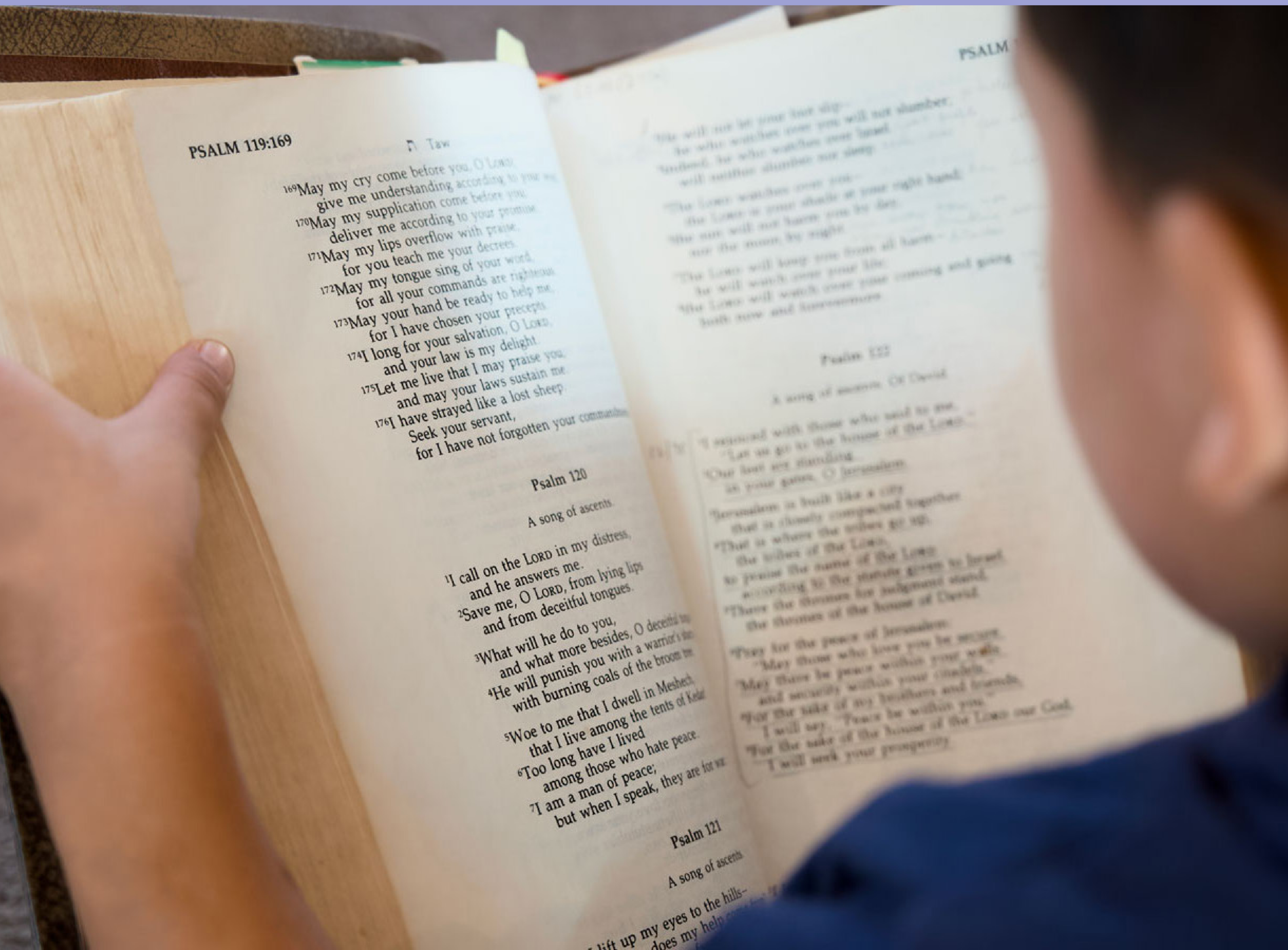




Into the Bible

The purpose of into the Bible
is to get children into the Bible,
and to get the Bible into children.

VOLUME ONE



Contents



mi-pham@unsplash

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General Introduction



INTO THE BIBLE is a way to help children and young people, and anyone for that matter, to understand the Bible better. It's a simple translation from the original languages of the Bible, together with explanations, to make the Bible more clear.

Each Step INTO THE BIBLE is made up of three parts:

- 1) A **translation**, so that children can understand the passage in order to be able to read it in their own Bible.
- 2) An **introduction** to the passage for Beginners, so that they can get to know the background to the passage they are reading. This includes the history, geography, the issues of the time, and people involved, the culture, etc.
- 3) A **Bible study** on the passage for young people, or for parents, or teachers to help them grasp what the point of each paragraph is, and what are the issues spoken about in the text .

For five years in my ministry God put me in a government high school where I **discovered how interested children were in understanding a passage of the Scriptures.** Class after class, year after year there was sustained interest and even excitement. Among thousands of learners, I never had a class not interested.

During that time three of our four school-going children died. They died of extremely rare diseases that strike once in several million cases, and all three cases were entirely different from one another.

These two factors, teaching at the high school, and at the same time losing our children, are where the idea of INTO THE BIBLE came from.

The method of INTO THE BIBLE is to consult the Hebrew or Greek lexicons (dictionaries) to find out what meaning of the Hebrew/Greek word best fits the context of the passage, and will also make clear sense to a young reader. Where a word is difficult to understand I may turn it into a sentence to make sense of it. Where an issue is rather complicated, I use a footnote to explain it.

Hebrew and Greek lexicons open up the meanings of words and phrases in such a way that one sees more clearly what the Bible is saying. My aim is to share this information with children, with people who are beginning to read their Bibles, and with anyone who wants to teach children or adults, or those who simply want to get to know the Bible better.

The main principle on which INTO THE BIBLE is based is that the Bible comes from God, and it leads us to God, and that the whole Bible is true, and is perfectly reliable. The Bible is what we need to get through life, and to face death. The Bible has God's authority and goodness behind it.

Therefore, it is vital that everyone can understand their Bible.

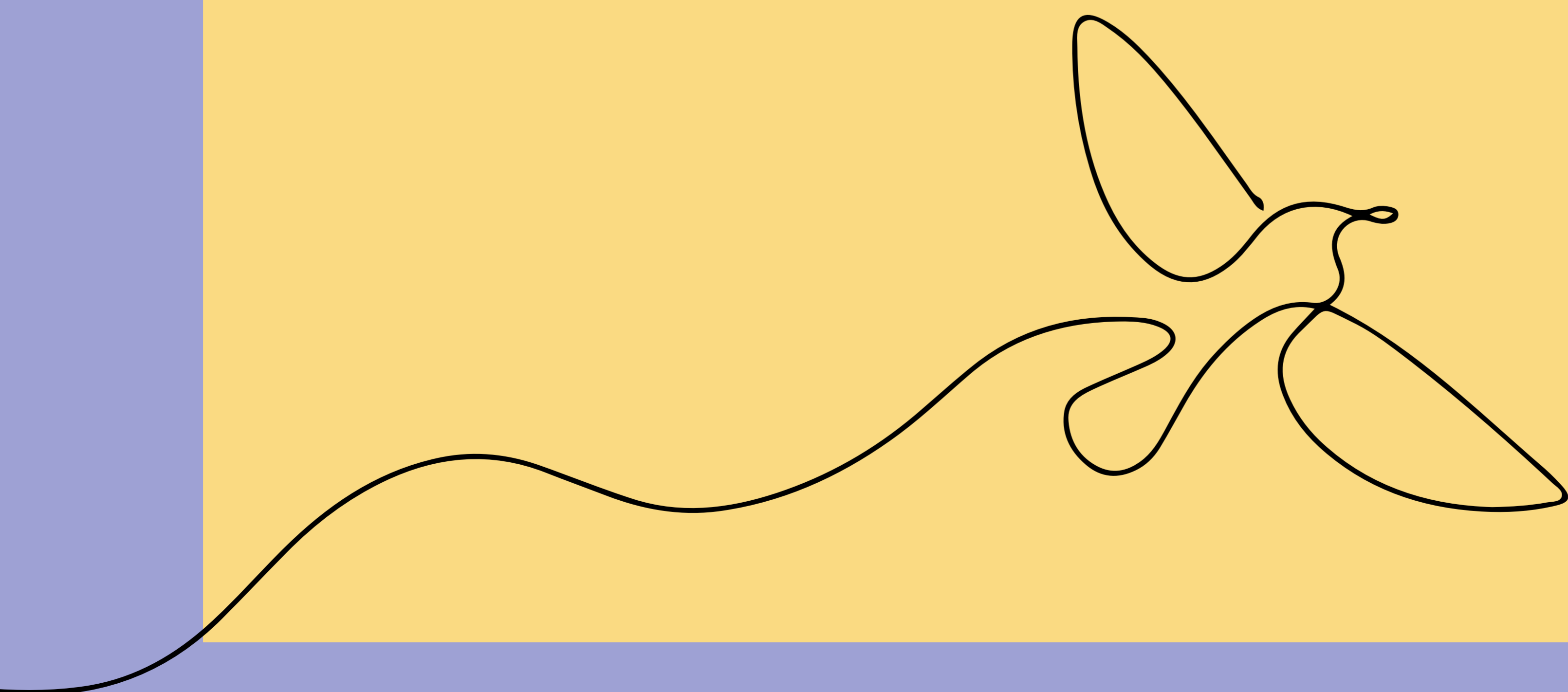
- **INTO THE BIBLE is intended to prepare youngsters to be able to read their own Bible.**
- **INTO THE BIBLE is planned to introduce children to most of the Bible.**
- **INTO THE BIBLE is educational. It is meant to develop their reading skills as well as their characters. It can also be used by parents or teachers to teach their children. The focus is on our children.**

Our children are our heritage from God, and the Bible is the heritage for our children, which is also from God. The purpose of Into the Bible is to get children into the Bible, and to get the Bible into children.

Yours in Christ,

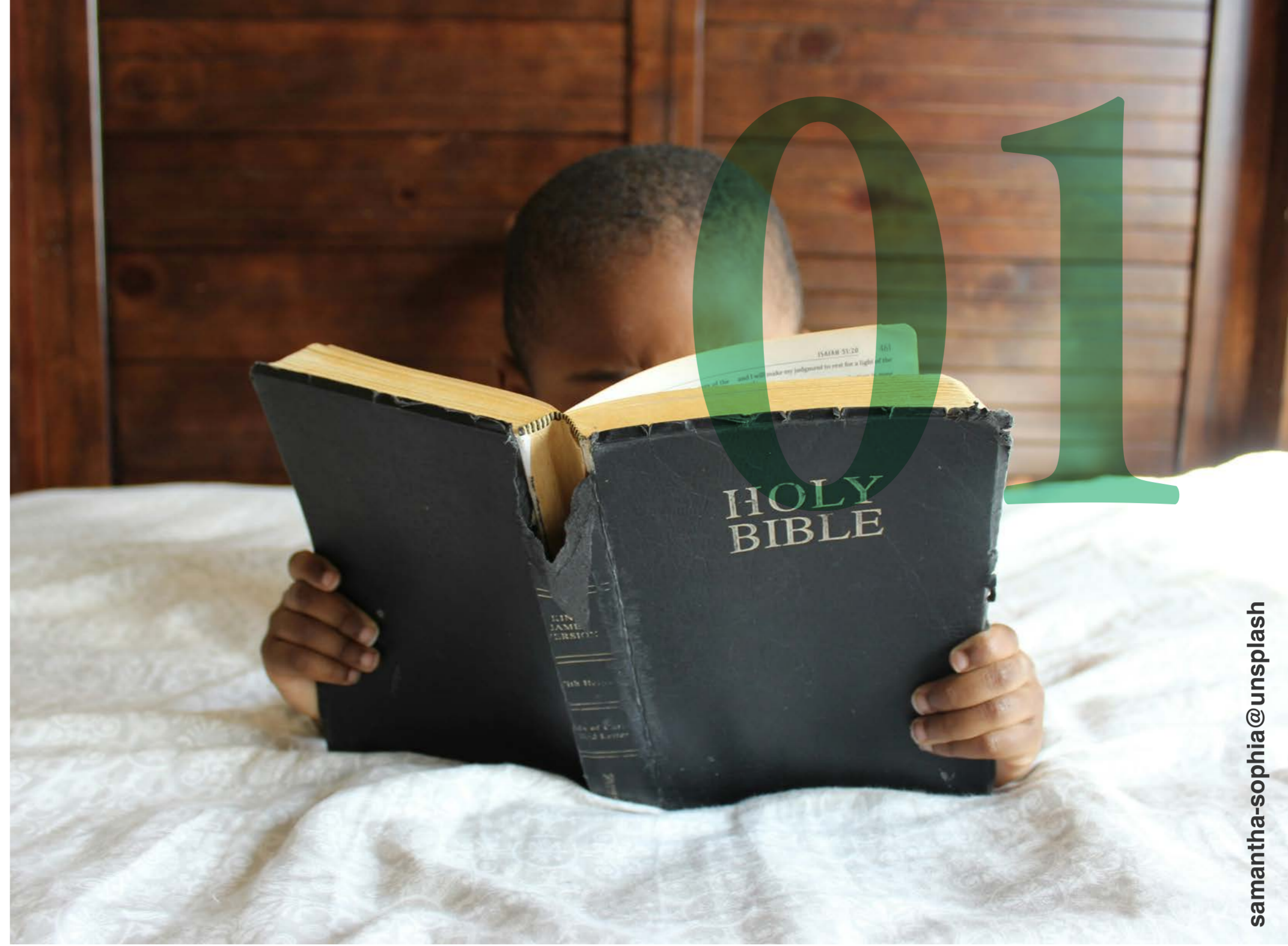
Peter Watson

Genesis 1–3



Genesis 1-3

A Simple Bible Translation



samantha-sophia@unsplash

START HERE!

Read this simple translation to understand the passage, then read it in your own Bible.

1:1 GOD, AND THE BEGINNING

In the beginning God created everything: God alone created the skies and the earth.

1:2 THE STATE OF THE EARTH, AND GOD'S SPIRIT

At first the earth was a terrible mess. There was nothing good there. Nothing could possibly live there. The sea covered everything. It was deep and terribly wild. Above the surface of the sea was absolute darkness. The awesome sea and the awful darkness together made it utterly impossible for anything to live in the world.

But God's Spirit was there. The Spirit of God was in full and perfect control of all those masses of deep, dark, dangerous waters.

1:3-5 GOD CREATED LIGHT

God said: Let there be light! When God gave the order, there was light. God saw to it that the light was good. It was brilliant!

God separated the light from the darkness. He made light and darkness two completely different things. He called the light, "Day", and he called the darkness, "Night."

So there was evening, and there was morning, the first day.

1:6-8 GOD CREATED THE SKY

Then God said: Let there be a great space covered by a huge roof amongst all this water, and let it separate some of the water from the rest of the water.

So God made the huge space in the air. It separated the water under the space from the water above in the space. It all worked out just as God wanted it to. In that space would be air and rain. Air and water are two of the most precious things in the world. God called the space, "Sky." There was evening and there was morning, the second day.

1:9-10 GOD MADE DRY LAND

Then God said: Let the waters under the sky be collected together into one place, and let dry land rise up from under the seas.

So that is what happened. Dry land appeared out of all the water. God called the dry ground, "Land," and he called all the waters that were gathered together, "Seas." God then checked that it was good, and he was pleased with it. It was solid and firm.

1:11-13 GOD MADE PLANTS

Then God said: Let the land produce fields covered with grass, and plants that have seeds and trees that give fruit. Let the trees each have their own special kind of fruit, with their own seeds in the fruit. Let all of this grow on the land.

Everything happened just as God said. The land did produce grass. It produced plants that have seeds from which will grow the same kind of plant. It also produced trees that give fruit. That fruit would have its own kind of seeds that will produce the same kind of tree. God saw to it that it was good. It would produce all kinds of food. God was pleased with what he saw. It was satisfying! It was healthy and a pleasure! This was just what God wanted.

Then evening came, followed by the morning. That was the third day.

1:14-19 GOD MADE THE SUN, MOON AND STARS

God now said: Let there be lights in space, in the sky, to make the difference between day and night. They must also serve as signs and seasons, and as days and years.

Let them be as lights up there in the sky, and let them give light for the earth.

That is what then happened. It all turned out exactly as God had ordered. It was magnificent! God made two big lights up there in the sky. The bigger, stronger light was the sun. It was to control the day. The lesser, more gentle light was the moon. It was to brighten up the dark night sky. God also made the stars.

God put them in the sky to give light on earth.

He made them to rule over or govern the day and the night. They were to make a clear difference between light and darkness. God saw to it that this was well done. He was pleased with what he saw. It was awesome! It was also all so reliable and so good for the world.

Then evening came, followed by the morning. That was the fourth day.

1:20-23 GOD CREATED FISH AND BIRDS

Then God said: Let the water everywhere swarm with lots of life, with huge numbers of living creatures. Let birds also fly above the ground. Let them fly around freely, up in the sky.

So God created huge amounts of fish and sea creatures. He gave them life so that they could live and move around. He created great swarms of them in the water, millions and billions and trillions of them. On top of this each type of fish was a special kind. God also made all the birds that can fly. Each type of bird was also its own special kind. God saw to it that it was all good. God liked what he saw. God had now made life. Life is a marvellous thing! There were now lots of different kinds of living creatures on earth. It was all very fascinating!

God blessed all these living creatures. God said: Be useful. Produce your little ones. Grow and increase your numbers. Fill the waters of the seas with life. Let the numbers of the different sorts of birds in the world also increase.

Then it was evening, and morning, the fifth day.

1:24-25 GOD MADE ANIMALS

Then God said: Let the land produce animals, living creatures, each one of a certain kind. Let the land support animals for farming, and animals that can move around in nature and live off the land. All these animals are to be of special types or species. That is what then happened.

