is found in 1 Timothy 2:5: “There is **one** God, **and** one **mediator** between God and men, the **man** Christ Jesus.”

Reflection upon the highlighted words leads to the following conclusions:

1. The Father is God. (1 Corinthians 8:6; Isaiah 63:16; 64:8).

2. In addition to this one God, there is the mediator, the man Christ Jesus – “…***and*** one mediator…,” indicating a difference between Christ and God.

3. “Mediator” means that Christ is a go-between. A mediator between sinful man and sinless God cannot be sinless God Himself; it had to be a sinless man, of human nature – “the *man* Christ Jesus.”

**The Nature of Jesus**

The word ‘nature’ refers to what we naturally, fundamentally are. The Bible speaks of only two natures – that of God, and that of man. By nature God cannot die, be tempted etc. Christ was not of God’s nature during his life, he was totally of human nature. It was vital that Christ was tempted like us (Hebrews 4:15), so that through his perfect overcoming of temptation he could gain forgiveness for us.

The wrong desires, which are the basis of our temptations, come from within us (Mark 7:15-23), from within our human nature (James 1:13-15). It was necessary, therefore, that Christ should be of human nature so that he could experience and overcome these temptations.

*“As the children (us) are partakers of flesh and blood (human nature), he (Christ) also himself likewise took part (i.e. “partook”, R.S.V.) of the same (nature); that through death he might destroy…the devil…For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the (nature of the) seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest…to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted”. (Hebrews 2:14-18 KJV)*

This passage emphasizes the fact that Jesus had human nature: “*He also himself likewise”* partook of it (Hebrews 2:14). This phrase uses three words all with the same meaning, just to drive the point home. Christ was the seed of Abraham (2:16), who had come to bring salvation for believers. In *every* way he had “to be made like unto his brethren” (2:17) so that God could grant us forgiveness through Christ’s sacrifice.

**Forgiveness**

Whenever baptized believers sin, they can come to God, confessing their sin in prayer through Christ (1 John 1:9); God is aware that Christ was tempted to sin exactly as they are, but that he was perfect, overcoming that very temptation which they fail. Because of this, “God for Christ’s sake” can forgive us (Ephesians 4:32 KJV). *“God, by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh” (Romans 8:3).*

“Sin” refers to the natural proneness to sin which we have by nature. We continue to sin, and “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). To get out of this predicament, man needed help. God therefore intervened and gave us His own Son, who had our “sinful flesh”, with all the promptings to sin which we have. Unlike every other man, Christ overcame every temptation

**The Humanity of Jesus**

The Gospel records show how completely Jesus had human nature. He was weary, and had to sit down to drink from a well (John 4:6). “Jesus wept” at the death of Lazarus (John 11:35). Most supremely, the record of his final sufferings should be proof enough of his humanity. “Now my soul is troubled”, he admitted as he prayed for God to save him from having to go through with his death on the cross (John 12:27). He “prayed, saying, O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup (of suffering and death) pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:39).

From childhood “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature (i.e. spiritual maturity, cp Ephesians 4:13), and in favour with God and men”. (Luke 2:52), see also 2:40). This shows Christ’s physical growth as being parallel to his spiritual development. Obedience to God’s will is something which we can all learn over a period of time. Christ also had to go through this process of learning obedience to his Father. “Though he was a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered, and having been perfected (i.e. spiritually mature), he became the author of eternal salvation” (Hebrews 5:8,9; see also Phil. 2:7,8.).

Jesus had to make a conscious, personal effort to be righteous; he was not forced by God, which would have resulted in him being a mere puppet. Jesus truly loved us, and gave his life on the cross from this motive. The constant emphasis upon the love of Christ for us would be hollow if God forced him to die on the cross (Ephesians 5:2,25; Revelation 1:5; Galatians 2:20). That Jesus *did* have the option whether to obey or not, makes us able to appreciate his love, and to form a personal relationship with him. It was because of Christ’s willingness to voluntarily give his life, that God was so delighted with him. “Therefore my Father loves me, because I lay down my life. No man takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself” (John 10:17,18).

What Does This Mean For Me?