God made different kinds of animals that live on the land. He made all sorts of different species of animals that can move around in the countryside. God saw to it that it was well done. God approved of what he had made. It was good. It was excellent and marvellous. Animals are so interesting, and all of them are very well made. We also like animals, just as God does.

1:26-28 GOD CREATED MAN

Then God said: Let us make man. Let us make man in our own image. We shall make him like God, so that he is able to rule and to be the leader of all that we have made. Let him rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air. Let him be in control of the animals, and take charge of the whole earth and all the creatures that move about on the land. We want man to care for them and look after them.

So God created man. He created man like himself, someone who is capable and caring. He created him as a reflection of God. God created both man and woman.

God blessed them. He wanted them to live good, useful and happy lives. God said to them: Increase in number, and fill the world. You two must be in charge of the earth. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky, and over all the living animals that move around on land. The best thing that God created was the last thing he made. It was man and woman, and from them, boys and girls.

1:29-31 GOD SUPPLIED FOOD

Then God said to man: I have given you all plants that produce seeds everywhere on earth, and all the trees that have fruit and produce seeds. All this will be good food for you.

It will also be food for every living creature on earth, and for every bird in the sky, and for every creature moving around on the land. This food is for every single living thing. All these plants will be food for all of you. And that is how it was and will always be. All living creatures must have food. We cannot live or be healthy without it. We need it to be strong and able to do things.

God was very pleased with all that he had made. It was very, very good. It was excellent! It was such a wonderful blessing, especially for man! Then there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

CHAPTER 2

2:1-3 GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY

So the universe and the whole earth were finished, as well as the great and wonderful things in them.

By the seventh day God had finished his work. So he rested on the seventh day from the work he had done.

Therefore God blessed the seventh day by making it a special and different day. He made it holy. He blessed it because on that day he rested from all his great work of creation that he had done.

2:4-9 GOD PLANTED A GARDEN

Now this is what happened next when the skies and the earth were created, at the time the Lord God made the earth and the sky.

To begin with, not all the plants of the field were growing yet. Nor had the crops of the field started growing. This was for two reasons: First, because the Lord God had not made it rain on the land, and secondly, because there was no man to farm the land.

Then an underground stream came up out of the ground. It produced a useful wet mist that watered all the land around it. That solved the first problem.

To solve the second problem, the Lord God formed the man out of the dust from the soil, and breathed life into him through his nose. So the man became a living being or person. Life means that we are always breathing. (We normally breathe through our nose.)

Then the Lord God planted a garden in Eden to start with, and that is where he put the man whom he had formed.

There God made things grow out of the ground. He grew good looking trees and tasty fruit trees. Right in the middle of the garden was a different sort of tree. It was a fruit tree that held the secret to the knowledge of good and bad, what is right and what is wrong. That tree was about knowing what is true, but also what is false or a lie.

2:10-14 THE RIVERS OF EDEN

A river was flowing from Eden. It was to water the garden. From there it divided into four and became the sources of great or major rivers.

The first river curved its way through a land where there was gold.

The gold of that land was of a high quality. There were other good things there, like perfume and precious stones.

The second river curved or wound its way through a country that was then called Cush.

The name of the third river was the Tigris. It runs past the front, or east, of Asshur [a-shoor]. Asshur is better known as the powerful country of Assyria. Today Assyria is known as Syria. The fourth river is the Euphrates [yoo-fray-tees].

2:15-17 GOD PUT MAN IN EDEN

Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to farm it and look after it.

The Lord God gave an order to the man. He told him: You are completely free to eat from every tree in the garden.

But, you must not eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of what is right and what is wrong. You must keep your conscience clean. As soon as you eat from that fruit you will have to die.

2:18-24 GOD MADE WOMAN FOR MAN

Then the Lord God took a decision. He said: It is not good enough that the man is all alone. I will make a helper for him that will be like him, and that he will like.

So first of all the Lord God made, from the soil, every living animal that is out in the fields, as well as every bird in the skies. The Lord God brought these to the man to see how he would like them and what he would name each one. This meant that all these creatures would get their names from man.

So the man gave names to all the animals and to the birds that fly, and to all the animals that live out in the fields. Yet, despite getting to know all these living creatures, the man could not find a real partner that was good enough or suitable for him.

So the Lord God put the man into a very deep sleep. Then while he was unconscious God took one of his ribs out and closed up his chest where the rib had been.

The Lord God built the rib he had taken from the man into a woman. So woman was made from man, not just from soil. This helps explain why women are more beautiful, and girls are so lovely, not just in looks but in nature too. God then brought the woman to the man.

The man, Adam, was pleased. He was delighted and grateful. He celebrated by saying: **At last! She's bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh.** Because of this I've decided that she is to be called "woman" [wo-man] since she was taken out of a man's body. In Hebrew a man is "ish" and a woman is "ishah" [ish-ah].

This explains why a grown man normally leaves the home of his father and his mother, and links up with his wife to become a couple. Together they can make their own home and start their own family. That is what our parents did, and that is what most children are going to do when they grow up.

2:25 HOW ADAM AND EVE BEGAN LIFE

To begin with, Adam and Eve, a man and a woman, were bare all the time. The man and his wife, who were made differently, lived together and they wore no clothes. They did not need them as they were perfectly comfortable. So they were not in any way worried about the fact that they were naked. For them that was the normal way to live. They were completely innocent, like little children. They lived naturally, without clothes, just as all the animals did.

CHAPTER 3

3.1-3 THE SNAKE ASKS EVE A QUESTION

From among all the animals in the countryside that the Lord God had made, the snake was the clever one. So it asked the woman: Is it true that God said that you can't eat the fruit from all the trees in this garden? Did God really say that you are not allowed to have whatever you want?

So the woman said to the snake: O no! God said that it's alright for us to eat from all the fruit of any of the trees in the garden. We can eat anything we like.

But there is just one tree right in the middle of the garden, and God warned us not to eat its fruit. He told us: You must not touch it at all, or else you will die. Don't have anything to do with it!

3.4-7 THE SNAKE TEMPTS THE WOMAN

The snake said to the woman: I promise you that you will not be put to death. God did not mean that. You two will not lose your lives.

For God realises that when you eat from this tree you will find out that you are free. You will be just like God. You will be free to decide for yourselves what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong. The two of you will then be able to do what you feel like doing, and you will be free to decide what you don't want to do. God was just trying to put you off by scaring you.

So the woman then thought that the fruit of that tree would be good to eat as food. It also looked very nice. But the big thing was that if they ate that fruit they would become wise. They would be clever and smart, like God. **So she took some of its fruit and ate it.** She also gave it to her husband who was with her. **And he ate it too.**

But then they discovered something that they had not noticed before. They realised that they were naked. They suddenly felt embarrassed because their bodies were so different.

So they got hold of some large fig leaves and made for themselves something to wear.

3.8-13 BOTH OF THEM HAVE TO ANSWER TO GOD

Then they heard the voice of The Lord God call them. He was visiting them in the garden at the time when the breeze blows. But instead of welcoming the Lord God, the man and his wife ran away. They tried to hide from God among the bushes in the garden.

But the Lord God demanded to see the man. He called out to him: Where are you?

The man had to answer: I heard you call in the garden, but I could not bring myself to face up to you. I felt so bad because I was naked. So I ran away and hid myself.

The Lord God asked him: Who showed you that you were naked? Who explained that to you? Did you disobey me? Did you eat from the tree that I told you clearly NOT to eat?

The man answered: The woman you kindly gave me to be with me as my wife and helper and friend - she produced the fruit from the tree and offered it to me. I never thought that anything harmful would come from her, so I ate it. **So yes, I did eat it!**

Then the Lord God spoke to the woman: What is this about? What have you done? The woman answered: I'm afraid the snake tricked me, and I was completely taken in by it. That's why I ate it. I know I should never have allowed myself to listen to him. **But yes, I did eat it!**

3.14-15 GOD PUNISHES THE DEVIL

Then the Lord God told the snake: Because you have caused this trouble you will be punished. I am angry with you. You are going to get into big trouble. You will be hated more than any other animal. From now on you will be reduced to crawling around on your belly. No one will want you. You will bite the dust, and spend your life lonely and silent. You will suffer for what you have done. You are cursed.

The Lord God said to the snake: I shall bring war between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He is going to hurt you, and you are going to hurt him. He will destroy your pride and arrogance. He will take away your power to do harm to people, and your influence to cause them trouble. He is going to remove your dreadful leadership among people. As it says in Hebrew: **"He will hurt your head."** But you are going to attack him using dirty tricks. You are going to fight him with lies and excuses and cheating. You will tackle him by means of bullying and mocking and insulting his people. As it says in Hebrew: **"You will hurt his heel."**

3.16-20 GOD PUNISHES EVE AND ADAM

To the woman God said: I have taken the decision to make it difficult and painful for you to have children. Yet you will still want your husband to give you children. He will have to look after you and be your leader.

To Adam God said: Because you listened to what your wife had to say, and gave in to her, and ate from the tree that I ordered you not to, you will be punished. It is going to be painful and a strain for you to grow food from the ground. To have enough to eat, you are going to have to work hard for the whole of your life.

The ground will make plenty of difficulties for you by producing prickly thorns and lots of weeds. But you are going to need to eat the crops of the fields.

In order to get food to eat you are going to have to work hard. You will work until you sweat. You will have to go on doing this until you die. When you die you will return to the ground because you were originally taken from the ground. You were made of dust, and you will go back to the dust.

So the man took responsibility for his wife and named her Eve. He called her that because she was the mother of all human beings. Her Hebrew name is Chavvah, which means “Life” [chav-vah, ch as in loch]. She is the mother of all people who have life. We translate Chavvah into English, as Eve.

3.21-24 GOD EXPELS MAN FROM THE GARDEN

Then the Lord God made clothes out of animal skins for Adam and his wife to wear.

The Lord God said: What has now happened is that man has become like one of us. He has learnt to know what is good as well as what is bad. Since he has discovered this it is important that he does not help himself to the fruit from the Tree of Life. If he eats that then he shall live forever.

So the Lord God ordered man to leave the Garden of Eden. He had to go and work with the soil from which he had originally been taken.

In that way God expelled the man. He then put a special guard from heaven outside the garden, with a shiny and threatening sword. This dangerous weapon was used to patrol the whole area in order to protect the way to the Tree of Life.

NOW YOU CAN READ GENESIS CHAPTERS 1-3 IN YOUR OWN BIBLE.

Genesis 1

Passage background & introduction



Read this part to get to know the background of the chapters you read in section 01. Interesting things like how the world began, what God did to create our world, how mankind, man and woman, came into being, and how he struggled with the first responsibility that God gave him. It even explains why we have to die, and how it was possible that we could live forever.



The book of **GENESIS** is the first book in the whole Bible. Genesis is a Greek word that means **THE BEGINNING of everything**.

Genesis chapters 1 and 2 tell us about God's creation. Creation is good and beautiful and wonderful! So nature shows us very clearly how very good and glorious, and how brilliant and marvellous, God is, because he created all these lovely and amazing things. We can learn a lot about God from his creation.

Chapters 1 and 2 show us what God wanted life to be like for us. God made everything so good because he wants life to be very good for us. Then the rest of the Bible shows us what God's plans for us were when he created our world and us. We learn a lot about life from God's creation and especially from the Bible. In fact, we learn more about creation by reading the Bible than by nature studies or scientific studies about the world and space. People who study nature and outer space seem to learn nothing about God unless they also read the Bible. Since God made everything, we ought to learn something useful about God by studying such things as geography, biology and science. Yet when people ignore the Bible they cannot see the connection between creation and its Creator. The Bible helps us to do that.

Genesis chapter 3 is about what went wrong with the world at the beginning. This tells us why there is so much trouble and suffering in the world. It explains to us how death began. Death came only after the creation.

The purpose of the first two chapters of the Bible is:

- To show us why we should have such a deep respect for God
- To show us why God made us
- To help us to understand the rest of the Bible better.

The purpose of chapter 3 is to warn us not to disobey God and not to sin against him.

The Bible tells us that there is a God. We live with many people who think that there is no God. Either they don't want to believe, or they don't know what to believe. There are also lots of people who believe in other ideas that people made up long ago. When most people don't believe in God it sometimes makes it hard for us to believe in him. Then when people give up believing in God because things go wrong in their lives, it can hurt us deeply.

The word "Bible" means "The Truth," that is, the truth about God.

The Bible is what we need to help us to believe properly in God. Nature gives us a rough idea about God, but the Bible makes it possible to understand God clearly and properly.

As we read the Bible we learn what God is like. He is good. He is great! He made everything. He made us all. He looks after us. And he loves us very much!

God knows what is right and what is wrong. He knows what is best, and what is bad. What is wrong or bad is bad for us. But God is always good for us, even when things go wrong and we suffer.

We did not make ourselves. Nor did we invent God. No, he made us, and he is there, and he is real. We have to learn how to understand him and how to get on with him.

The way to get to know God is to read the Bible. God got some special people to know him and then told them what to write. There is no other book in the world that is like the Bible.

The Bible comes from God

The reason why God made us was to do something for him. He wanted us to look after the things that he has made. He wants us to do good work. He wants us to be like him. If we are going to do the work God wants us to do, then the most important thing that

we need to do is to listen to him. We must learn to love him and trust him. We must believe him and obey him.

To live a proper life we need to understand two very important things:

The first is that:

God is excellent and wonderful!

That's what Genesis 1 and 2 are about. The second point is that we are not great or good. That's what Genesis 3 is about. The whole of mankind has gone wrong.

We have all done what we should NOT have done.

All of us have also failed to do what we should have done.

Mankind has made a mess of life. That's why there is so much fighting and crime and suffering. That's why there's so much trouble and pain and unhappiness. All of this failure is because we have not listened to God.

But God has not let us down. He made us and he loves us. So he is patient with us. He had a plan to help us, and to get us right again. He has saved us from being ruined. He has given us hope. He has told us this in the Bible.

What we must do is trust him and listen to him. We must read the Bible to find out what God is truly like. We must learn what God has said and what he wants. That is the way for us to get right with God our Maker.

We cannot understand God without the Bible because he is so amazing. We cannot understand life without the Bible. Life is too complicated. We cannot properly understand other people without the help of the Bible, because all people are so different from one another. We cannot even understand ourselves without the Bible. We make too many mistakes.

That's why there's so much trouble and pain and unhappiness. All of this failure is because we have not listened to God.

We all have a soul as well as a body and a mind.

We need to learn the truth about ourselves. We have to learn that from God. God uses the Bible to teach us about him and about life and about ourselves and others. God gave us the Bible for the good of our soul and our mind, and even for the good of our body.

Our soul is that part of us that needs to believe.

Our mind is that part of us that needs to think.

Our body is that part of us that needs to live.

The Bible tells us the TRUTH.

The Bible shows us what is RIGHT.

The Bible brings us HOPE.

The Bible comes from GOD.

The Bible makes it possible for us to find out the truth, to come right in life, and to live well. The Bible makes it possible for us to die, at any time, with the hope of a better life.

The Bible begins, in chapter 1, by showing us how wonderfully God made everything, including us. Once we appreciate that, we can trust him and listen to him. The better we can understand what God has made, the more we can respect him and have confidence in him. God has given us all this goodness in creation so that we can know that he is real and good. We must therefore learn what we can about the world around us so that our appreciation for God can improve, and so that our admiration for God can grow.

The Bible begins, in chapter 2, by telling us what God wants us to do. He wants us to look after his creation well. He wants us to enjoy all these things he created and made. God made things good so that we can have a good life. An important part of living a good life is to be useful. God has given us responsibilities and challenges so that we may learn how to become useful in this wonderful world God has made for us. The more we learn, and the more useful we become, the more we are going to enjoy this world and this life that God has given us.

The Bible begins, in chapter 3, by explaining to us that we must be careful to listen to God and do what he says. We cannot afford to ignore him or disobey him. Adam and Eve failed to listen to God. The result is that a lot has gone wrong in the world, and a lot also goes wrong in our lives, for the same reason: we fail to listen to God. God meant Adam and Eve to be a big and very important lesson for all of us. Adam and Eve have affected all the people on earth. Therefore everyone, everywhere, has to learn from God, and from Adam and Eve, how to avoid the same mistake that our first parents made.

We learn five things from what happened in the Garden of Eden.

1. God made Eden a beautiful and pleasant world.
2. God told Adam and Eve what they should do, and how to enjoy life.
3. God warned Adam and Eve what NOT to do, and why they must not do it.
4. God punished them, as he had warned them he would if they disobeyed him.
5. God also helped them when they failed. He gave them HOPE.

So this is what the whole Bible is about. In the Bible we learn how to live, and how to enjoy life, and how to do something worthwhile and good in life. These are the parts of the Bible that people like to read.

But the Bible also tells us what we must not do, and why we must listen to God. These are the parts of the Bible that many people want to change, or just avoid reading and thinking about. There are some parts of the Bible that people do not like.

But it is a huge mistake to argue with what God has told us.

The Bible tells us that God allowed us to sin so that he could make us even better people than he created us to be.

God allowed us to sin in order to save us forever from sin.

Genesis 1

A Bible study on our passage



dawid-zawila@unsplash

Now let's grasp the points of each paragraph and the issues being spoken about and together we can grow in our knowledge and love of God.



1:1 GOD, AND THE BEGINNING

¹In the beginning God created everything: God alone created ²the skies and the earth.

¹In the beginning: We don't know when the beginning was. All we know is that there was a beginning to life on earth. There is so much that we do not know about the past. Experts are finding out more and more, but there will always be lots that we don't know.

When we don't really know about something, many people like to guess. But if we guess it is very easy to be wrong. The one thing that we do know is that the Bible is true and reliable when it talks about the past. This is because God gave us the Bible. The word "Bible" means the Book of Truth, "The Book of God" that we can believe and rely on.

"In-the-beginning" is just one word in Hebrew. It is the first word of the whole Bible. It has an important meaning that comes out more and more clearly in the rest of the Bible. "In-the-beginning God created" means two things:

First, it means that we, and everything else in the world, had a beginning. All of creation, all of life, had a start. The world and life is not something

We and everything else in the world, had a beginning. All of creation, all of life, had a start.

permanent, it is not forever, it is not eternal. We also had a start, when we were born. Every year, on that day, our birthday, we remember that we had a beginning.

Secondly, in-the-beginning God created also means that God did NOT have a beginning. God was there before anything else began. God made everything in the beginning. So God never had a start. This is the most amazing and wonderful mystery there is in life.

No one can imagine how God never had a beginning. It is too much for us to understand. This, more than anything else, shows us how BIG God is and how small we are! It is easier to understand that God shall live forever, than it is to grasp that God never had a beginning. God made the beginning of everything!

All this tells us that God is always there. The word “GOD” means someone that we can always turn to. We can rely totally and absolutely on him, at all times, whatever happens.

the skies: Sometimes “the skies” are called the heavens. The heavens and the skies mean the same thing. But what the Bible calls “heaven” is somewhere beyond the skies and even beyond space. But somehow heaven is also not very far away from us. God is in heaven and yet he looks after us. We can even talk to him because he is always near us.

High up above us is where our better and permanent life is going to be.

The skies above us are always there to remind us of God

who is always there, above us. As the skies are vast and unlimited in size, so is God. As the skies contain mysteries we cannot understand so is God full of mysteries we cannot understand. But just because we do not understand him does not mean that he is not there.

What the skies also tell us is that somewhere up there is where our final and eternal home is. High up above us is where our better and permanent life is going to be.

One day we shall be up there with God.

1: 2 THE STATE OF THE EARTH, AND GOD'S SPIRIT

At first the earth was a terrible mess. There was nothing good there. Nothing could possibly live there. The sea covered everything. It was deep and terribly wild. Above the surface of the sea was absolute darkness. The awesome sea and the awful darkness together made it utterly impossible for anything to live in the world.

But God's Spirit was there. The Spirit of God was in full and perfect control of all those ¹masses of deep, dark, dangerous waters.

¹masses of deep, dark, dangerous waters: Water can be very powerful and dangerous.

A stream that is flowing strongly after some rain is powerful. It can sweep a man off his feet if he gets in it just up to his knees.

The roughest seas are between Antarctica and Cape Horn at the southern tip of South America. Waves there can reach up to well over 100 feet high (or over 30 metres.) That is as high as a ten storied building.

At Christmas time in 2004 an earthquake in the Indian Ocean caused a tsunami shock wave to travel as fast as a jet aeroplane towards Indonesia. When it reached the Northern Sumatra in Indonesia it built up into a wave that was up to 100 feet high. It drowned nearly a quarter of a million people.

The highest wave we know of was in a bay in Alaska where an earthquake caused a huge cliff to fall into the sea at the top of the bay. It triggered a wave well over 1500 feet high.

The waters at the beginning of the world would have been very rough and dangerous. On top of that everything was pitch-dark. What the Bible is saying is that the world began in terrible chaos. Nothing could possibly live in those conditions.

The first thing to notice was that God could live although the world was in a state of utter chaos. God could live because he is a spirit. This tells us how different God is from us. It's another reason why so many people cannot understand God. Because they cannot understand him they think they do not have to believe in him. But since he is there, we must believe in him. The fact that the world is now such a beautiful place is our evidence that God is there. If God created the world he must be at least just as real as our world.

The waters at the beginning of the world would have been very rough and dangerous.

1:3-5 GOD CREATED LIGHT

God said: Let there be light! When God gave the order, there was light.

God saw to it that ¹the light was good. It was brilliant!

God separated the light from the darkness. He made light and darkness two completely different things. He called the light, "Day", and he called the darkness, "Night." So ²there was evening, and there was morning, the first day.

¹the light: Light is amazing! It is difficult to understand what light is. Light is a mystery. It's a miracle!

What we do know is that we cannot live without it. We also need light to be able to see how lovely so many things are that God has made.

Light travels incredibly fast, at over 180,000 miles in just one second! On top of that it does not hurt us when it gets to us at that speed! How did God create something that could travel at such a speed? At the same time it is so beautiful and useful. Light is indeed an utterly marvellous miracle!

Without light we would not be able to live. Light comes into our brain through our eyes. God created our eyes and brain as well as light. It is all so wonderful and absolutely brilliant!

The Bible will go on to tell us that the most important thing in our lives is light. It is light that enables us to see. When we can see we can understand. When we understand we can live properly. In the Bible light stands for truth. **Truth** is what we need most in order to be able to live good lives.

Truth comes from God. God has given us the Bible to tell us the truth. The Bible is our source of truth, or light. The source of all truth is God.

The most important teaching of the Bible is that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the light of the world. He came to lead us out of the darkness that sin has caused in our lives. The trouble with all of us is that we cannot see truth clearly. We cannot see into the future. We don't understand why things go wrong as they often do. Jesus came to help us to see life and truth and the future more clearly. He came to get us to see what's right, and to get us right. **That is why Christ is our light.**

Christ came to get us to see what's right, and to get us right. That is why he is our light.

It is interesting that God made light on the very first day, whereas he made the sun only on the fourth day...(Wait until we get to the fourth day.)

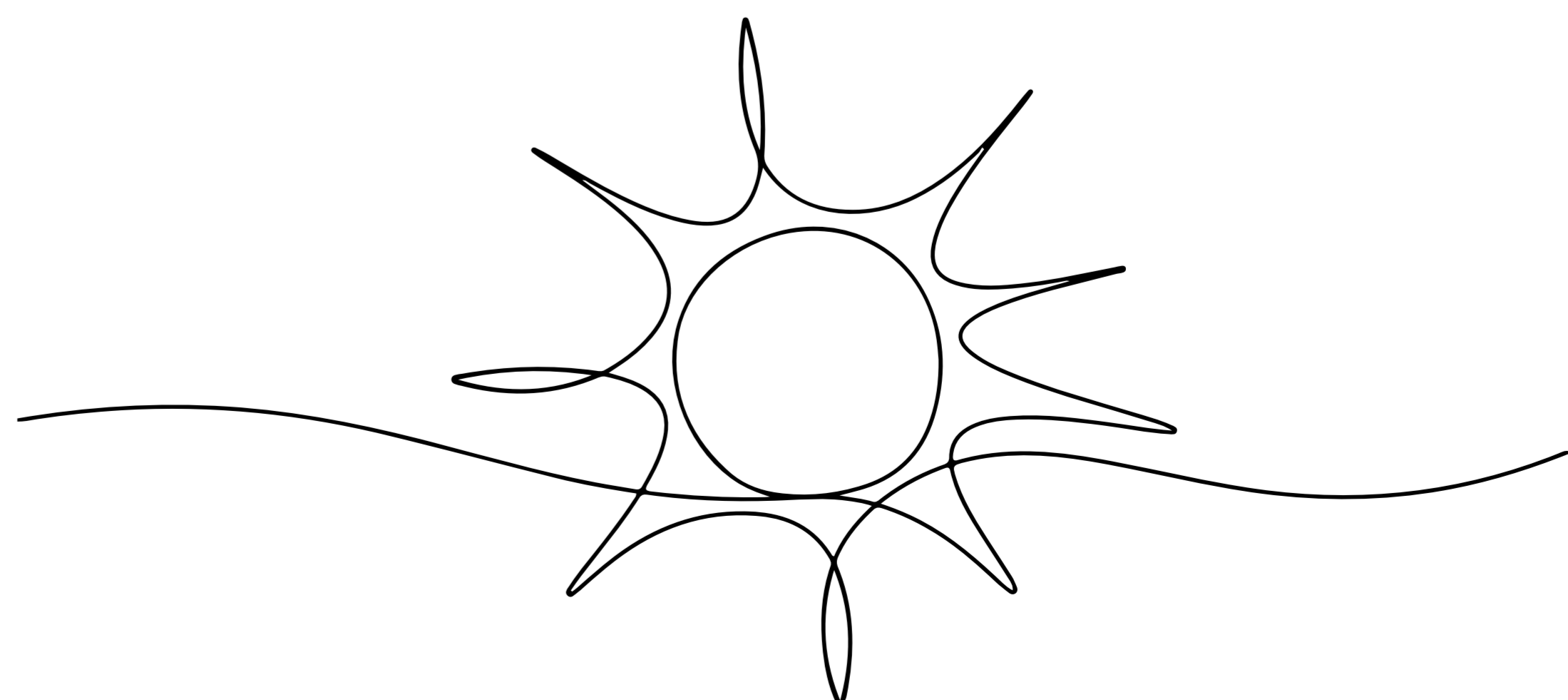
2there was evening, and there was morning: There are two important things about the evening and the morning:

- **God has made day and night a fixed thing.** There will always be night and day. You can be quite sure of it.
- **God said that his promises are as sure as day follows night.** In the same way that we can be certain that day will follow night we can also be just as confident that what God has promised shall definitely happen.

Take time to watch a sunset. It is a daily sign that life, for every one of us, is going to come to an end. It is even a sign that this world is going to come to an end.

Get up early and watch a sunrise. It is a daily sign that God's new world, the Kingdom of Heaven, is going to come. Each sunrise is a sign that God's promises will come true if we believe in him.

Each sunset is a sign that we shall one day leave this world. Each sunrise is a sign that we shall be welcomed into a better home if we love God with all our heart.



1:6-8 GOD CREATED THE SKY

¹Then God said: Let there be a great space covered by a huge roof amongst all this water, and let it separate some of the water from the rest of the water.

So God made the huge space in the air. It separated the water under the space from ²the water above in the space. It all worked out just as God wanted it to. In that space would be air and rain. Air and water are two of the most precious things in the world.

God called the space, "Sky." There was evening and there was morning, the second day.

¹**A-great-space-covered-by-a-huge-roof:** The Hebrew word is a difficult one for us to translate. The old fashioned translation was "firmament." Firmament means a large, firm covering. So the beautiful blue sky is a huge safe roof above us.

The huge space of air above us is what we call the atmosphere. In that space the birds fly and the clouds form. It is the air that we breathe. The atmosphere also protects us from the many dangers of outer space.

The air, or atmosphere, rises about 100 kilometres above us. Above that is outer space. The higher the atmosphere the thinner the air becomes. Above 100 kilometres (about 60 miles) there is no air whatsoever. Clouds can rise up as high as 10 kilometres or more above sea level. Passenger planes cannot fly higher than 12 kilometres because the air up there is too thin to hold up the wings of the plane.

Two most important things that we need in life are air and water. We need air to breathe every minute. We need water to drink every day. That should make us realise that we need God's Spirit every minute, to live, and we need God's refreshment every day, to keep going, especially when we find life difficult and frustrating – that is what the Bible means by being 'thirsty.'

We get both from the skies. The atmosphere and rain are our sources of air and water. The Bible will go on to tell us that we have a very great need for God. He is not only

God gives us far more good things than we realise. God also protects us from far more troubles than we are aware of.

the source of truth, but also the source of all that we need in life. He made the air we breathe. He sends the water we drink.

He also provides the food we eat and the clothes we wear. He is looking after us all the time, and not only when we get desperate and pray for help. God gives us far more good things than we realise. God also protects us from far more troubles than we are aware of.

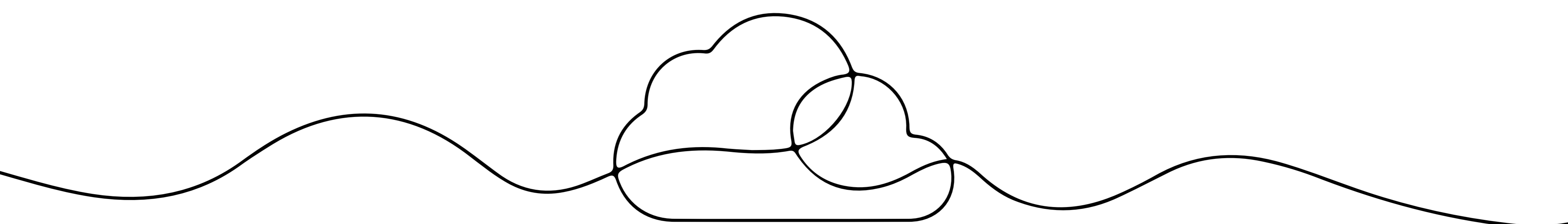
In the Bible the sky is also called heaven. This is to remind us that up there somewhere there is also a heaven, which is quite different from our world. Up there, in heaven, is where our future world and home is going to be.

the water above in the space: The water below the sky would become the seas, and the water up in the sky would become the clouds that give rain.

Sea-water is no use for plants or animals, but rain is absolutely essential for animals and people to drink and for plants to grow. Rain that does not go into the ground runs off it in the form of streams and rivers that lead to the sea.

God controls the rain. We need it so much. But it is in God's hands. He can send rain to bless us so that we can enjoy life. Or he can keep it away to warn us. He can also send storms and floods to punish us.

God controls the rain. We need it so much. But it is in God's hands. He can send rain to bless us so that we can enjoy life.



1:9-10 GOD MADE DRY LAND

Then God said: Let the waters under the sky be collected together into one place, and let ¹dry land rise up from under the seas.

So that is what happened. Dry land appeared out of all the water. God called the dry ground, “Land,” and he called all the waters that were gathered together, “Seas.” God then checked that ²it was good, and he was pleased with it. It was solid and firm.

¹dry land: The making of dry land was important. Land means firmness and stability. This is something that we have a great need for. The opposite is chaos. One of the worst experiences people can have is an earthquake, or an erupting volcano, or a flood, or a massive landslide down the side of a mountain. Land and safety is vital for any nation. Hills and mountains are also a sign of something permanent. They will always be there, generation after generation. That is a sign of what God is like. He is always there. God is the source of all stability and security in life, if we listen to him.

Over a quarter of planet earth is made up of dry land. Nearly three quarters of our planet is sea. Just over 70% is sea, and just under 30% is land. The highest point on land is Mount Everest in Nepal, to the north of India. The lowest point on land is the Dead Sea between Jordan and Israel, though mostly in Jordan. There is an even much lower valley, miles deep, under the ice in Antarctica. The ice covering Antarctica is several miles thick.

God loves to help us, just as we would love to help or save someone in need.

The land mass of earth is said to weigh nearly 6 six billion trillion tons*, which is more than one can explain. Six billion! It’s unthinkable! What great, almighty power did God use to raise this amount of land out of the seas? God is Almighty! We must learn to respect God, because he is stronger than we are. He’s much more powerful than all mankind put together.

²it was good: After a flood dry land is very good and comforting. Whenever we turn to God in our troubles, and he listens to us and helps us, it feels like coming out of a rough and threatening sea, and onto good, firm ground. That is what the Bible calls God’s salvation. It IS good! It’s comforting when God saves or helps us, when he gets us out of trouble, out of a mess or chaos or danger, and into a safe place. God loves to help or save us, just as we would love to help or save someone in need.

1:11-13 GOD MADE PLANTS

Then God said: Let the land produce fields covered with grass, and plants that have seeds and trees that give fruit. Let the trees each have their own special kind of fruit, with their own seeds in the fruit. Let all of this grow on the land.

Everything happened just as God said. The land did produce grass. It produced plants that have seeds from which will grow the same kind of plant. It also produced trees that give fruit. That fruit would have its own kind of seeds that will produce the same kind of tree. God saw to it that it was good. It would produce all kinds of food. God was pleased with what he saw. ¹It was satisfying! It was healthy and a pleasure! This was just what God wanted.

Then evening came, followed by the morning. That was the third day.

¹It was satisfying: One of the lessons we must learn in life is to be thankful to God for the things we have, especially food. Giving thanks to God reminds us that we are dependent on God for what we need. We should also be grateful to our parents for what they provide for us when we are children. We depend on them until we grow up. Learning to be thankful to our parents, and to appreciate what they do for us, trains us to become thankful to God. That's the way we learn to appreciate and worship him.

There are nearly 400,000 different types or species of plants in the world. Over 90% of them produce flowers. Just try to imagine thinking of so many different shapes and sizes and colours and smells or aromas, and even different ways of growing and different ways of producing seeds. Different plants also live for different lengths of time. There is just so much variety as well as

so much goodness in it all! It would be impossible to imagine how many blades of grass there must be on earth. Or to try to work out how many leaves on all the trees. But every single one is a miracle. They are all so complicated and clever. Each type is different, and every type works well. God made every one of them – and he still does! Many types of trees lose their leaves in the autumn, and get brand new leaves made in the spring. As young trees grow they get more new leaves. Grass, that gets eaten or mowed or even burnt, grows again. God keeps on doing all this.

Learning to be thankful for our parents trains us to become thankful to God.

Plants are a miracle that we can clearly see. How does the soil produce trees or bushes? How does the soil turn into so much wood? There are tons of wood in a big tree, yet the ground under the tree is not hollowed out by producing all that wood and moving it above ground. How does the same soil turn not only into wood but also into so many leaves? How does ground produce flowers and fruit? How does the rough earth turn into such tasty fruit, with so many different tastes, all growing out of the soil? How does that same soil turn into such beautiful flowers with such a lovely aroma or smell? How do so many different aromas come out of the same garden, or so many different colours? How does a seed turn into a plant? The more you try to think about all this the more of a mystery and miracle it seems. The answer is that God makes all things grow. God gets the land to turn into the things we need and like. What a wonderful God we've got! It is well worth our while to get to know God who makes all things grow in such amazing and useful ways.

It is useful to learn how healthy some plants are for our body and mind. Learn what they are and how to use them, to live a better life. God has put some first class products in many plants for our health. He has also provided so many marvellous flowers for our eyes, and even our nose, to enjoy. There are also lots of lovely sounds to please our ears, if we listen to natural life around us, such as the wind in the trees.

How does a seed turn into a plant? The more you try to think about all this the more of a mystery and miracle it seems.