The Lord Jesus can become real to us in our common, everyday lives because He too faced the temptations we face. We can really believe that forgiveness is possible through the work of such a representative; his example can be a living inspiration to rise above our lower nature. Appreciating the doctrines of salvation through Christ enables us to pray acceptably; “we have boldness and access with confidence by *the* Faith” – not just ‘by faith’, but as a result of *the* Faith (Ephesians 3:12 KJV). After being baptized into Christ we can come boldly before God’s throne in prayer, with a true heart and clear conscience (Hebrews 4:16). This “boldness” will be reflected in our being ‘bold’ in our witness (2 Corinthians 3:12; 7:4). ‘Boldness’ characterized the early church (Acts 4:13,29,31; Philippians 1:20).

God existed from infinity, and yet only 2,000 years ago He gave His only and His *begotten* Son. And that Son was a human being in order to save humans – only a few million of us (if that), who lived in a 6,000-year time span. That the only Son of God should die for a very few of us here, we who crawl on the surface of this tiny planet for such a fleeting moment of time, is wondrous indeed.

Christ died so that God could work out our salvation. The love of God for us is likened to a young man marrying a virgin (Isaiah 62:5) with all the intensity and joyful expectation and lack of disillusion. And more than this, Jesus Christ died for you, in the shameful way that He did. When this is fully appreciated we are left in total wonder and gratitude for God’s love.

**The Trinity – Unscriptural**

The Bible’s clear teaching about Christ gives no support for the doctrine of the Trinity. Consider the following:

Luke 1:31-35: Jesus *would be* the Son of God. Note the many future tenses in these verses. Jesus did not pre-exist before his birth of Mary.

John 3:16: Jesus was the “only *begotten* Son” of God. He ‘began’ when he was ‘conceived’ (idea of beginning, Luke 1:31) in Mary’s womb. If Jesus was begotten by God, then his Father is older than he is. God has no beginning (Psalm 90:2) and therefore Jesus cannot be God Himself.

Mary is described in the Gospels as Christ’s “mother”. Jesus did not exist before his birth of Mary.

The word ‘Trinity’ never occurs in the Bible.

1 Timothy 2:5: “There is *one* God, *and* one *mediator* between God and men, the *man* Christ Jesus.” (see also 1 Corinthians 8:6; Isaiah 63:16; 64:8).

“God is not a man” (Numbers 23:19; Hosea 11:9); yet Chris was “the son of man”.

Christ is “the *Son* of the Highest” (Luke 1:32). God only has ultimate highness; Jesus as “the Son of the Highest” cannot have been God Himself in person.

The language of Father and Son, used about God and Jesus, shows they are not the same. A son may have certain similarities to his father, but cannot be one and the same person.

Jesus was “made like his brethren” (Hebrews 2:17) so that God could grant us forgiveness through Christ’s sacrifice. To say that Jesus was not totally of human nature denies the good news of Christ.

There are a number of obvious differences between God and Jesus, which clearly show that Jesus was not God Himself.

**GOD JESUS**

“God cannot be tempted” (James 1:13) Christ “was in all points tempted as we are”

(Hebrews 4:15).

God cannot die – He is immortal by nature Christ died for three days (Matthew 12:40; (Psalm 90:2; 1 Timothy 6:16). 16:21).

God cannot be seen by men Men saw Jesus and handled him (1 John 1:1

(1 Timothy 6:16; Exodus 33:20) emphasizes this).

In some ways Christ’s ‘will’, or desires, was different from that of God (Matthew 26:39; John 5:30).

From childhood “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men” (Luke 2:52). This would not be possible if Jesus was ‘God the Son’.

Christ did not know the exact time of his second coming, although the Father did (Mark 13:32).

God was pleased with Christ’s willing obedience which is hard to understand if Jesus was God, living out a life in human form as some kind of tokenistic association with sinful man (Matthew 3:17; 12:18; 17:5).

**Part 6: THE HOLY SPIRIT**

The Hebrew word translated “spirit” in the Old Testament strictly means “breath” or “power”; thus God’s spirit is His “breathing”, the very essence of God, reflecting His mind. It is not a separate person from God. It is a common Bible teaching that how a man thinks is expressed in his actions (Proverbs 23:7; Matthew 12:34). A little reflection upon our own actions will confirm this; we think of something and then we do it. God likewise thinks and therefore does things. “Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass, and as I have purposed, so it shall stand” (Isaiah 14:24).

Many passages clearly identify God’s spirit with His power. In order to create the earth, “…the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, Let there be light; and there was light” (Genesis 1:2,3). God’s spirit was the power by which all things, e.g. light, were made. A comparison of Matthew 12:28 and Luke 11:20 shows that “the finger of God” and “the spirit of God” are parallel – God in action is His spirit. “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of is mouth” (Psalm 33:6). God’s sp His mouth” (Psalm 33:6). God’s spirit is therefore described as follows:

* His breath
* His word
* His finger
* His hand

It is therefore His power by which He achieves all things. The spirit given to us, and all creation, is what sustains our life. We have “the breath of the spirit of life” within us (Genesis 7:22) given to us by God at birth (Psalm 104:30; Genesis 2:7). God is the life force which sustains all creation. His spirit is present everywhere (Psalm 139:2,7,9,10).

Gifts of the Holy Spirit

At various times in His dealings with men, God gave the use of His power (“Holy Spirit”) to men. However, this was never in the form of a “blank cheque”, as it were, enabling them to do what they wished; always the use of this Holy Spirit was for a specific purpose. When it was accomplished, the gift of the Holy Spirit was withdrawn. We must remember that God’s spirit acts in a way which fulfils the purpose which is in His mind. The gifts of Holy Spirit were always to achieve specific things at specific times. The making of the tabernacle is an example. Early in Israel’s history; they were commanded to make an elaborate tent (“tabernacle”) in which the altar and other holy items could be kept; detailed instructions were given concerning how to make all the items which would be necessary for the worship of God. To accomplish this, God gave His spirit to certain men. They were, “filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron’s garments…” etc. (Exodus 28:3).

Reasons for the Gifts in the First Century

Remembering the basic principles which we have already learnt about the gifts of God’s spirit, we now come to the New Testament record of the spirit gifts which were possessed in the early church (i.e. the groups of believers who lived in the generation after the time of Jesus).

Christ’s last command was for the apostles to go throughout the world preaching the Gospel (Mark 16:15,16). This they did, with the theme of Christ’s death and resurrection foremost in their message. But remember that then there was no New Testament as we know it. As they stood in market places and synagogues speaking about this man Jesus of Nazareth, their story could have sounded bizarre – a carpenter from Israel who was perfect, who died and was then resurrected in accurate fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, and who was now asking them to be baptised and follow His example.

In our day we appeal to the New Testament records of the work and doctrine of Jesus in order to prove that our message is from God; but in those days, before it was written down and available, God allowed His preachers the use of His Holy Spirit in order to underline the truth of what they were saying. This was the specific reason for the use of the gifts in the sight of the world; the absence of the written New Testament would have also made it difficult for the new groups of believers to grow in their faith.

As ever, these reasons for the granting of the Holy Spirit were made abundantly plain:

* “When he (Jesus) ascended up on high (to heaven), he…gave (spirit) gifts unto men… for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry (preaching), for the edifying of the body of Christ (i.e. the believers)” (Ephesians 4:8,12 KJV).
* So Paul wrote to the believers at Rome, “I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established” (Romans 1:11).

Concerning the use of the gifts to confirm the preaching of the Gospel, we read: “God also bearing witness (to the message of salvation) both with signs and wonders, with various miracles” (Hebrews 2:4). “Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done (a miracle), being astonished at the teaching of the Lord” (Acts 13:12). All this is summarized by the comment on the apostles’ obedience to the command to preach: “And they (the disciples) went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs” (Mark 16:20).

The Withdrawal of the Gifts

The miraculous gifts of God’s spirit will be used again by the believers in order to change this present world into God’s Kingdom, after the return of Christ. The gifts are therefore called “the powers of the age to come” (Hebrews 6:4,5); and Joel 2:26-29 describes a great outpouring of the spirit gifts after the repentance of Israel. The very fact that these gifts will be given to the believers on Christ’s return is proof enough that they are not possessed now. To any Christian, with eyes open to both Scripture and world events, the Lord’s return must surely be soon.

From all the Biblical records of the use of spirit gifts, it is clear that they were given at particular times for particular purposes and were withdrawn by God when His purpose was accomplished: “Whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues (the ability to speak foreign languages, in order to preach), they will cease…but when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.” (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). As the Good News Bible clearly states: the gifts “are temporary”.

Ephesians 4:8-14 helps us understand this further. This passage explains that the gifts of the first century were to be given until the perfect, or mature, man was reached. Making such a fuss about possessing the spirit gifts is therefore not a sign of spiritual maturity. The progress each reader of these words should now make, is towards a deeper appreciation of the written Word of God, to rejoice in the completeness of God’s basic revelation of Himself to us through it, and to respond to it in humble obedience.