***6 six billion trillion tons:**

A thousand is a hundred hundreds; a million is a thousand thousands; a billion is a thousand millions, and a trillion is a thousand billions. So a billion trillion means not just a thousand trillions and not just a million trillions, but a whopping great billion of trillions. This is too much for any of us to understand. That is exactly what God is like: He is much too great for any of us to understand. Even more than that, he is much too good for any of us to understand properly. All we can do is just to believe in him.

1:14-19 GOD MADE THE SUN, MOON AND STARS

God now said: Let there be lights in space, in the sky, to make the difference between day and night. They must also serve as ¹signs and seasons, and as days and years.

Let them be as lights up there in the sky, and let them give light for the earth.

That is what then happened. It all turned out exactly as God had ordered. It was magnificent! God made two big lights up there in the sky. The bigger, stronger light was the sun. It was to control the day. The lesser, more gentle light was the moon. It was to brighten up the dark night sky. God also made the stars.

God put them in the sky to give light on earth.

He made them ²to rule over or govern the day and the night. They were to make a clear difference between light and darkness. God saw to it that ³this was well done. He was pleased with what he saw. It was awesome! It was also all so reliable and so good for the world.

Then evening came, followed by the morning. That was the fourth day.

¹signs: Where the sun rises or sets on the horizon shows us how far the year has gone. If the sun has moved closer to the Arctic in the north then it is winter time in the southern hemisphere and summer in the north. If the sun moves towards the Antarctic in the south, then it is winter time in the northern hemisphere and summer in the south. The moon, by waxing and waning, growing more bright and then less bright, also shows us how far the month has gone. What the stars look like, and where they are in the sky, makes it possible for people to know exactly where they are if they are out at sea. Aeroplanes can also use the stars to guide them through the night.

But the sun, moon and stars are signs in another way. God knows that we need the **sun** to shine. But we need light not just outside but also inside us, in our soul. God wants to shine into our lives and make us feel good. God has also given us the **moon**. When the moon is full, even the darkness is lovely. The moon fades or wanes during one half of the month, and then waxes, or fills up with light, during the second half. This should encourage us. When life gets hard and unpleasant for us we must not give up. God will see to it that it gets brighter and better later on.

God has also put the stars in the sky for us. The stars are beautiful. They are awesome! They are utterly reliable. They keep their proper place in the night sky. There are so many of them. It's not possible to count them. One can spend one's whole life studying the **stars**. They are too amazing to explain. God says that the good things he wants us to have are like the many stars in the night sky. There are so many of them, and they are so lovely.

to rule over or govern: The sun and the moon govern our lives, and the whole world, all the time, every day. The time, the days, the months, the seasons and the years are all based on the sun and moon, and are very accurate and reliable indeed. The stars are also as accurate and reliable as the sun and moon are.

Man can never change the way the skies work, or the rules by which they govern us. Nor should they ever be changed, because they are so good. Their timing is absolutely perfect. The sun, moon and stars do us a lot of good. Their light also shows up a lot of beauty. Beautiful things make us feel good. A great pleasure is to get up early and watch a new day dawning. Another treat is to relax and enjoy admiring the sunset. Though we cannot see God, we can see what he made. We can see it and touch it. We can hear it and smell it. We can taste it and feel it. We can experience it and enjoy it. That tells us something real about God whom we cannot see.

God has also given us commandments to obey. They are to rule our lives in the same excellent way that the sun and moon do. God's laws are to make us become good so that we can end up as stars in the kingdom of heaven. Just as we cannot change the way that the sun and moon rule in the sky, so we cannot change God's rules. They are perfect because he has given them to us. They are what are best for all of us.

Like high tides and low tides, good times and hard times happen in our lives. Highs and lows never stop coming and going.

this was well done: It is impossible to tell anyone how wonderful the skies are. There are worlds out there that are far bigger than our world. There are suns in space that are far, far bigger than our sun. There are too many stars for anyone to count.

For most of history people believed that the sun circled around the earth the way the moon does. An Italian man called Galileo [ga-l'lee-oh] lived about the year 1600. He was a scientist. He invented a telescope, and used it to study the stars. His telescope could make the stars look twenty times bigger, or twenty times closer, than they appear to our sight. While looking into the skies he worked out that the sun does not circle around the earth, but rather the earth circles around the sun. It takes a year for the earth to get right around the sun. This was one of the beginnings of modern science.

It takes nearly a month for the moon to get around the earth. The moon is over 200,000 miles from earth, and is about a quarter the size of the earth. One great function the moon performs, because it is big enough and close enough to earth, is to pull at the seas. As it circles around the world it tugs at the oceans. This causes the waters in the seas to keep moving, just as the winds on the land keep moving. When the moon pulls the sea towards our shore-line it is high tide, and when it pulls the sea away the tide runs out. High tide and low tide never stop.

In the same sort of way good times and hard times happen in our lives. Highs and lows never stop coming and going.

The sun is nearly 100,000,000 (100 million) miles from the earth. The sun and moon look about the same size from earth, but the sun is 400 times larger than the moon. It is also about 400 times further from earth than the moon. The sun is more than 100 times bigger than the earth. The sun is almost 900,000 miles across, or well over a million kilometres. Its great heat causes the winds there to blow at over a million miles an hour.

Be careful not to look at the sun when it is bright, without clouds. It will damage your eyes. In the same way we can never see God: he is far too glorious for us to be able to see him.

God has put the earth at exactly the right distance from the sun. It's not too close and too hot, nor is it too far and too cold for us. God has made sure that we can live and be comfortable. The distances out in space among all those stars are unbelievable. One cannot understand that light from those stars would take billions of years to reach us, when light travels at 186,000 miles in just one second.

In the same way we cannot understand how great God is who made all of this. We would not be able to see him because he is too bright, far, far brighter than the sun. All we know is that he is great, utterly marvellous, perfectly wonderful and absolutely awesome! He deserves all our respect and admiration. There's no one else like him. We should worship him. Worship means to appreciate him, like him and respect him. We must thank him, love him and fear him. To fear him means to obey him. Fear means that we do not dare disobey him.

It is interesting that God made light before he made the sun. This is to show us that light, the sign of truth, is forever. The sun is not forever. One day, far in the future, the sun is going to burn out and be no more. There is nothing in this world that will last forever. It will all come to an end sometime. But God and his light and truth, and his love and plans, are eternal. They will never burn out. They will never come to an end. If you read the Bible you are reading something that will outlast even the world and the sun.

1:20-23 GOD CREATED FISH AND BIRDS

Then God said: Let the water everywhere swarm with lots of life, with huge numbers of living creatures. Let birds also fly above the ground. Let them fly around freely, up in the sky.

So God created huge amounts of ¹fish and sea creatures. He gave them life so that they could live and move around. He created great swarms of them in the water, millions and billions and trillions of them. On top of this each type of fish was a special kind. God also made all the ¹birds that can fly. Each type of bird was also its own special kind. God saw to it that it was all good. God liked what he saw. God had now made life. Life is a marvellous thing! There were now lots of different kinds of living creatures on earth. It was all very fascinating!

²God blessed all these living creatures. God said: Be useful. Produce your little ones. Grow and increase your numbers. Fill the waters of the seas with life. Let the numbers of the different sorts of birds in the world also increase.

Then it was evening, and morning, the fifth day.

¹fish and birds: The new idea about creating the fish and the birds was that they had life in them. They could breathe. They could also move around as they pleased. They could even move up or down. They are different from plants that grow and stay in just one place.

FISH: The main thing about the fish, or sea-creatures, was that there were so many of them. The greatest movement or migration of living creatures in the world is among the fish. The greatest swarm of fish in the world are the sardines that swim along the eastern coast of South Africa. Where there are so many sardines there will be larger fish to feed on them, as well as many birds diving into the sea to catch them. Other fish also migrate, some of them deep down in the oceans. Salmon migrate far out to sea and then migrate back to the very same river they were born in to lay their eggs. How they find the right river is a mystery. Sharks travel thousands of miles through the seas. Whales also travel many miles from where they feed in the cold waters of the Antarctica to where they give birth in the warmer waters, such as South Africa, where they are a great tourist attraction. The largest living creature in the world is the massive Blue Whale. It is up to 100 feet or 30 metres long, and can weigh anything up to 200 tons.

Many people love fishing. Another fascinating hobby is diving and swimming around among the fish. There are over 30 000 different types or species of fish that we know of. There are many trillions of fish in the sea. There are more fish than any other kind of creature, but they are all out of our sight, under the surface of the sea. Even the largest creatures in the world are unseen most of the time. So we cannot see most of what God has made. But it IS all there! In the same way we cannot see all that God is doing in people's lives all over the world. But he is there, doing many wonderful things for so many people. What God is doing is amazing, and it's because God is amazing.

BREAKING NEWS:

The Bible says that God created fish in vast numbers: the sea was teeming with them.

In February 2021 scientists discovered a new fish breeding colony in the Antarctic. In the past they knew that there were about 60 breeding nests in that area. Each nest was a small circle of stones on the ocean floor of mud. Early in 2021 they discovered that the breeding colony is actually about the size of Malta Island (which is in the Mediterranean Sea). They found that instead of just 60 breeding nests there are an estimated 60

million breeding spots there. Each breeding nest contains over 1,700 eggs that are being protected by either a male or a female adult. That is over 100,000,000,000 (a hundred billion) fish eggs in one breeding season in one tiny, tiny area of the vast, vast seas. Of course there are also at least 120 million parent fish looking after those eggs. Those fish have transparent blood and brains that prevents their blood from freezing in those icy conditions.

Even the largest creatures in the world are unseen most of the time. So we cannot see most of what God has made. But it IS all there!

How true and reliable is the Bible from the beginning!

BIRDS: The main thing about the birds was that they had the freedom to fly around up in the air. The albatross bird has a wingspan of over ten feet. Some birds can stay in the air for months. Some can fly right around the world. Some can even sleep while flying. A certain type of vulture can fly over 35,000 feet high, which is as high as passenger aeroplanes fly. There is a type of goose that flies regularly over the Himalaya Mountains at heights of nearly 30,000 feet. The fastest creature in the world is the Peregrine Falcon, which can fly at speeds up to 300 kilometres an hour as it hunts its prey in the air. There are at least 10,000 different species of birds. (There are 30,000 types of fish and 10,000 types of birds.) A favourite hobby for some people is bird watching. They get to know all the different types of birds in an area. They take photos of them, or film them and what they do and how they fly.

Birds have been flying since the beginning of the world. But it took man thousands of years, until about the year 1900, to learn to fly. Two brothers, Orville and Wilbur Wright carefully studied how birds fly. Then, at Kitty Hawk in America, they succeeded in getting a primitive aeroplane up into the air. Their first effort got them into the air for just over 10 seconds. But their plane went over 100 feet (30 metres) up into the air. That was a great achievement. I wonder if any birds watched that effort, and what they may have thought of it... Over a hundred years before that people were able to go up into the air in a huge balloon. But a balloon just goes where the wind blows. It does not really fly.

Ever since the invention of flight, flying has been something of a risky business. Many people have died while flying. It takes a lot of highly trained people and a huge amount of time to make sure that flying in an aeroplane is safe. But for birds, flying is quite safe, wherever they go, however high they fly or however far they travel when they migrate. Some birds travel for over 15,000 miles, and take up to two months for the journey. The Arctic Tern flies from near the North Pole to near the South Pole each year. It is amazing to watch some massive flocks of birds, hundreds of thousands of them, or even millions, all flying together. They are so close that one cannot tell one bird from another.

Yet not one of them crashes into any other. What is perhaps even more astonishing is to see masses of bats, numbering as much as a million or so, flying together at night. They all fly safely AND they are all blind! What God has made!

2God blessed all these living creatures: God gave all these creatures the gift of life. God's blessing means two things: God wants his creatures to have life, and he also wants them to enjoy it. He wanted the fish to be swimming around freely in the seas and the birds flying freely in the skies. They were meant to enjoy life. They would also be there for us to enjoy.

An extra blessing that God gave his creatures was that they would be able to give birth to little ones. A most important part of the lives of fish and birds is to give birth to their young. In this way every type of fish or fowl would increase in their numbers. It's a great thing to have a family, even for birds or fish! Birds are well known for the way they look after their young until they can fly. Many fish just leave God to look after their young when they are born – and he does!

God wants his creatures to have life, and he also wants them to enjoy it.

1:24-25 GOD MADE ANIMALS

Then God said: Let the land produce ¹animals, living creatures, each one of a certain kind. Let the land support animals for farming, and animals that can move around in nature and live off the land. All these animals are to be of special types or species. That is what then happened.

God made different kinds of animals that live on the land. He made all sorts of different species of animals that can move around in the countryside. God saw to it that it was well done. God approved of what he had made. It was good. It was excellent and marvellous. Animals are so interesting, and all of them are very well made. We also like animals, just as God does.

¹animals: It seems that there are over a million species of animals on earth. It may be much more than a million. People keep on discovering more types of animals.

There was a time when people used to hunt certain types of animal until there were very few of that type left. Now people try to look after the animals and protect them and help them survive. There are even special efforts to help some types that have nearly died out to recover their numbers. Animals are important to us. Some kinds of animals are used for farming. Many others live in the wild. Even wild animals need to be cared for and looked after. Some animals are friendly and some are harmless. But there are those that are dangerous. In heaven all animals will be great fun to live with. They won't fight or harm or kill anymore. Imagine playing with a lion or a tiger! Imagine an elephant swinging you up onto its neck, or a furry bear cuddling you to sleep. God has given us animals to love and enjoy, and in heaven all animals will love us too.

God wants us to learn to care about animals so that we can learn from that how to care about people.

The important thing about animals is that they are our responsibility. God has put us in charge of them. We are to care for them and look after them. Animals need us. Many animals depend on humans for food and water. Even wild animals need us to look after the world so that they can live safely in it.

A great problem that is always with us is cruelty to animals. Some animals suffer tremendously from being neglected or badly treated. We should not only look after our own animals well, but also do what we can if we come across animals suffering. We need to try to help them, especially if they suffer because of the way that people mistreat them.

God wants us to learn to care about animals so that we can learn from that how to care about people. The two most important things that we have to learn in life are how to get to know God and how to understand people. Caring for animals helps us to learn to respect God who made them, and it also teaches us to care for people. Looking after animals is not easy, but it's a very good thing to do.

Caring for animals helps us to learn to respect God who made them, and it also teaches us to care for people.

1:26-28 GOD CREATED MAN

Then God said: ¹Let us make man. Let us make man ²in our own image. We shall make him like God, so that he is able to rule and to be the leader of all that we have made. Let him rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air. Let him be in control of the animals, and take charge of the whole earth and all the creatures that move about on the land. We want man to care for them and look after them.

So God created man. He created man like himself, someone who is capable and caring. He created him as a reflection of God. God created both man and woman.

God blessed them. He wanted them to live good, useful and happy lives. God said to them: Increase in number, and fill the world. You two must be in charge of the earth. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky, and over all the living animals that move around on land. The best thing that God created was the last thing he made. It was man and woman, and from them, boys and girls.

1Let us: Why did God say, “Let us?”

First, it is most important to understand that there is only one true God. God alone made man. No one else helped him. We human beings certainly did not help God to make us.

God is very complicated. There is a lot about God that we do not understand at all, and much that we find difficult to get to know about.

Even the word “man” is complicated. It really means mankind. It means human or humanity. It means everyone, men and women, boys and girls. All of us are human. Humanity is also very complicated. One will spend one’s whole life trying to understand people. But God is far, far more complicated than that. GOD means someone too wonderful to understand and too marvellous for words.

When God created the world and life, the Holy Spirit was there. The Holy Spirit is God, and he worked with God. He did what God wanted. When God made man, the most important thing about man is that he would have the Spirit of God in him.

When God said, “Let us make man like us,” he was creating both man and woman. Man and woman together are “man”. So God and his Holy Spirit are also “us.”

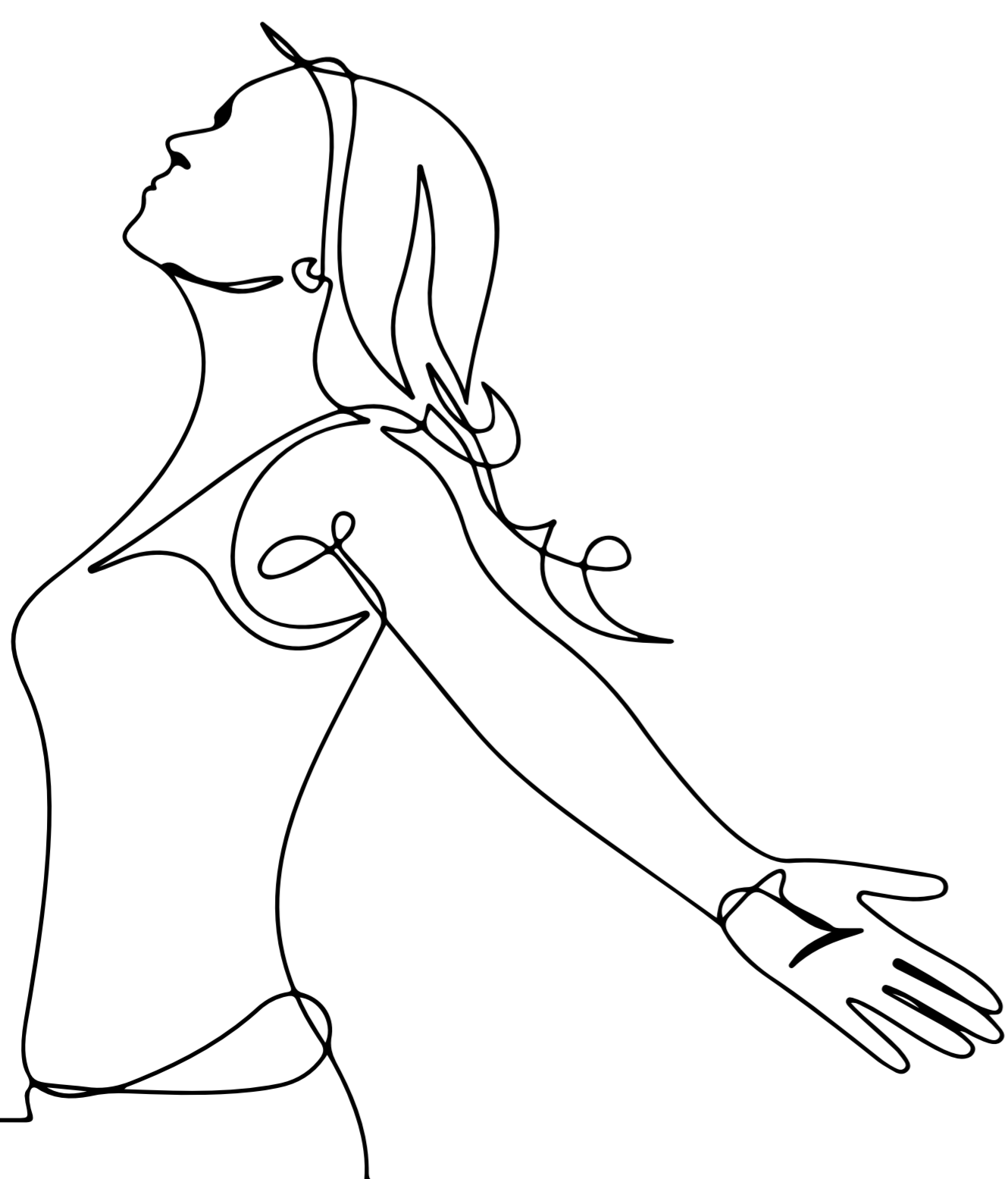
in our own image: God made man and woman in a special way. Man, or mankind, is much more wonderfully made than the animals or anything else in creation. Man is like God in some ways, just as children are like their parents in some ways.