2 Timothy 3:16,17 teaches that response to “all scripture” enables the man of God to be “perfect”, complete, and mature. So once the New Testament was completed, towards the end of the first century, the gifts were no longer needed. They had achieved their purpose, of enabling the church to become “fully equipped” (Ephesians 4:8 Weymouth). When the Bible was completed, the church was indeed fully equipped to preach the gospel of salvation.

Present Claims of Spirit Possession

A number of other points have to be made concerning the repeated claims of those who think they now possess the miraculous gifts. Whatever one makes of the above arguments for the withdrawal of the gifts, the reality is that the present claims to Spirit gift possession are sadly in conflict with the nature of the gifts as recorded in the New Testament. Whatever is being done today is different from that which happened in the early church.

Present “speaking in tongues” tends to repeat the same short syllables over and over again, e.g. “Lala, lala, lala, shama. Jesus, Jesus…..”. This is not in the syntax associated with any language; when one hears someone speak in a foreign tongue, it is usually possible to discern that they are communicating something by the pattern of the words they use, although we may not understand those words. Yet modern tongue-speaking does not feature this, underlining the fact that it is not building up the church, which was the purpose of the first century gifts.

Some Pentecostals claim that speaking in tongues is a sign of being “saved” and will therefore accompany every true conversion. This claim runs into serious difficulty with the description of the early church as a body, in which those possessing different gifts were like the different parts. Not everyone was an arm or leg, and so likewise not everyone possessed any one gift, e.g. tongues. 1 Corinthians 12:27-30 makes this clear. Another problem for the Pentecostal argument is that Philip converted many people in Samaria – i.e. they were baptised in water after understanding the Gospel, but they did not receive the spirit gifts; because after this, Peter and John came to them: “When they had come down, (they) prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit…through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given” (Acts 8:4-18).

It is possible that the passing on of the Spirit gifts was only by this laying on of hands, which is not frequently practised by modern claimants. Thus Paul wanted to visit the Romans in order to give them the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Romans 1:11 cf. Ephesians 4:12). It would therefore follow that once the generation who had this power passed away, there was no way of continuing the gifts. If indeed they are obtainable purely by prayer, it is difficult to understand why Paul had to visit Rome to transfer the gifts to believers there. The only answer must be that “through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given”.

**Part 7: BAPTISM**

Baptism is one of the most basic Bible doctrines (see Hebrews 6:2 for example). True baptism can only occur after a correct grasp of the basic truths which comprise the Gospel. If you wish to become truly associated with the great hope which the Bible offers through Jesus Christ, then baptism is an absolute necessity. “Salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22) in the sense that the promises concerning salvation were made only to Abraham and his seed. We can only have those promises made to us if we become *in* the Seed, by being baptized *into* Christ (Galatians 3:22-19). Jesus therefore clearly commanded His followers: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel (which is contained in the promises to Abraham – Galatians 3:8) to every creature. He who believes **and** is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:15-16).

Baptism – Start of a New Life

Baptism is not just an optional extra, it is a vital prerequisite for salvation. Baptism must be followed by a lifetime of continued obedience to God’s Word. Jesus emphasized this: “Most assuredly, I say unto you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). “Born of water” refers to baptism: after this, one must be born again of the spirit. This is an ongoing process “Being born again….through the word of God” (1 Peter 1:23). Thus it is through our continued response to God’s spirit word that we become born of the spirit.

Baptized Into Christ

We are “baptized *into* Christ” (Galatians 3:27*), into* His name (Acts 19:5; 18:16; Matthew 28:19). Note that we are baptized into *Christ* – not into any church or any human organization. Without baptism we are not “in Christ”, and therefore not covered by His saving word (Acts 4:12).

True Belief Compels Baptism

The book of Acts of the Apostles shows the vital importance of baptism and emphasizes how *immediately* people were baptized after accepting the Gospel (e.g. Acts 8:12, 36-39; 9:18; 10:47; 16:15). This emphasis is understandable once it is appreciated that without baptism our learning of the Gospel is in vain. The prison keeper at Philippi was suddenly plunged into the crisis of his life by a massive earthquake which completely broke up his high security prison. The prisoners had ample opportunity to escape – something which would have cost him his life. His faith in the Gospel then became real, so much so that “the same hour of the night….immediately he and all his family were baptized” (Acts 16:33). Many a hesitant candidate for baptism can take true inspiration from that man. That he could make such an act of faith in the middle of huge immediate problems is proof enough that he already had a detailed knowledge of the Gospel, seeing that such real faith only comes from hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17 cp. Acts 17:11).

Acts 8:26-40 records how an Ethiopian official was studying his Bible whilst riding in a chariot through the desert. He met Philip, who extensively explained the Gospel to him, including the requirement of baptism. Humanly speaking, it must have seemed impossible to obey the command to be baptized in that waterless desert. Yet God would not give a command which He knows some people cannot obey. “As they went down the road, they came to some water”, i.e. an oasis, where baptism was possible (Acts 8:36).

The apostle Paul received a dramatic vision from Christ which so pricked his conscience that as soon as possible he “arose and was baptized” (Acts 9:18). Paul later talked about his life after baptism like this: “I press toward the goal for the prize….” (Philippians 3:7,8,13,14). This is the language of an athlete straining forward to break the finishing tape. Such concentration of mental and physical endeavour should characterize our lives after baptism. Baptism is the beginning of a race toward the Kingdom of God; it is not just a token of having changed churches and beliefs, nor is it a passive entrance into a relaxed life of easy-going adherence to a few vaguely stated Christian principles. Baptism associates us in an ongoing sense with the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus (Romans 6:3-5).

As was true for Paul, so it is for all who have been properly baptized; baptism is a decision which one will never regret. All our lives we will be aware that we made the correct choice. Of few human decisions can we ever be so certain. The question has to be seriously answered: “Why should I not be baptized?”

How Should We Be Baptized?

There is a widely held view that baptism can be performed, especially on babies, by sprinkling water on their foreheads (i.e. ‘christening’). This is in stark contrast to the Biblical requirement for baptism. The Greek word ‘baptizo’, which is translated ‘baptize’ in the English Bible, does *not* mean to sprinkle; it means to completely wash and immerse in a liquid. This word is used in classical Greek concerning ships sinking and being ‘baptized’ (i.e. submerged) in water. It is also used with reference to a piece of cloth being dyed from one colour to another by ‘baptizing’, or dipping it into a dye. To change the colour of the cloth, it is evident that it had to be fully immersed under the liquid, rather than have the dye sprinkled upon it. That immersion is indeed the correct form of baptism is borne out by the following verses:

* “John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was **much water** there” (John 3:23).
* Jesus was baptized by John in the River Jordan: “Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway **out of** the water” (Matthew 3:13-16 KJV). His baptism was clearly by immersion – he “went up…**out of** the water” after baptism. One of the reasons for Jesus being baptized was in order to set an example, so that no one could seriously claim to follow Jesus without copying his example of baptism by immersion.
* Philip and the Ethiopian official “went down **into** the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up **out of** the water…” (Acts 8:38,39).
* Baptism is a burial (Colossians 2:12), which implies a total covering.
* Baptism is called a ‘washing away’ of sins (Acts 22:16). The point of true conversion is likened to a ‘washing’ in Revelation 1:5; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 10:22 etc. This language of washing is far more relevant to baptism by dipping than to sprinkling.

There are several Old Testament indications that acceptable approach to God was through some form of washing (Priests: Leviticus 8:6; Exodus 40:32; Israelites: Deuteronomy 23:11; Naaman a Gentile: 2 Kings 5:9-14). So baptism refers to a complete dipping in water after first understanding the basic message of the Gospel.

The Meaning of Baptism

One of the reasons for baptism by immersion is that going under the water symbolizes our going into the grave – associating us with the death of Christ, and indicating our ‘death’ to our previous life of sin and ignorance. Coming up out of the water connects us with the resurrection of Christ, relating us to the hope of resurrection to eternal life at His return, as well as to living a new life now, spiritually triumphant over sin on account of Christ’s victory achieved by his death and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5).

Because salvation has been made possible only through Christ’s death and resurrection, it is vital that we associate ourselves with these things if we are to be saved. The symbolic dying and resurrecting with Christ, which baptism gives, is the only way to do this. Sprinkling does not fulfil this symbol.

A New Way of Life

At baptism, “our old man (way of life) is crucified” along with Christ on the cross (Romans 6:6); God “made us alive together with Christ” at baptism (Ephesians 2:5). However, we still have human nature after baptism, and the fleshly way of life will keep raising its head. The ‘crucifixion’ of our flesh is therefore an ongoing process which only *begins* at baptism, hence Jesus told the believer to take up his cross each day and follow Him, as it were, in the procession towards Calvary (Luke 9:23; 14:27). Whilst a life of true crucifixion with Christ is not easy, there is unspeakable consolation and joy through being also united with Christ’s resurrection. Christ brought about “peace through the blood of His cross” (Colossians 1:20. See also Philippians 4:7; John 14:27; 2 Corinthians 1:5).