The main way in which man was created like God is that he is able to rule over the rest of creation. Man can think and get things done in a way that animals cannot. Man can do what is right and honour God. Man can talk and explain things. Man can be God's friend. Man can love and do a lot of good. God made man to look after everything in the world that he has made.

Of all creation, God is especially good to us.

That we are made in the image of God means that we are to be good, just as God is good. Made in the image of God means that we are to be good rulers of God's creation.

Made in the image of God means that we are to be good rulers of God's creation.



1:29-31 GOD SUPPLIED FOOD

Then God said to man: I have given you all plants that produce seeds everywhere on earth, and all the trees that have fruit and produce seeds. All this will be good food for you.

It will also be food for every living creature on earth, and for every bird in the sky, and for every creature moving around on the land. This food is for every single living thing. ¹All these plants will be food for all of you. And that is how it was and will always be. All living creatures must have food. We cannot live or be healthy without it. We need it to be strong and able to do things.

God was very pleased with all that he had made. It was very, very good. It was excellent! It was such a wonderful blessing, especially for man! Then there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

¹All these plants will be food for all of you: Food is important for all of us, and for all creatures. Even plants need food, which they get out of the soil. We need food to grow, and we need food to be able to work. We not only need food, but we also enjoy good food.

We can easily see that many animals depend on people for their food. This is especially true of tame animals and farm animals. What is not so easy to see is that all of us depend on God for food. God is able to provide every person, and every creature, with the food they need for their whole life-time.

What we can see is that the food we all need depends on the weather. Food needs sunshine and rain in order to grow. It is also not difficult to realise that the weather is in God's hands. He decides how much rain to send, and he decides how hot the summer is to be and how cold the winters are.

What God has promised in the Bible is this: If we listen to him and obey him, he will look after us and supply what we need.

God's prophets told the people of God very clearly that if they obeyed God he would fill them with good food. If they refused to listen to him then God would punish them

To live you need food, but to live forever, said Jesus, you need me.

by causing them to suffer shortages of what they needed. These prophecies were made over and over again. And God did exactly what the prophets said he would do.

In the New Testament Jesus Christ taught us something even more important about food. He said, I am the food of life. To live you need food, but to live forever, said Jesus, you need me. However much good food people may have all their lives, they are still going to die. But Jesus promised that the food that he gives us means that we shall never die. We shall just leave this life and go straight to heaven.

Learn this lesson from food: God made food so that you would be dependent on it to live. God has also sent Jesus so that you can find and enjoy life permanently, forever and ever. The secret to life is food; the secret to everlasting life is Jesus Christ. All we have to do with food is grow it and prepare it, and then eat and enjoy it. What we must do with Jesus is listen to him, trust him, obey him and love him. Just as we put food in our tummy and enjoy it, so we must take the Lord Jesus to heart. We must believe in him and love him. Jesus Christ is God's greatest gift to us in the same way that food is God's good gift to us in creation.

**Jesus Christ is
God's greatest gift
to us in the same
way that food is
God's good gift to
us in creation.**

CHAPTER 2

In this chapter we look at the creation of man in more detail. It tells us how man was made, and what work he was given to do. It also tells us how God created man and woman. To begin with it tells us what God did on the seventh day.

2:1-3 GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY

So the universe and the whole earth were finished, as well as the great and wonderful things in them.

By the seventh day God had finished his work. So ¹he rested on the seventh day from the work he had done.

Therefore God blessed the seventh day by making it a special and different day. He made it holy. He blessed it because on that day he rested from all his great work of creation that he had done.

1he rested on the seventh day: During the week, man rests at night. We rest so as to get strength for the next day. But on the Sabbath, we can rest for the whole day as well as two nights in a row. This gives us strength in our body and mind and also in our spirit for the next week.

Since we do not work on the Sabbath there are two things we can do:

- The first is to give more time to **worship God** for his greatness, and for his goodness to us.
- The second is to **enjoy life** that God has given us.

The Hebrew word for “rest” is “Sabbath”. So, “**He rested on the seventh day**” means that the seventh day was God’s Sabbath.

The whole idea of the Sabbath is that if we are to get the most out of life we need to do two things:

- **First**, we shall not get something good out of life unless we work for it. To get what we would like in life, or to put some good into life, we must be prepared to work.

- But, **secondly**, we cannot enjoy life if all we do is work. To enjoy what we have worked for we need to stop and relax. We need to remember what is important in life, and what is truly good. We need to get some comfort and encouragement. That is what the Sabbath is for. Life is so complicated and hard and uncertain that we need to spend time with God.

When God finished his work, he saw that it was very good, and then rested with pleasure. The holiness of the Sabbath means that to make life good, we need something even better than work. We need to be truly thankful and we need real peace. We need to take a break to feel how good God is to us. That is what will make life really good. We also need hope. Hope is when we know that everything is going to turn out well in the end. When one has hope, one can keep going through difficult and even sad times. Hope means that God will get all things to come right eventually. The Sabbath is most important for building up hope in us.

Hope means that God will get all things to come right eventually. The Sabbath is most important for building up hope in us.

2:4-9 GOD PLANTED A GARDEN

Now this is what happened next when the skies and the earth were created, at the time the Lord God made the earth and the sky.

To begin with, not all the plants of the field were growing yet. Nor had the crops of the field started growing. This was for two reasons: First, because the Lord God had not made it rain on the land, and secondly, because there was no man to farm the land.

Then an underground stream came up out of the ground. It produced a useful wet mist that watered all the land around it. That solved the first problem.

To solve the second problem, the Lord God formed the man out of the dust from the soil, and breathed life into him through his nose. So the man became a living being or person. Life means that we are always breathing. (We normally breathe through our nose.)

Then the Lord God planted a garden in¹Eden to start with, and that is where he put the man whom he had formed.

There God made things grow out of the ground. He grew good looking trees and tasty fruit trees. Right in the middle of the garden was a different sort of tree. It was a fruit tree that held the secret to²the knowledge of good and bad, what is right and what is wrong. That tree was about knowing what is true, but also what is false or a lie.

¹**Eden:** Eden is a Hebrew word meaning a lovely, beautiful place to make us happy.

²**the knowledge of good and bad:** Man is in charge of the world, so life is a big responsibility. Responsibility means that it is important to know what is right, and to do it. We must also know what is wrong or foolish, and what is bad or harmful.

This special tree was there just like a sign. It was meant to encourage man to be good. It was also meant to warn man all the time not to do wrong things and make stupid mistakes.

2:10-14 THE RIVERS OF EDEN

A river was flowing from Eden. It was to water the garden. From there it divided into four and became the sources of great or ¹major rivers.

The first river curved its way through a land where there was gold.

The gold of that land was of a high quality. There were other good things there, like perfume and precious stones.

The second river curved or wound its way through a country that was then called ²Cush.

The name of the third river was the ³Tigris. It runs past the front, or east, of Asshur [a-shoor]. Asshur is better known as the powerful country of Assyria. Today Assyria is known as Syria. The fourth river is the ⁴Euphrates [yoo-fray-tees].

¹major rivers: We do not know where the first two rivers were. We just know that their water was important, and that people settled along those rivers. The rivers all came from Eden. The third and fourth rivers, Tigris and Euphrates, are well-known. Today they start in mountains to the east of Turkiye, not far south of the Black Sea. The Euphrates starts near the Caspian Sea, goes around the start of the Tigris River and then flows parallel to the Tigris, and to the south of it. The Euphrates flows through Syria and Iraq and is more than 1600 miles long. The Tigris flows roughly parallel to and north of the Euphrates, through Iraq and past Baghdad, the capital of Iraq. The Tigris River is over 1000 miles long. The two rivers join together about 100 miles before they get to the sea. They then flow into what used to be called the Persian Gulf, just north of Kuwait.

But what is important for the Bible is that these two great rivers flowed through two powerful countries and famous ancient civilizations. The first half of these two rivers flowed through Assyria, while the bottom half of both rivers passed through Babylonia. Assyria was the country that destroyed the northern country of Israel. Babylon, under King Nebuchadnezzar, took the southern tribe of Judah, the Jews, into exile. It put an end to the kings of Judah who were descended from King David.

²Cush: We do not know where this country Cush was. In the rest of the Bible, the name Cush means Ethiopia. Ethiopia is in Africa, up-river from Egypt, on the Nile.

³the Tigris: The Tigris River flows from near where Noah's ark came to ground after the flood. It flows through Assyria and on down through the country of Babylonia.

the Euphrates: The Euphrates is the most important river in the Bible. Many times in the Bible it is just called, “The River”, in the same way that the Mediterranean Sea is often just called, The Sea. The Euphrates has sweet or nice tasting water. That is what “eu” means: “sweet” or “good”. The Euphrates goes past where Babylon used to be.

From this one can see that there are some places in the Bible that we know nothing about, and there are other places in the Bible that we do know. This part of the Bible was written well over a thousand years before Christ. A lot has changed since then, but there are also a lot of things that have not changed. One of the values of the Bible is that it was written so long ago. That means that the Bible has been there throughout history. So it would have been read by many people over thousands of years.

The Bible has another side to rivers. Water is vital for life. Water comes from God. It comes from above, from rain. A river means that people always have water. They can use whatever they want or need. So people liked to settle near rivers or streams or wherever there was water that they could help themselves to. But rain is something that remains in God’s hands. We have to wait for rain. Even the rivers get their water from rain. We are to trust God to send us water.

Water is vital for life. Water comes from God.

The Garden of Eden was the perfect place for man. One of the big things that made it so good or ideal was that there was that great river there. This would be useful to Adam and Eve as they looked after their wonderful garden with its animals and plants. In the Garden of Eden God supplied water generously.

We should all learn to drink water. It is good for our health. It is even good for our bones. Try to drink some pure water every day – just plain, clean water. It is a special gift to us from God. When one becomes very thirsty, really thirsty, water is the loveliest thing there is to drink. Nothing can beat it.

God has three special uses for water:

Water is to save us from **thirst**.

Water is to get things, and us, **clean**.

Water is to make things **grow**.

2:15-17 GOD PUT MAN IN EDEN

Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to farm it and look after it.

The Lord God gave an order to the man. He told him: You are completely free to eat from every tree in the garden.

But, you must not eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of ¹what is right and what is wrong. You must keep your conscience clean. As soon as you eat from that fruit you will have to die.

¹what is right and what is wrong: The secret of life lies in two things:

- **First**, we are to enjoy life. That's what God wants us to do. He gives us lots of good things, and the freedom to enjoy ourselves. Adam and Eve were free to eat from every tree, and there were many of them. The secret to enjoying life is to do what is right and good. That is what God wants for us. That is why he made everything so good.
- **Secondly**, we must make sure that we do NOT do what is wrong. No matter what happens, nor whatever might happen, we must not do what is bad or ugly. We must never disobey God or do what is unacceptable to him. We must always keep our conscience clear and clean.

The tree of the knowledge of good and bad was there for a good reason. It was to encourage Adam and Eve and their children to do what is good. It was also there to warn them not to do anything bad.

But God also had another reason that the Bible tells us about later on. God can see into the future. He knew that many nasty things were going to happen in the world. But God can do anything. He knew that even if the world became a wicked place, spoilt and ruined by evil, he could still get good out of it. He has not only created man. He also cares about man. He wants man to escape from what is bad and return to what is good. He wants to save us even though we have many faults.

God wants man to escape from what is bad and return to what is good.

God wants to save us.

So this tree was meant to show us that from the beginning God knew that he was taking a chance when he created man. But that is what he wanted to do. Parents also take a chance when they have children, but that is what they want to do. They love their children despite their naughtiness or foolishness. They want to steer them away from what is wrong to what is good for them as they grow up.

It is the same with God. God knew that he could save his people even if they disobeyed him and would have to die. God knew that he could bring good out of what is bad, and life out of death, just as he brought light out of darkness and life out of nothing.

Out of our faults God brings us hope.

That is what the Bible is all about.

That is the message of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

2:18-24 GOD MADE WOMAN FOR MAN

Then the Lord God took a decision. He said: It is not good enough that the man is all alone. I will make a helper for him that will be like him, and that he will like.

So first of all the Lord God made, from the soil, every living animal that is out in the fields, as well as every bird in the skies. The Lord God brought these to the man to see how he would like them and what he would name each one. This meant that all these creatures would ¹get their names from man.

So the man gave names to all the animals and to the birds that fly, and to all the animals that live out in the fields. Yet, despite getting to know all these living creatures, the man could not find a real partner that was good enough or suitable for him.

So the Lord God put the man into a very deep sleep. Then while he was unconscious God took one of his ribs out and closed up his chest where the rib had been.

The Lord God built the rib he had taken from the man into a woman. So woman was made from man, not just from soil. This helps explain why women are more beautiful, and girls are so lovely, not just in looks but in nature too. God then brought the woman to the man.

The man, ²Adam, was pleased. He was delighted and grateful. He celebrated by saying:

*At last! She's ³bone of my bones,
and flesh of my flesh.*

Because of this I've decided that she is to be called "woman" [wo-man] since she was taken out of a man's body. In Hebrew a man is "ish" and a woman is "ishah" [ish-ah].

This explains why a grown man normally leaves the home of his father and his mother, and links up with his wife to become a couple. Together they can make their own home and start their own family. That is what our parents did, and that is what most children are going to do when they grow up.

Children do not live for a very long time with their parents. That could be for only about 20 years. But a married couple could be together for over 50 years.

¹get their names from man: When Adam gave names to all the animals, it meant that he was then in charge of them. He was like a father to them. He was responsible to care for them. In the same way parents give names to their children, and then look after them.

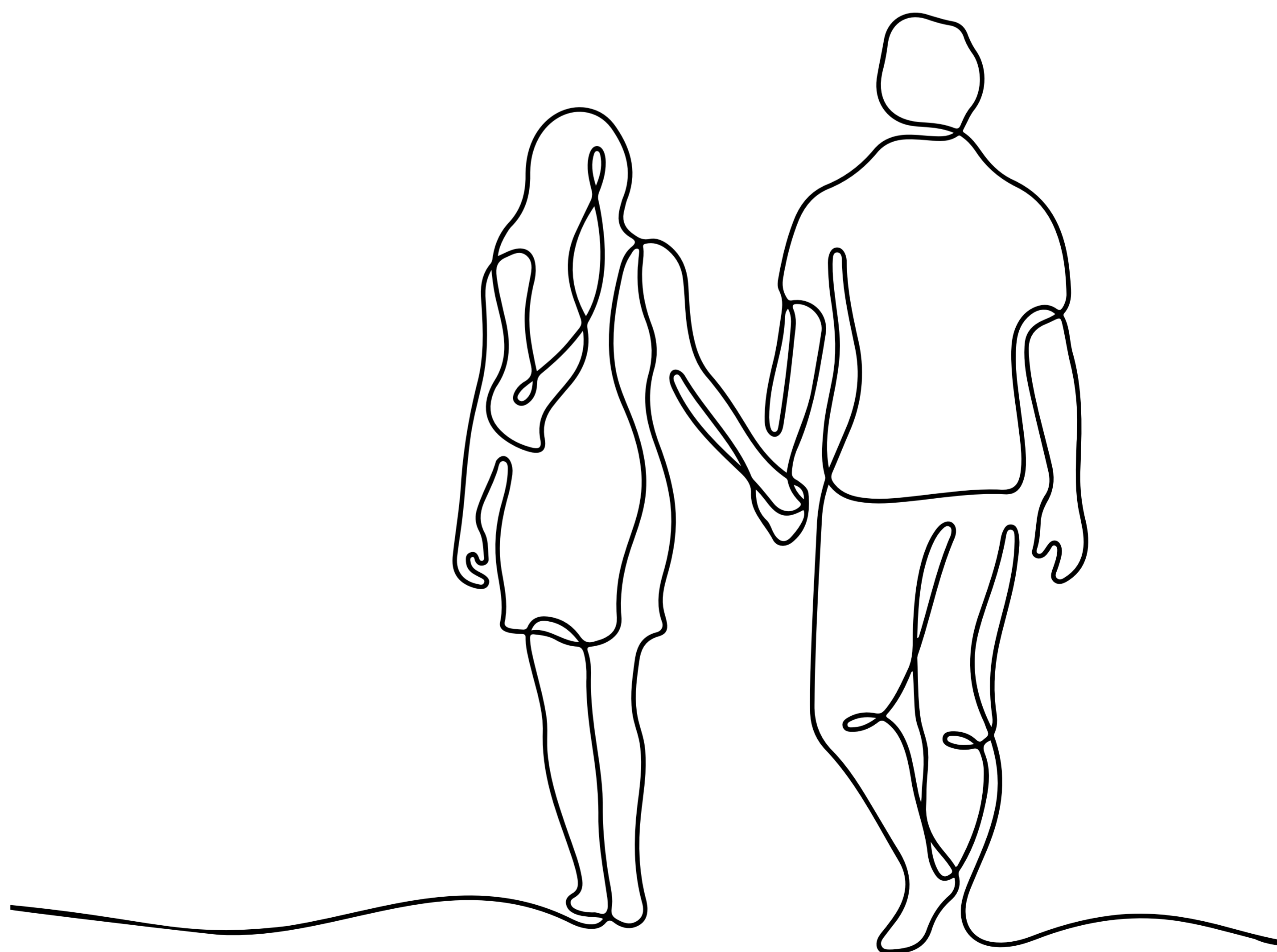
²Adam: “Adam” [a-dim] is a Hebrew word for “man.” The Hebrew word for ground or soil is “adamah” [a-dum-ah]. Man was made from the earth that God created. (Both “ish” and “adam” mean a man.)

³bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: This is a bit of Hebrew poetry. What it says is that the man likes the woman because she will give him strength, as his bones do. He loves her because she will give him happiness and pleasure, as his body does. She is his friend. He is so grateful for her, like a bridegroom on his wedding day, the happiest day of his life!

Bone of my Bones, and Flesh of my Flesh

means

**They will live together,
be stronger together,
and enjoy life more together.**



CHAPTER 3

The biggest problem there is in life is this: If God made the world so well and so good, why is it now so bad, with so much suffering? This next chapter answers this sad question.

Chapter 3 really begins with the last verse of chapter 2, which says the following:

2:25 HOW ADAM AND EVE BEGAN LIFE

So the universe and the whole earth were finished, as well as the great and wonderful things in them. By the seventh day God had finished his work. So he rested on the seventh day from the work he had done. Therefore God blessed the seventh day by making it a special and different day. He made it holy. He blessed it because on that day he rested from all his great work of creation that he had done.

3.1-3 THE SNAKE ASKS EVE A QUESTION

From among all the animals in the countryside that the Lord God had made, ¹the snake was the ²clever one. So it asked the woman: Is it true that God said that you can't eat the fruit from all the trees in this garden? Did God really say that you are not allowed to have whatever you want?

So the woman said to the snake: O no! God said that it's alright for us to eat from all the fruit of any of the trees in the garden. We can eat anything we like.

But there is just one tree right in the middle of the garden, and God warned us not to eat its fruit. He told us: You must not touch it at all, or else you will die. Don't have anything to do with it!

1the snake: To begin with all animals were lovely and safe and friendly towards Adam and Eve. And that is how they are going to be in heaven too.

Animals are different and have different abilities. People believed two things about snakes:

- **First, that they were clever, because of the way they hunted.** They would lie very still for a long time and not move at all. Their prey would not notice that they were there. Then, suddenly, they would strike.
- **Secondly, that they were dangerous.** They were poisonous.

In this very early part of the Bible we see the devil using the snake.

Many people do not believe that a snake talked. But the Bible is full of amazing miracles. A talking snake is just one of many surprising things written about in the Bible that we cannot explain. Later on there is also a case of a donkey talking to a very clever man who was going to do a very foolish thing. We cannot explain miracles. It is best to believe the Bible from beginning to end. To understand the Bible we have to believe it. People who do not believe the Bible can never understand it. It is obvious that if God is real he would perform miracles. He allowed the devil to use the snake to talk to Eve. Jesus said that God could even make the stones talk if he wanted to.

To begin with, snakes were not poisonous and dangerous. The Garden of Eden was a sign that the world is going to be a very different place when heaven comes. There will never be anything dangerous there. The Bible not only tells us the truth about the past, but it tells us the truth about the future too.

To be able to believe in what the Bible says about the future,

we need to be able to believe what the Bible says about the past.

²**clever:** In Hebrew the word for “clever” and the word for “naked” are the same sort of word. The Hebrew words are telling us that the devil used the snake’s **cunning** to take advantage of Eve’s **innocence**.

3.4-7 THE SNAKE TEMPTS THE WOMAN

The snake said to the woman: ¹I promise you that you will not be put to death. God did not mean that. You two will not lose your lives.

For God realises that when you eat from this tree you will find out that you are free. You will be just like God. You will be free to decide for yourselves what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong. The two of you will then be able to do what you feel like doing, and you will be free to decide what you don't want to do. God was just trying to put you off by scaring you.

So the woman then thought that the fruit of that tree would be good to eat as food. It also looked very nice. But the big thing was that if they ate that fruit they would become wise. They would be clever and smart, like God. So she took some of its fruit and ate it. She also gave it to her husband who was with her. And he ate it too.

But then they discovered something that they had not noticed before. They realised that they were naked. They suddenly felt embarrassed. So they got hold of some large fig leaves and made for themselves something to wear.

¹I promise you: There is a big problem with what the devil said to Eve. What he said was true in a way. Eve did not die when she ate the fruit. It was not poisonous. But what the snake had said was only half true. The devil did not tell Eve that she would die in the end, just as God had warned. One half was true, but the other half was a poisonous lie.

The most dangerous kind of lie is one that starts with a half-truth. If one believes the part that is true, one is then likely to believe the rest of it that is not true. Watch out for that!

3.8-13 BOTH OF THEM HAVE TO ANSWER TO GOD

Then they heard the voice of ¹The Lord God call them. He was visiting them in the garden ²at the time when the breeze blows. But instead of welcoming the Lord God, the man and his wife ran away. They tried to hide from God among the bushes in the garden.

But the Lord God demanded to see the man. He called out to him: Where are you?

The man had to answer: I heard you call in the garden, but I could not bring myself to face up to you. I felt so bad because I was naked. So I ran away and hid myself.

The Lord God asked him: Who showed you that you were naked? Who explained that to you? Did you disobey me? ³Did you eat from the tree that I told you clearly NOT to eat?

The man answered: The woman you kindly gave me to be with me as my wife and helper and friend - she produced the fruit from the tree and offered it to me. I never thought that anything harmful would come from her, so I ate it. So yes, I did eat it!

Then the Lord God spoke to the woman: What is this about? What have you done? The woman answered: I'm afraid the snake tricked me, and I was completely taken in by it. That's why I ate it. I know I should never have allowed myself to listen to him. But yes, I did eat it!

¹the Lord God: Usually our Creator is called “God.” Here he is called, “The Lord God.” This title shows us God’s authority. He is the Big Boss, the Judge. He is completely in charge. One day we shall all have to face him, and answer to him for what we have done.

²at the time when the breeze blows: Toward the end of the day a light breeze would start to blow. This was the time when people would stop work and go home for supper. People would get together to relax. They would then share their news about the day, and enjoy one another’s company. It was a time to build up friendships. So it was a problem when God came to visit them, because they had

Instead of enjoying the Lord’s visit, they tried to hide away from him.

disobeyed him. Instead of enjoying the Lord's visit, they tried to hide away from him. One is always awkward and embarrassed when one has done something wrong. We do not like to meet people when we have let them down or failed them.

³Did you eat from the tree that I told you clearly NOT to eat? The Lord God asked Adam and Eve these questions. He asked the questions for two reasons:

- The **first** reason is to get to the truth. Questions bring out the truth.
- The **second** reason is to get them to see that what they had done was wrong. When one has done what is right, it is a pleasure to answer any questions. One is proud to be able to answer them. But when one has done what is wrong, it is painful and embarrassing. One feels bad. One feels guilty.

The Lord asked these questions to get the man to see that what he has done was wrong.

3.14-15 GOD PUNISHES THE DEVIL

Verse 15 is important. It explains why life is so hard, but why we can live with hope despite the problems we face. This verse says that there is a great war going on. It is between a son of Eve, and his enemy, the devil. The Son of Eve will be a special man. For the sake of humanity he will fight the devil. Although he will get hurt, he will defeat the devil. In this war we too will struggle and get hurt, but we shall also win in the end, thanks to a future special son of Adam and Eve. This verse is the first sign in the Bible that a Messiah would come for us from God.

Then the Lord God told the snake: Because you have caused this trouble you will be punished. I am angry with you. You are going to get into big trouble. You will be hated more than any other animal. From now on you will be reduced to ¹crawling around on your belly. No one will want you. You will ²bite the dust, and spend your life lonely and silent. You will suffer for what you have done. You are ³cursed.

Now we come to this famous verse 15:

The Lord God said to the snake: ⁴I shall bring war between you and the woman, and between ⁵your offspring and her offspring. He is going to hurt you, and you are going to hurt him. He will destroy your pride and arrogance. He will take away your power to do harm to people, and your influence to cause them trouble. He is going to remove your dreadful leadership among people. As it says in Hebrew: “He will hurt your head.” But you are going to attack him using dirty tricks. You are going to fight him with lies and excuses and cheating. You will tackle him by means of bullying and mocking and insulting his people. As it says in Hebrew: “You will hurt his heel.”

¹crawling around on your belly: It is possible that the snake was not only able to rise up as a cobra can, but could also move around with its head high above the ground. But after being punished by God it would move about only by lowering its head to ground level. When people are cursed or punished by God it means that they will be embarrassed or ashamed of themselves. One sees this when suspects charged with a crime hide their faces when they are brought to court.

²bite the dust: To “bite the dust” means to lose and be humiliated. People hate this.

³**cursed**: To be cursed means to be an enemy of God. Anyone who is cursed will be punished. He or she will end up being lonely and silent because no one wants them. That's an awful punishment. It drives people mad. Being cursed will ruin and destroy them. To be cursed is the exact opposite of to be blessed. Blessed means to be God's friend and get his support. We shall end up happy and with good friends and everlasting life.

⁴**I shall bring war between you and the woman**: God could not let the devil, who used the snake, get away with the harm that it had done. The devil had tried to break down the friendship between God and the people he had made. If that friendship broke down, Adam and Eve would die. If a friendship breaks down, or we lose a friend, it is very painful. If we lose our friendship with God we lose everything. We lose our life. So when an enemy tries to destroy a good friendship, and people's lives, it is time to declare war on that evil enemy.

⁵**your offspring and her offspring**: This is where a single word in the Bible becomes very important. What is meant by the word, "offspring?" The word in Hebrew is "seed." A seed will produce another plant just like the original one. So, offspring, or seed, means a child or grandchild, or what we call a direct descendent. The Apostle Paul, in the New Testament, speaks about this word here in Genesis. In his letter to the Galatians, chapter 3, Paul points out that we must understand that it says a seed, not seeds. That means someone, someone special. By punishing the snake God was telling the devil that a certain chosen person was going to go to war against him. That person would fight the devil for the sake of all God's people. Paul tells us that it would be Jesus Christ, the Son of God and descendent of Eve - a real, true man.

**Jesus came to
make it possible for
us to obey God and
do what is right,
and live together
in peace, with love.**

What is the war between Christ and the devil about? They are fighting for the souls of people. Paul tells us in Galatians 3 that the devil has succeeded in getting everyone to fail to live up to God's standards. The devil has also caused a lot of fighting and arguing and unpleasantness among us all. Christ came to tackle this. He came to make it possible for us to obey God and do what is right, and live together in peace, with love. He fought the devil to make us good, and to get us to be good to one another. Eve and Adam would be punished, but a Messiah, their descendent, was going to save the human race.

3.16-20 GOD PUNISHES EVE AND ADAM

To the woman God said: I have taken the decision to make it difficult and painful for you to have children. Yet you will still want your husband to give you children. He will have to look after you and be your leader.

To Adam God said: Because you listened to what your wife had to say, and gave in to her, and ate from the tree that I ordered you not to, you will be punished. It is going to be painful and a strain for you to grow food from the ground. To have enough to eat, you are going to have to work hard for the whole of your life.

The ground will make plenty of difficulties for you by producing prickly thorns and lots of weeds. But you are going to need to eat the crops of the fields.

In order to get food to eat you are going to have to work hard. You will work until you sweat. You will have to go on doing this until you die. When you die you will return to the ground because you were originally taken from the ground. You were made of dust, and you will go back to the dust.

So the man took responsibility for his wife and named her Eve. He called her that because she was the mother of all human beings. Her Hebrew name is ¹Chavvah, which means “Life” [chav-vah, ch as in loch]. She is the mother of all people who have life. We translate Chavvah into English as Eve.

¹Chavvah [chav-vah, ch as in loch], which means “Life”: Adam had listened carefully to God when he punished the snake. Adam understood that one of their descendents was going to go to war with the devil in order to save human beings, even though they had sinned against God. So he realised that two things would happen to people: they would die, BUT they would ALSO live. That is why he gave Eve a hopeful name, not a hopeless one.

At the same time Adam realised that he must be responsible for Eve in future. He must look after her, and be a good leader for her.

God knows how to punish us in such a way that good comes of it.

3.21-24 GOD EXPELS MAN FROM THE GARDEN

Then the Lord God made clothes out of ¹animal skins for Adam and his wife to wear.

The Lord God said: What has now happened is that man has become like ²one of us. He has learnt to know what is good as well as what is bad. Since he has discovered this it is important that he does not help himself to the fruit from the Tree of Life. If he eats that then he shall live forever.

So the Lord God ordered man to leave the Garden of Eden. He had to go and work with the soil from which he had originally been taken.

In that way God expelled the man. He then put ³a special guard from heaven outside the garden, with a shiny and threatening sword. This dangerous weapon was used to patrol the whole area in order to protect the way to ⁴the Tree of Life.

¹animal skins: Animal skins are amazing. We usually call their skins, leather. Leather is very useful in all sorts of ways. It is tough and strong. It can bend often without breaking and does not easily tear. It is long lasting. It protects animals from heat and cold, and from many sorts of injuries. Leather is an excellent form of covering. An animal's skin stays with the animal for life. It is water-proof. Leather clothing is top quality. These skins would have solved Adam and Eve's problem of being naked. The fig-leaves that they made for themselves would have been of no use. When we try to cover up our mistakes or faults, we don't do any good. We cannot get rid of our conscience. But when God sorts our sins out, he deals with them well and permanently. God can even take the bitterness out of our conscience. God can wipe out and get rid of our guilt and shame.

Of course, it is likely that in order to get these skins, some animals would have had to die. So the animal dies in order to solve a problem for man. This is the basic idea of sacrifice: It is that one creature suffers in order to help another. Sacrifice is the way to sort out sin.

Sacrifice is the only way to get rid of sin, and to free us from sin and the trouble it causes.

²one of us: Why does God say, "One of us?" Who was he talking to?

First of all we must realise that Hebrew is a different language from ours. Different languages say things differently. Sometimes the English translation does not mean exactly the same as what the Hebrew means.

God was talking to himself. But we know that God's Spirit was with God in the creation. The Bible will tell us that the Holy Spirit is also God. Later on the Bible will also tell us that God's Son was also with God at creation. God's Son is God. Father and Holy Spirit and Son, together, IS God. "One of us" could also mean that Father, Holy Spirit and Son ARE God.

3a special guard from heaven: In Hebrew this is called a cherub [in Hebrew k'roov. In English you have one cherub and two cherubs. But in Hebrew it is one k'roov but two k'roo-veem, which we call cherubim.]

A cherub is difficult to explain. It is a creature in heaven, but not the same as an angel. It is an extremely powerful creature, with a body something like a bull, yet with a human head. It has four huge wings on its back. It is said to be as powerful as a lion, as strong as a bull, as sharp-sighted as an eagle, and as intelligent as a human. Sometimes it has the four heads of these four great creatures. The basic idea of cherubim in ancient times was that they formed a picture of a sort of palace guard for the greatest of kings. Cherubim were carved in the walls and surrounded the carvings of the great rulers. However, in the Bible they are real, not just carvings on walls. They surround the throne of God. They are awesome because God is awesome!

4the Tree of Life: This tree contained the secret of life. If one kept on eating its fruit, one would go on and on living permanently. It would stop one from ever getting old. God did not destroy the idea of that tree. Although the tree became extinct because of man's sin, it re-appears in the New Testament. The Tree of Life is waiting for us in heaven. There we shall be able to eat its fruit and live forever. Praise God for that! What a blessing! What a marvellous, glorious hope!

This is why Jesus said, "You have to eat me." He is the Tree of Life. Whoever asks Jesus into his heart and life, and repents of his sins, shall live forever. This applies to anyone and everyone. People who don't believe Jesus cannot understand this.

So, although Genesis chapter 3 is all about how man came to have to die, the last word in the chapter, in both English and Hebrew, is the idea of LIFE! Eve! Chavvah!

The most important thing about the Garden of Eden was the Tree of Life. The Tree of Life tells us two things that are important about God and important to us:

- **The one thing is that when God made man it was possible for people to live forever.** All they had to do was to eat the fruit of the Tree of Life.
- **The other thing is that if anyone thinks for a moment that the devil could outwit God and ruin all God's plans,** then that person is ignorant and must think again. God made man to live, and not even the devil is going to ruin God's plans.

But the Tree of Life was not able to work because man decided to eat from the wrong tree. That was the tree of getting to know not only what is good but also what is wrong and bad. So God organised another plan. He sent his Son into our world. He is the true Tree of Life. God's Son first had to sort out man's mistake and sin. Then he went back to heaven to prepare it for us. Heaven will include another Tree of Life, as we read in the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation. What is more, there will be no danger from any other tree because God will have separated heaven from hell, and good from bad, forever. What is bad will never again upset what is good. There will be no more lies and no more death in heaven, and no more tragic mistakes or suffering or sadness. Never ever!