There is also the freedom which comes from knowing that our natural self is really dead, and therefore Jesus is very actively living with us through our every trial. The great apostle Paul could speak from much experience of this all down the long eventful years of his life: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God” (Galatians 2:20).

Saved By Christ’s Resurrection

Association with Christ’s resurrection to eternal life gives a person access to the same at His return. It is through sharing in this resurrection, then, that we can finally be saved (1 Peter 3:21). Jesus stated this in very simple terms: “Because I live, you will live also” (John 14:19). Paul likewise: “We were reconciled to God through the death of His Son….we shall be saved by His life” (resurrection; Romans 5:10). By associating ourselves with Christ’s death and sufferings in baptism, and our subsequent way of life, we will surely share in His glorious resurrection. (2 Timothy 2:11,12; 2 Corinthians 4:10,11,14; Philippians 3:10,11 compare with Galatians 6:14).

Luke 3:12 records how the “tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, Teacher, what shall we do?” There is a parallel between desiring baptism and realizing that we must *do* something concrete in our lives. The baptism process brings us into the realm of God’s gracious forgiveness and redemption, and into living contact with the real Christ. There is no way we can be passive to this and do nothing about it.

Baptism is Vital for Salvation

When we are baptized we should try not to continue in sin, seeing we are “dead” to it (Romans 6:2). This is one of the most basic implications of baptism. We will realise that the unbaptized world (including those who have not been baptized properly) has no hope and we will try with all our heart to persuade others to be baptized. Baptism can never be undone; we for evermore live our lives with a sense of responsibility to God (1 Peter 1:17-19).

Carrying Christ’s Name

The wonder of being baptized into Christ means that like the early brethren, we will rejoice to suffer shame for the sake of carrying Christ’s Name (Matthew 10:24,25). It will be “enough” for us that we know something of our Lord’s sufferings. The more we reflectively read the Gospels, the more we will know the nature and extent of His sufferings, and the more we will see in our own something of His.

Loving One Another As Ourselves

Paul reasons that we are the body of Christ by baptism; and nobody hates their own body. He feeds and cares for it. This not only means that the Lord will likewise care for us (Ephesians 5:29-30). It means that we now have the basis of self-respect and a healthy love of self (the kind the Lord had in mind when he said we should love our neighbour *as* we love ourselves). Because we are to count ourselves as the body of *Christ*, we no longer need to wallow in the feeling that we are so unworthy, we aren’t worth making the effort with. And therefore we should truly love our brother.

“One Man In Christ”

By being baptized into Christ, all that is true of him becomes true of us. We must aspire to be united, because “ye are all one man in Christ” (Galatians 3:28 RV). We “are all sons of God” (3:26) because of our baptism into the Son of God. And so Paul goes on to reason that just as Christ was “the heir”, who is “master of all”, “even so we” were kept under the law for a time (Galatians 4:1-3). The basis of our unity is that there is only one Jesus, and by being in Him we are living lives committed to the imitation of that same man. The unity between baptized believers is enough to witness to the world and arrest their attention – that this is all something true and valid.

**APPENDIX: THE DEVIL AND SATAN**

Many religions believe there is a monster called the Devil or Satan, who is the originator of all problems and is responsible for the sins we commit.  But the Bible teaches us that God is all-powerful and that the Angels cannot sin. This means it is impossible that there is any supernatural being that is opposed to God.  We are questioning the supremacy of God Almighty by believing that such a being does exist.

**The Source of Evil**

There is a belief that good things come from God and bad things from the Devil or Satan.  The ancient Babylonians believed in a god of good, and a god of evil.  God’s response was, “I am the LORD, and there is no other; there is no God besides me … I form the light and create darkness.  I make peace and create calamity.  I, the LORD, do **all** these things” (Isaiah 45:5-7,22).  God is the Author, the Creator of “calamity” and sin.  There is a difference between calamity and sin.  Sin entered the world as a result of man not God (Romans 5:12). God tells the Babylonians, “There is **no** God beside me.”  There is no source of power apart from Him.  Thus a true believer in God cannot accept the idea of a supernatural devil or demons.

**God: The Creator of Disaster**

There are many examples of God bringing “evil” into people’s lives.

* Amos 3:6 says that if there is calamity in a city God has done it.
* Micah 1:12 says that “disaster came down from the Lord to the gate of Jerusalem”.
* Job recognised that, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away” (Job 1:21).  He does not say, “The Lord gave and Satan has taken away”.  Job commented, “Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?” (Job 2:10).  Job’s friends comforted him over “all the adversity that **the LORD** had brought upon him” (Job 42:11 cp. 19:21; 8:3).

So God is the source of “evil” in the sense of being the ultimate permitter of problems in our lives.

**The Orthodox Devil – Illogical**

“For whom the LORD loves He chastens … If you endure chastening … afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:6-11).  This shows that trials given by God eventually lead to our spiritual growth. To say that the devil forces us to sin while at the same time bringing problems which lead to our developing “the peaceable fruit of righteousness” is inconsistent.  Here the orthodox idea of the devil runs into problems.  For example, the passages which speak of delivering man to satan “that his spirit may be saved”.(1 Corinthians 5:5), or “that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Timothy 1:20).  If Satan is really a being bent on causing men to sin, why do these passages speak of “Satan” in a positive light? The answer: an adversary, a “Satan”, or difficulty in life, can often result in positive spiritual effects on a believer’s life.

**The Origin of Sin**

**Sin comes from *inside* us.** It is ***our***  fault that we sin.  Remember, “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23) – sin leads to death.  If it is the devil’s fault that we sin, then a just God should punish the devil rather than us.  But the fact that we are judged for our own sins, shows that we are responsible for them.  “There is **nothing** that enters a man from outside which can defile him … For from **within**, out of **the heart** of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders … All these evil things come from within and defile a man” (Mark 7:15-23).

The idea that there is something sinful **outside** of us which causes us to sin is incompatible with the teaching of Jesus.  From **within**, out of the heart of man, come all these evil things.  James 1:14 tells us how we are tempted: “Each one is tempted when he is drawn by his **own desires** and enticed”.  We are tempted by our **own** evil desires evil desires, not by anything outside of us.  “Where do wars and fights come from among you?” James asks; “Do they not come from **your** desires for pleasure?” (James 4:1).  Each of us has temptation generated by our own evil desires.

**Paul identifies the source of sin**

Paul laments: “In me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells … For the good that I will to do, I do not do …if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells in me” (Romans 7:18-21).  Paul does not blame his sinning on an external being called the devil.  He located his own evil nature as the real source of sin: “it is no longer I that do it, but **sin that dwells in me.** I find then a law, **that** evil **is present** with (i.e. within) me, the one who wills to do good” (Romans 7:20-21).  So he says that the opposition to being spiritual comes from something that he calls “sin that dwells in me”.

**The word ‘Satan’ in the Bible**

1 Kings 11:14 records that 2the LORD raised up an adversary (same Hebrew word elsewhere translated “satan”) against Solomon.  Hadad the Edomite”, “And God raised up another adversary (another satan) …Rezon … He was an adversary (a satan) of Israel” (1 Kings 11:23,25(.  God stirred up ordinary men, not a supernatural being, to be satans/adversaries to Solomon. Another example: Peter tried to dissuade Jesus from going to Jerusalem to die.  Jesus turned and said to Peter “Get behind Me, **Satan**! … you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men” (Matthew 16:23).  Thus Peter was called a satan by Christ.

**God can be termed a ‘satan’**

Because the word ‘satan’ just means an adversary, a good person, even God Himself can be termed a ‘satan’. There is nothing necessarily sinful about the word itself.  God can be a satan to us by:

* *Bringing trials into our lives.*
* *Obstructing a wrong course of action we may be embarking upon.*

But the fact that God can be called a ‘satan’ does not mean that He Himself is sinful.

The books of Samuel and Chronicles are parallel accounts of the same incidents.  2 Samuel 24:1 records “**the LORD** … moved David against them (Israel)” to make him take a census of Israel.  The parallel account in 1 Chronicles 21:1 says that “**Satan** stood up against Israel, and moved David” to take the census.  In one passage God does the provoking, in the other Satan does it.  Therefore God acted as a ‘satan’ or adversary to David.

**The Word ‘Devil’ in the Bible**

Similarly with the word ‘devil’.  Jesus said “Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?  He spoke of Judas Iscariot...” (John 6:70-71) who was an ordinary, mortal man.  The word ‘devil’ here simply refers to a wicked man. Another example is in 1 Timothy 3:11.  The wives of church elders were not to be ‘slanderers’; the original Greek word his is ‘diabolos’, which is the same word translated ‘devil’ elsewhere.  Thus Paul warns Titus that the aged women in the ecclesia should not be “false accusers” or ‘devils’ (Titus 2:3 KJV).