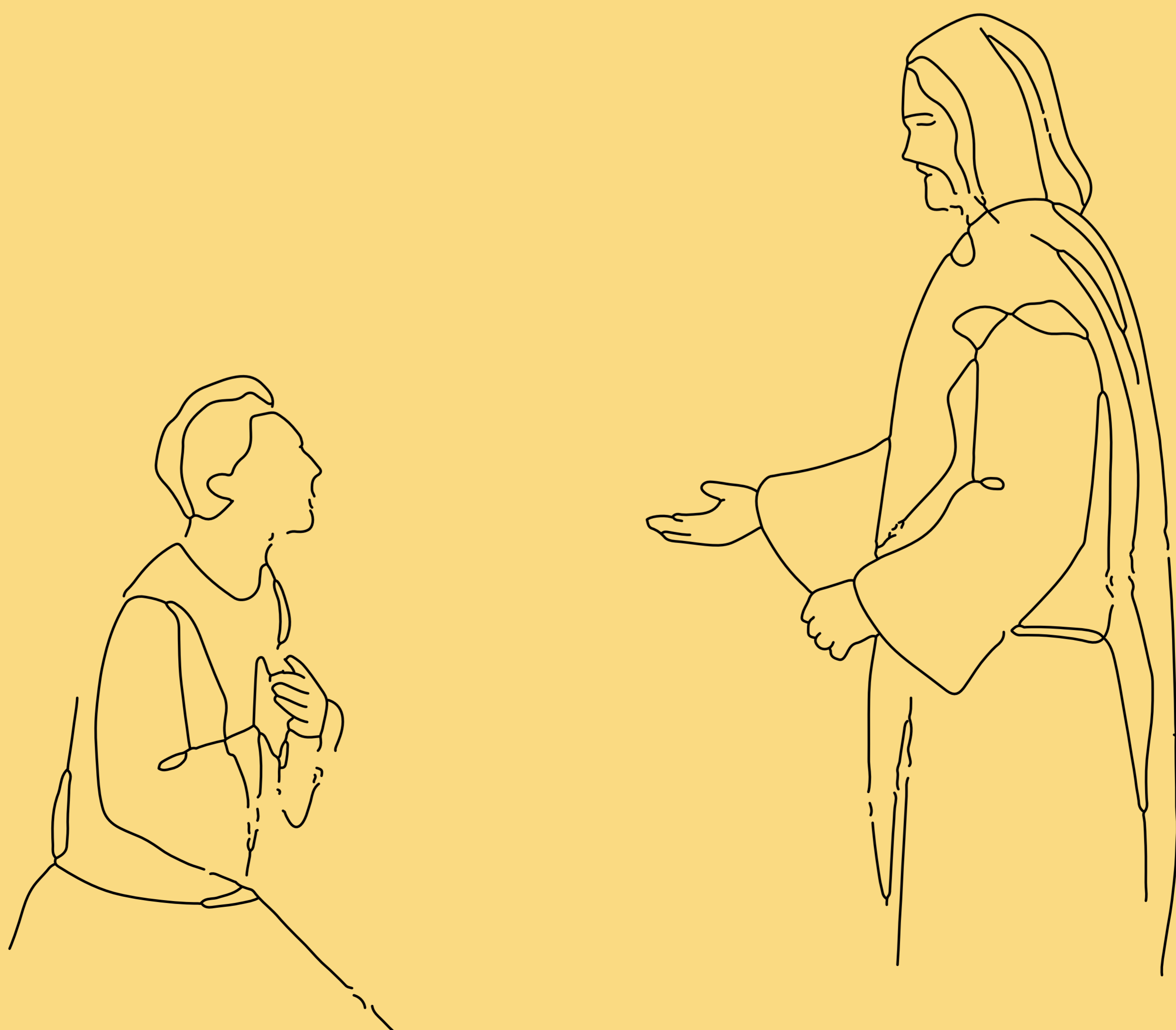
God made man to live.

God made man to be his friends forever.



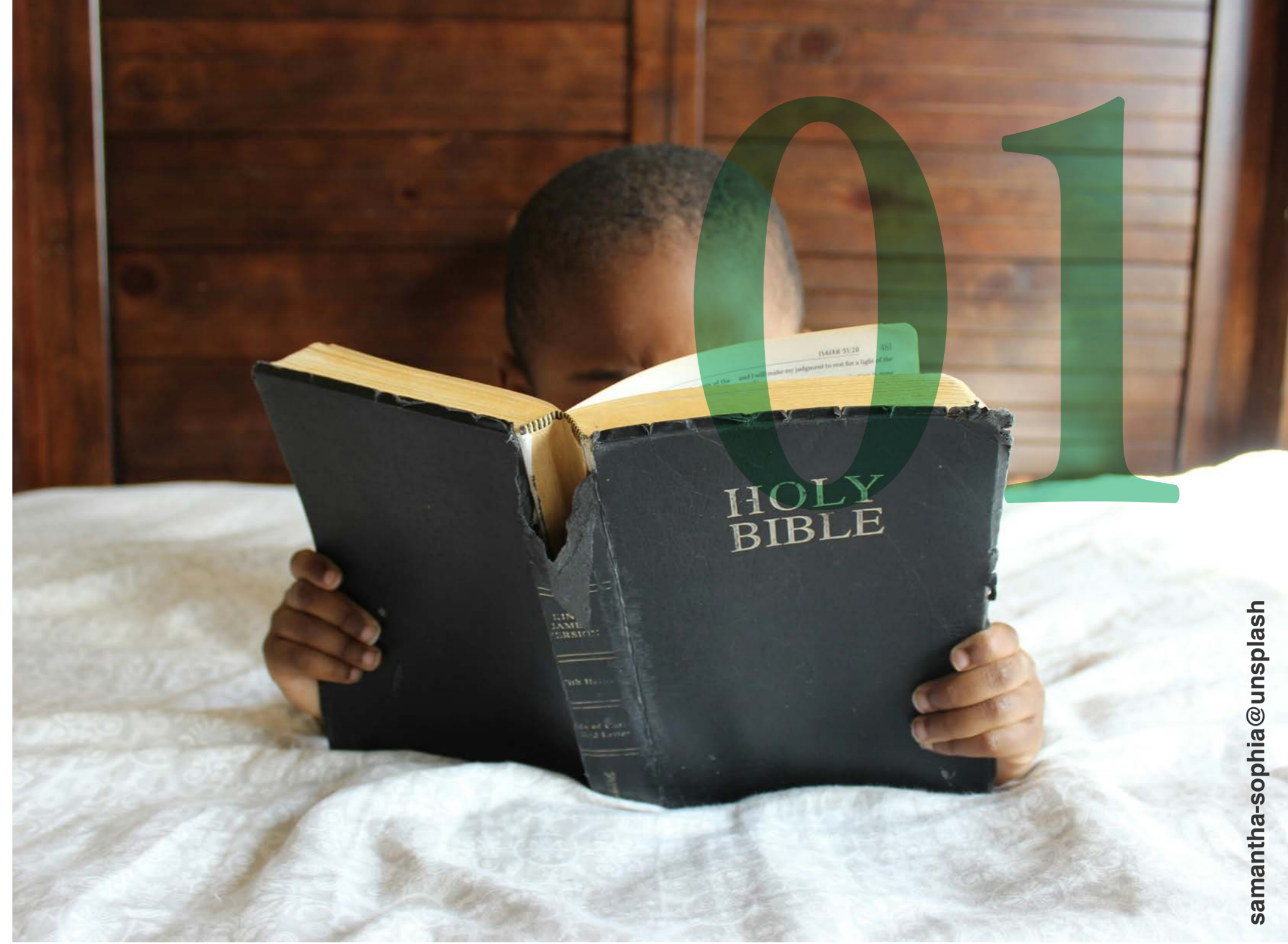


Mark 1



Mark 1

A Simple Bible Translation



START HERE!

Read this simple translation to understand the passage, then read it in your own Bible.



1: 1-5 THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

This is the beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, as it has been written in Isaiah the prophet:

Look, I am going to send my special messenger to introduce the Messiah. He will prepare people for the Messiah. (Malachi 3)

The voice of this special messenger will call out in the wilderness where very few people live. He will preach that you must prepare yourselves for the coming of the Messiah. Get your lives straightened out so that you can welcome him. (Isaiah 40)

That's exactly how John came. He was a special messenger from God. His coming was the beginning of the gospel. John the Baptist was baptising people in the wilderness, and preaching that they should be sorry for their sins and repent, and then be baptised. They must do this in order to get God's forgiveness for their sins.

All the Jews in the whole country of Judah went out into the desert wilderness to get baptised by John. So did all the people who were living in Jerusalem. They openly admitted their sins, and so were baptised by him in the Jordan River.

1:6-8 JOHN THE BAPTIST

John was different from other religious leaders. They lived well. They dressed to look good, and they enjoyed the best kind of food. Today that would be like eating out in expensive restaurants. But John wore rough, tough clothing, made from the thick, hard hair of camels. He wore a leather belt, because he dressed for action, not for show.

He just ate whatever he could find in the desert, so he lived on locusts and the honey of wild bees.

The important thing about John was what he told the people. He said: Someone is coming soon who is much more powerful than I am, and much more useful to you. I'm not good enough even to take off his sandals, as a junior servant does.

I'm just baptising you with water. But he will do something much greater: He will baptise you with God's Holy Spirit.

1:9-11 JESUS IS ALSO BAPTISED BY JOHN

Then something especially important happened in those days when John was baptising people. Jesus, who was from Nazareth in Galilee, came there. He was also baptised in the Jordan River by John.

Then, straight after that, as Jesus was getting up out of the water, he saw heaven being ripped open. He saw the Spirit of God, looking like a dove, coming down and onto him.

Then there came a voice out of heaven: You are my Son whom I love so much. I am very, very pleased with you!

1:12-13 JESUS IS TEMPTED BY SATAN

Straight after being baptised, the Holy Spirit made Jesus go out into the desert.

He was in the desert a long time, for forty days. During this time he was challenged and tempted by Satan, the devil, who put him under great pressure and strain. He was also surrounded by wild animals that were dangerous. But angels looked after him.

1:14-15 JESUS BEGINS TO PREACH

After John was arrested and put to death, Jesus came into Galilee. There he announced the gospel, the good news of God.

He told the people that the time the prophets had predicted had now come. Jesus said: The kingdom of God is near. It is now here, just as the prophets predicted. So you must repent and change the way you live. You must believe the gospel.

1:16-18 JESUS CALLS SIMON AND ANDREW

As Jesus was walking next to the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew throwing their nets into the sea. They were fishermen.

Jesus said to Simon and Andrew: Come with me! I'm going to train you to work for God. Instead of fishing for fish, you will fish for people.

They immediately left their nets, and went off with Jesus.

1:19-20 JESUS CALLS JAMES AND JOHN

Going a bit further, Jesus saw James and his brother John. They were the sons of Zebedee [ze-b'dee], and were busy mending their fishing nets.

Jesus then called them as well. James and John left their father Zebedee in the boat, with the fishermen who worked for him, and they went off with Jesus.

1:21-26 JESUS CHASES A DEMON OUT OF A MAN

Jesus and his followers went into the town of Capernaum [k'per-nee-im]. When it was the Sabbath day Jesus went straightaway to the synagogue, where he started to teach.

The believers were utterly amazed at Jesus' teaching, because he spoke as though he knew all about God, and could explain clearly what God wanted us to know and to do. He taught with authority. He spoke the truth. Their usual teachers were quite different. Although they had been trained in God's laws, they were sometimes unsure about exactly what God wanted. Often they did not understand the Bible well enough to make it really clear to people. They were not reliable teachers.

Suddenly, during their worship in the synagogue, a man with a demon in him shouted out at Jesus:

Leave us alone, Jesus of Nazareth! Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: You are the Holy One who has come from God!

But Jesus got angry and rebuked the demon. He said: Stop it! Be quiet! Come out of this man!

The demon caused the man to shake violently, but then with a loud shriek it came out of him.

1:27-28 PEOPLE ARE AMAZED AT JESUS' TEACHING

All the people there were stunned, and even frightened. It caused them to do a lot of talking with one another about what had happened. They said: What is this? It's a new kind of teaching, with amazing authority. He can even tell demons what to do, and they have to obey him.

News about what Jesus had done straightaway spread in all directions through the whole area of Galilee.

1:29-31 JESUS HEALS PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW

Straight after this Jesus and his disciples left the synagogue, and they went to the home of Peter and Andrew. James and John were with them.

Now the mother of Peter's wife was sick. She was lying in bed, helpless, with a fever. As soon as Jesus got there, they told him about her.

Jesus went to her, and he got her up just by taking her hand. Immediately her high temperature left her and she was completely better. She even got busy serving a meal for them.

1:32-34 JESUS HEALS MANY PEOPLE

Then evening came. For the Jews, this was the end of the Sabbath day. So when the sun set people started bringing all those who were sick to Jesus. They also brought people who had demons in them.

The whole town was gathered together at the door of Peter's home.

Jesus then healed many sick people who had all kinds of illnesses and diseases. He also chased away many demons. He never allowed the demons to say anything, because they knew him.

1:35-39 JESUS PRAYS AND MOVES ON

Very early the next morning, while it was still dark, Jesus left the house and went away to a lonely place. There he prayed.

But Peter, and some friends with him, tracked him down.

They found Jesus, and said to him: All the people are looking for you.

But Jesus said to them: Let's go off somewhere else, to the other villages and towns around here, so that I can also preach there. That's the reason why I've come away.

So Jesus went around preaching in their synagogues throughout the whole of Galilee. He also chased demons out of people who suffered from them.

1:40-45 JESUS HEALS A MAN WHO HAD LEPROSY

A man with leprosy came to Jesus begging him for help. He went on pleading with Jesus. He would even go down on his knees in front of him. He kept on pleading, saying: If you want to you are able to make me well.

Although Jesus got cross with the man, he reached out his hand and touched him. No one had ever touched him since he had caught this dreadful disease. Then Jesus said to him: Yes, I DO want to help you! So, get well.

Straightaway the leprosy left him, and his skin became completely healthy and normal.

But Jesus sent him away immediately with a strict warning and a clear order:

He said to him: Make sure that you do not say anything to anyone, but go straight to the priest and show him your skin. Then give thanks to God for your healing, the way the Bible says. Now off you go, straightaway, and see that you do as you are told!

But instead of doing what Jesus had told him to do, the man went away and started to do a lot of talking. He went around telling everyone everywhere what had happened to him. The result was that Jesus was no longer able to go freely into any town without creating a lot of excitement. He now had to stay out in the empty desert countryside. Yet people still came to him from everywhere.



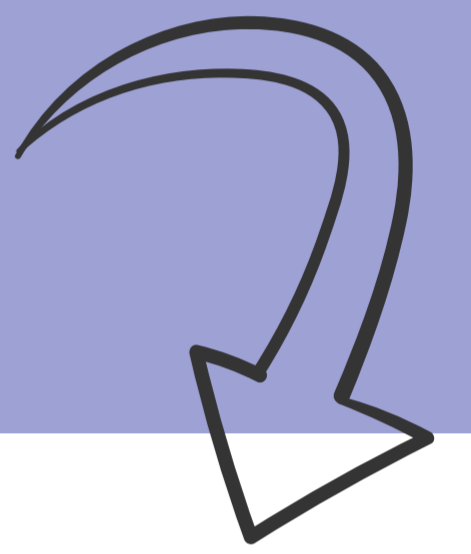
NOW YOU CAN READ MARK 1 IN YOUR OWN BIBLE.

Mark 1

Passage background & introduction



Read this part to get to know the background of the chapter you read in Section 01. Interesting things like who Mark was, and what he did, and why he decided to write this gospel. Mark tells how Jesus began his work and his teaching.



Mark was a young man in the time of Jesus. It is likely that he actually knew Jesus. It is quite possible that he was with the disciples when Jesus was arrested. He narrowly escaped being arrested himself. This idea is based on the fact that Mark says that there was a young man present when Jesus was arrested. When all the disciples ran away into the darkness, so did the young man. In the process he lost the cloak he was wearing and escaped in just his underwear. We cannot think of why Mark should mention this unless he was actually the young man.

Mark's mother's name was Mary. She was an important lady who was well-off. Mary was a keen believer in Jesus. She used her home for believers to meet there and to pray. It seems that the earliest group of Christians in Jerusalem used her home as their house-church.

Later on Mark left Jerusalem and joined Paul in Antioch [anti-ock]. Antioch was far to the north of Galilee, on the river Orontes [or-ron-teez], not far from the sea. It was in North West Syria, but nowadays it is just inside the southern border of Turkiye. That was where believers, Jews and Gentiles, were first called Christians. There was a strong community of Christians there, and Barnabas [barn-a-bis] and Paul were two of their leaders. Barnabas was a cousin of Mary, Mark's mother. The church at Antioch decided to send Barnabas and Paul on a mission to spread Christianity further to the west. Mark joined them although he was much younger than they. They went to the island of Cyprus [sigh-pris], and travelled across it, preaching about Jesus to the people. But when Paul and Barnabas decided to go from there into Turkiye, Mark became

uneasy. We don't know why. At their first stop in Turkiye he decided to leave the other two older men and go back home to Jerusalem for a while. He did not complete the first missionary journey with the other two. But later on he went back to Antioch.

The first missionary journey was so successful that Paul and Barnabas decided to go on a second missionary journey into Turkiye. Barnabas wanted to take his cousin Mark with them. Paul disagreed. Mark had already left them once. As a result of their disagreement Barnabas and Paul ended their teamwork. So Barnabas and Mark went back to Cyprus while Paul went to Turkiye. Paul took with him a man called Titus [tigh-tis]. Years later Paul wrote a letter to Titus and it became part of the New Testament. The book Titus comes after the two letters to Timothy, also written by Paul.