The words ‘devil’ and ‘satan’ do not refere to a fallen Angel or a sinful being outside of us.

**Sin, Satan and the Devil**

The words ‘satan’ and ‘devil’ are sometimes used figuratively to describe the **natural sinful tendencies** within us.  These are our main ‘satan’ or adversary.  They are also personified, and as such can be spoken of as ‘the devil’ – our enemy, a slanderer of the truth.  This is what our natural ‘man’ is like – the very devil.  The connection between the devil and our evil desires – sin within us – is made explicit in several passages:

* “As the children (ourselves) have partaken of flesh and blood.  He (Jesus) Himself likewise shared in the same, that through (His) death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14).  The **devil** is here described as being responsible for death.  But Romans tells us that **sin** is responsible for dearth “the wages of **sin** is death” (Romans 6:23).  Therefore sin and the devil must be parallel.
* Similarly James 1:14 says that our evil desires tempt us, leading us to sin and therefore to death, but Hebrews 2:14 says that the devil brings death.  The same verse says that Jesus had our nature in order to destroy the devil.
* Contrast this with Romans 8:3: “God by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh (that is, our human nature, … He (Jesus) condemned sin, in the flesh.”  This shows that the devil and the sinful tendencies that are naturally with human nature are effectively the same.

It is vitally important to understand that Jesus was tempted just like us.  Misunderstanding the doctrine of the devil means that we cannot correctly appreciate the nature and work of Jesus.  It was only because Jesus had our human nature – the ‘devil’ within him – that we can have the hope of salvation (Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:15).  By overcoming the desires of his own nature, the Biblical devil, Jesus was able to destroy the devil on the cross. If the devil is a personal being, then he should no longer exist.

**‘Our sins’ = ‘the works of the devil’**

“He who sins is of the devil” (1 John 3;8), because sin is the result of giving way to our own natural, evil desires (James 1:14,15), which the Bible calls ‘the devil’.  “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). If we are correct in saying that the devil is our evil desires, then the works of our evil desires, i.e. what they result in, are our sins.  This is confirmed by 1 John 3:5, “He (Jesus) was manifested to take away our sins”.  This confirms that “our sins” and “the works of the devil” are the same. Acts 5:3 provides another example of this connection between the devil and our sins.  Peter says to Ananias, “Why has **Satan** filled your heart?”  Then in verse 4, Peter says “Why have **you conceived** this thing in your heart?”  Conceiving something bad within our heart is the same as Satan filling our heart.

**Personification**

However, the Bible does talk as if the devil is a person!  Hebrews 2:14 speaks of “him who had the power of death, that is, the devil”.  The Bible often uses personification – speaking of an abstract idea as if it is a person.  Thus Proverbs 9:1 speaks of a woman called ‘Wisdom’ building a house, and Romans 6:23 likens sin to a paymaster giving wages of death.

Our devil, the ‘diabolos’, represents our evil desires.  Yet you cannot have abstract diabolism, the evil desires that are in a man’s heart cannot exist separately from a man; therefore ‘the devil’ is personified. Sin is often personified as a master (e.g. Romans 5:21; 6:6,17; 7:3).  It is understandable, therefore, that the ‘devil’ is also personified, seeing that ‘the devil’ also refers to sin.  In the same way, Paul speaks of us having two beings, as it were, within our flesh (Romans 7:15-21):

* *the man of the flesh, ‘the devil’,*
* *fights with the man of the Spirit.*

Yet it is evident that there are not two literal, personal beings fighting within us.  This sinful part of our nature is personified as “the evil one” (Matthew 6:15) – the Biblical devil. The devil is a common figure for our own nature; sin and temptation originate from within.  The real arena of spiritual conflict is the human heart.

**Practical Implications**

If we grasp this, we will battle daily for control of the mind; we will strive to fill our mind with God’s word, we will read the Bible daily, we will be cynical about our motivations, we will examine ourselves, we will appreciate the latent liability to sin which we and all men have by nature.  We won’t take the weakness of others towards us so personally; we will see it is their ‘devil’.  Belief in a personal devil is so popular because it takes the focus away from our own struggle with our innermost nature and thoughts.

*Duncan Heaster*