For many years after that we know nothing about Mark. Then we discover that he went to live and work in Rome. His Hebrew name was John and his Roman or Latin name was Marcus [mar-kis].

He became a close and trusted friend of both Paul and Peter. Peter stayed in Rome and preached there. He taught Mark what he knew about Jesus. Peter had known Jesus very well. Wherever he went he told people about what he knew of the Lord. He was the chief Christian apostle. Mark had the best possible teaching about Jesus.

Toward the end of Paul's life he was in prison in Rome. But he taught Mark how to think about the Christian gospel, and how to explain it to the Romans. Paul was the rabbi that Jesus chose to explain the gospel to the rest of the world, the Gentiles, and especially to the Romans. Paul was the greatest expert in the world on how we are all to understand what Jesus Christ has done for the whole of mankind.

So Mark also had the best possible teaching about Christianity from Paul. What with Peter and Paul's training Mark became a first class teacher of the gospel.

When Peter was killed Mark realised that Christianity faced a problem. Soon there would be no one alive who actually knew Jesus and was taught by him. Paul was also killed not long after Peter. This was nearly forty years after Jesus had gone back to heaven. Mark would now be in his sixties. So Mark came to two huge decisions.

Mark decided that what he had learnt about Jesus must be written down. Otherwise some of it was going to get lost in time. At that stage all that had been written were letters to Christian churches and some individuals. Most of these letters were by Paul.

Paul was the greatest expert in the world on how we are all to understand what Jesus Christ has done for the whole of mankind.

Peter had also written some letters. But no one had written about the life of Jesus. And that is what Peter had been preaching about. Peter had concentrated his teaching about Jesus from the time of his baptism until his resurrection from the dead. This was from the beginning of Jesus' ministry to the end of his time on earth as a man.

Mark's great concern was that this information must be written accurately. He wanted the news about Jesus to be true and reliable. If one says what is not true, it will be found out sooner or later. It cannot last, and it won't help anyone.

**But truth will last,
and the truth will help people.**

Mark decided to write down what he had learnt about Jesus from **the Apostle Peter**.

The other huge decision Mark took was particularly important. Mark decided not to write a story or biography of Jesus' life. He decided to write what Jesus' life was about, and what it means for us. This was what he had learnt from the Apostle Paul. Paul had helped him to understand what Jesus meant to the world. So Mark invented something that the world had never seen before. He called it "a gospel", **the gospel of Jesus Christ**.

**This gospel would explain
what Jesus was like and what he did,
and how that is good news for all people.**

**What Mark wanted us to know is that
Jesus is the Messiah,
the Son of God,
the Saviour of the world.**

**What Mark tells us is designed
to get us to believe this.**

Mark also had another purpose. The world, especially in Rome, had suddenly become a crazy, awful place, and most dangerous. Peter did not just die: he had been murdered, or executed. He was put to death by the Roman government. Paul, who had been in prison, was also executed by the government. Lots of Christians were being arrested and put to death in all sorts of cruel and barbaric ways. This had all come about suddenly and most unexpectedly.

When Peter and Paul and Mark were in Rome, the Roman emperor was a man called Nero [near-roh]. Nero ruled the world. But he was something of an artist and an actor. He was also a bit of a dreamer with some fantastic ideas. His real enemies were the wealthy and important people in Rome. For the first five years of his government things went fairly well. Then a fire broke out in Rome. No one is sure how it was started. But it became a massive fire. It burned for a week without anything being able to stop it. When the fires looked as though they were dying down they flared up again. A quarter of the city was completely destroyed. Three quarters of the city was badly damaged, especially the older buildings. This caused an immense amount of suffering to the citizens of Rome.

Nero did what he could to help his people. He reduced the taxes to help people to survive and rebuild their homes. He ordered the price of food to be lowered so that people would not starve. He got the government to rebuild parts of the city and make those parts better than they had been before. He got rid of crowded slums where people had lived in pathetic poverty. But what he could not do anything about was the anger of the people. Both the rich and the poor turned against him.

The people believed that the fires had been deliberately started, and that the person responsible for this was Nero. They thought that Nero had burnt old and shabby Rome down so that he could build a new and better Rome, and make it world famous. So they rioted. They went berserk. They fought against the authorities and even attacked them when they tried to put out the fires. In fact, criminals even threw fire-bombs into buildings to make things worse. The Emperor Nero panicked. All he could think of was to put the blame on others so that people would stop blaming him. He decided to blame the Christians.

Christians were not popular in Rome. Rome, the capital city of the world, was where many people of all sorts came to live.

Christians were not popular in Rome. Rome, the capital city of the world, was where many people of all sorts came to live. The rich or super-rich and the poor had one thing in common: they misbehaved. Rome was a very sinful place to be. Christians, with their ideas of living a decent and clean life, were a nuisance and a pain to most people. People don't like to be told how to live. They resent being told that what they are doing is wrong or bad.

Christians also refused to worship the popular idols. They would not worship even the Emperor. They stayed away from feasts that became wild parties. They would not attend the games where people killed one another or fought wild animals. All this made

them unpopular with the public. They were regarded as a nuisance who thought that they were better than everybody else. People did not like Christians.

So it was easy for Nero to blame the Christians. Christians were arrested. People who admitted that they were Christians were the first to be caught. They were then forced to tell the authorities who the other Christians were. Mass arrests followed. Christians were tortured in terrible ways. Many lost their lives. Christians had to go underground. Underneath Rome there were tunnels that had been dug through the rocks. That was where the Romans buried their dead. The Christians went into these catacombs [cata-kooms] to hide from the authorities and to worship God. Life became very difficult and dangerous for them.

Mark decided to tell these poor, suffering Christians what he had learnt from Peter and Paul about Jesus. Mark used the same sort of Greek language that ordinary Romans used when they talked. It was called common or simple Greek. He did not try to write in the classical Greek that the famous and clever Greek writers used, which was popular with the more educated Greeks and Romans. Mark wrote for ordinary people. He wrote the way most people talked. He wrote the way anyone would have written if there had been newspapers or news media or magazines in those days. He wrote in the Greek language because everyone could read and speak Greek in those times. In our Bible we have translated what Mark wrote into our own language, such as English.

He has made it possible for us to overcome sin and suffering, and get to heaven.

Mark says that Jesus was someone who had also suffered. He had been persecuted by the authorities. He had been betrayed by one of his friends. He had been falsely accused by his own people. He had been cruelly killed by order of Roman authorities. He had even warned his people that there was going to be terrible persecution and suffering.

But the gospel was that God had been with Jesus. Jesus had remained true to God. Jesus had won in the end. He had even conquered death. Jesus has taught us how to find God and how to please him. He has made it possible for us to overcome sin and suffering, and get to heaven. Mark wanted to help the Christians in Rome, and elsewhere, to know how to turn to God to get his help and comfort and the strength to keep going.

The Gospel means that we all find God through Jesus Christ the Son of God.

One of the most unfortunate things that had happened during this time of persecution was that some Christians tried to get out of being tortured and killed by denying that they were Christians. They broke away from the church. When the persecutions ended, they wanted to rejoin the church. Some of the leaders in the church who had been persecuted would not allow this. They said that because these people had denied Jesus they were no longer welcome in the church. This was a crushing blow for the Christians who had repented for letting the Lord down.

So Mark decided to tell people about what Peter had done in the night that Jesus was arrested. Peter had not done well, and he had told Mark about this. He had even preached to people about his failure. When Jesus had asked him to watch with him while he prayed, just before he was arrested, Peter had fallen asleep. When Jesus was arrested Peter had sworn that he did not know who Jesus was. He claimed that he knew nothing about that fellow Jesus. He denied knowing him three times. He even started swearing, protesting in the strongest terms that he was no friend of the man Jesus. He said this to save himself from also being arrested.

But later on Peter, the leader of the apostles, had deeply regretted what he had done, and Jesus had forgiven him. Jesus had not only forgiven Peter but had told him to continue doing the work that Jesus had been doing.

It is possible that because Mark wrote about Peter's failure he might have felt a bit uncomfortable for telling us about Peter's poor performance. That may be why he decided to put that bit in about how he had also run away from danger when Jesus was arrested. He had even lost his clothing. It had been a very embarrassing event. Believers in Jesus suffer not only pain and loss but also embarrassment and helplessness. Jesus himself suffered these things.

Jesus had not only forgiven Peter but had told him to continue doing the work that Jesus had been doing.

Mark's new gospel was so successful that the Apostle Matthew decided to use the same method to tell the world what he had learnt about Jesus, and what Jesus means to us. Matthew was a Jew and he wanted to explain to his fellow Jews that Jesus was the Messiah that God had promised his people since the time of Abraham, Moses and David. Matthew had been one of Jesus' twelve disciples for about three years, from the time Jesus began his work until his resurrection from the dead. So he knew Jesus well.

Another person who liked the idea of Mark's Gospel was a doctor called Luke. As a doctor Luke was a very careful writer. He interviewed many people who had known Jesus, and then faithfully recorded what he had found out. His gospel is highly

respected for its accuracy. He also decided to tell an important Roman friend of his about what he had discovered about the life of Jesus. Luke's gospel also tells us, who are not Jews, what Jesus means to us.

By the time the Apostle John came to write, many years later, the gospel was no longer a new idea. It was the normal way to tell people what Jesus had done, and what he had taught us to believe, and what he had commanded us to do. But the more popular the gospel became the more people there were that wanted to use the gospel to make money or become famous. These people changed parts of the gospel to make it easier for people to believe. John wrote his gospel to stop this kind of thing. John had been Jesus' closest friend.

**These four gospels became part of the Bible:
The Bible, throughout history,
is the most popular book the world has ever had,
and the gospels are the most popular part of the Bible.**

Mark wrote the shortest of the four gospels. Mark had the ability to write clearly and simply and briefly. Someone who lived about a hundred years later said that he had heard that Mark had short, stubby fingers. Whether or not that is true, Mark certainly had a gift for writing. He could say a lot in a few words. He was brilliant at explaining something so that people could understand.

**The two most important things
about GOD'S GOSPEL and THE BIBLE
are that it is the truth, and only the truth,
and that people understand it and believe it.**

Also, he was writing at a time when there was great danger for the Christians.

When there's danger or trouble, it's wise and helpful to say things briefly, and to stick to what is most important. What was most important to people who were suffering was that what Mark wrote was true and reliable.

It was a gospel of hope and encouragement.

It is quite likely that Mark was also eventually killed for being a Christian.

But before they got him,

Mark gave us this gospel of Jesus Christ.

Mark 1

A Bible study on our passage



Now let's grasp the points of each paragraph and the issues being spoken about and together we can grow in our knowledge and love of God.



1: 1-5 THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

This is ¹the beginning of the gospel about ²Jesus Christ, as it has been written in ³Isaiah the prophet: Look, I am going to send my special messenger to introduce ⁴the Messiah. He will prepare people for the Messiah. (Malachi 3)

The voice of this special messenger will call out in the wilderness where very few people live. He will preach that you must prepare yourselves for the coming of the Messiah. Get your lives straightened out so that you can welcome him. (Isaiah 40)

That's exactly how John came. He was a special messenger from God. His coming was the beginning of the gospel. John the Baptist was baptising people in the wilderness, and preaching that ⁵they should be sorry for their sins and ⁶repent, and then ⁷be baptised. They must do this in order to get ⁸God's forgiveness for their sins.

All the Jews in the whole country of Judah went out into the desert wilderness to get baptised by John. So did all the people who were living in Jerusalem. They openly admitted their sins, and so were baptised by him in ⁹the Jordan River.

¹In the beginning of the gospel: According to Mark, this is the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Mark begins with John the Baptist preaching about Jesus.

Later on Matthew and Luke decided to tell us something about Jesus when he was born and when he was a young child. Finally, when John wrote his gospel, he also started with the time when John the Baptist preached about Jesus. All four gospels tell us about John the Baptist. His part in the gospel and the work of Jesus is very important.

- **John the Baptist made it clear that we must face up to the fact that we have sinned against God.**
- **He emphasised that we must believe in Jesus Christ to get rid of all those sins in our lives.**

That is basically what the gospel of Jesus Christ is about.

²**Jesus Christ:** In the early days many Christians wrote out copies of Mark's gospel. In those copies, experts or scholars have discovered some small mistakes. One type of mistake was when the person copying Mark's gospel, or copying a copy of Mark's gospel, added a few extra words that Mark had not written. Someone added the words, "the Son of God" to the name, Jesus Christ. These words were added because Jesus Christ **IS** the Son of God. This is true, although Mark did not write it here. But these extra words were so popular that they have remained in the Bible ever since.

However, Mark does write that Jesus is the Son of God six times elsewhere in his gospel.

³**Isaiah the prophet:** Mark starts his gospel about Jesus Christ by pointing to a prediction or **prophecy** by the prophets Malachi [mal-a-kigh] and Isaiah [igh-zigh-a]. Both prophets said that God was going to send the Messiah to his people. Although Mark is quoting both Malachi and Isaiah, to write briefly he mentions only the name of Isaiah, the older and better known prophet. So Mark includes Malachi's prophecy in Isaiah's prophecy. The first part of the prophecy is Malachi's, and the second part is Isaiah's.

John the Baptist emphasised that we must believe in Jesus Christ to get rid of all those sins in our lives.

Isaiah came nearly 300 years after King David. He lived in Jerusalem about 700 years before Christ and more than 100 years before the exile of the Jews.

Malachi lived 300 years after Isaiah. He lived and prophesied in the time of Nehemiah and Ezra [nee-a-migh-a & ez-ra], when the Jews came back to Jerusalem from their exile in Babylon. This was more than 400 years before Christ.

⁴**the Messiah:** God had promised his people in the Old Testament that he would one day send them the perfect leader. This leader would save us all from all our great troubles in life. He would be the saviour, the super-Saviour, not just for the Jews, but for the whole world. The Jews who believed this promise called him “The Messiah”, the man God would appoint to be the greatest and most important leader in their history. He would be even greater than King David or the Law-giver Moses or the father of the nation, Abraham.

⁵**they should be sorry for their sins:** What are **sins**?

Sin is doing what God has told us not to do. Sin is doing anything bad. It is doing what we should not do, that we shall later on wish we had not done. Sin is doing what is ugly or dirty. It is cheating, harming others and corrupting our soul. It is going against our conscience. Sin is what makes God get angry with us. Sin is disobeying God.

The reason why people would be sorry for their sins and regret what they had said or done was that they would be punished for their sins. They would suffer for having disobeyed God. Sin does not pay, just as crime does not pay. Sin causes trouble for those who sin. We cannot live comfortably with ourselves if our conscience turns against us. People think that sin is fun or clever, but it turns out in the end to be horrible and stupid.

Sin causes trouble for those who sin. We cannot live comfortably with ourselves if our conscience turns against us.

When we realise that sin is wrong and bad, the thing we want most is to get rid of it. Sinfulness results in being upset with oneself.

The only way we can get our sin cancelled is to get God’s forgiveness.

⁶**they should repent:** To repent means that if we have done what’s bad, we must face it and admit it, and put it right. Where it is impossible to put it right, we must learn the lesson from it. It must not happen again.

To repent means to change,

to stop doing what is bad,

and to listen to God in future.

⁷**baptism:** Baptism is a Greek word. It means to be washed or made clean. Being baptised is the sign the church uses to show us that God forgives our sin. We are baptised if we are sorry for what we have done and regret the way we have lived in the past. Regret means being unhappy and worried about whatever sins we have committed.

Baptism is asking God to help us to come right in life. We ask God to make us clean, so that we can change the way we have lived, and do better in the future.

Baptism is the sign that we want to go to heaven where everything is perfectly clean, and where everyone there is also clean and good.

Baptism means to believe in a pure God and in living a clean life.

⁸God's forgiveness: This is the most important thing that we can get from God in this life. Once God forgives us, we are no longer guilty, no matter what we have done, or how bad we have been. When God forgives us, it is permanent. It is forever. It also means that no one can ever criticise or blame us anymore. It even means that we don't have to keep blaming ourselves. Our conscience can be clear in future. Most important of all, if God has forgiven us, we can go to heaven.

Forgiveness means that what was wrong has been sorted out and put right. Forgiveness means that we have come right, and that God is now on our side. God's forgiveness allows us to live with a clear conscience, and not worry about being punished. We don't even have to worry about what others think or say about us, if we have repented.

Once God forgives us, we are no longer guilty, no matter what we have done, or how bad we have been.

⁹the Jordan River: From Jerusalem to the river Jordan was a distance of about twenty miles (over 30 kilometres). The road was very steep since Jerusalem is about 4,000 feet (or 1,200 metres) higher than the Jordan River. For people to go down to the Jordan was a difficult journey. They had to walk down a long, steep dirt road. They then had to climb all the way back up the mountain. It was a big effort, and they had to go out of their way. It is very interesting that their reason for making this journey was just to get right with God. There were many people living in other parts of Judea who came to the Jordan from even greater and harder distances. What they needed was God's forgiveness, and John was the one person who preached with the authority of God. Most of the religious leaders of that time were too hypocritical to help people who suffered from a feeling of guilt and fear of God. By listening to John and being baptised by him these people found God and his forgiveness and peace and hope. They went home with joy in their hearts, despite the long, steep, hard uphill journey.

1:6-8 JOHN THE BAPTIST

John was different from other religious leaders. They lived well. They dressed to look good, and they enjoyed the best kind of food. Today that would be like eating out in expensive restaurants. But John wore rough, tough clothing, made from the thick, hard hair of camels. ¹He wore a leather belt, because he dressed for action, not for show. He just ate whatever he could find in the desert, so he ²lived on locusts and the honey of wild bees.

The important thing about John was what he told the people. He said: Someone is coming soon who is much more powerful than I am, and much more useful to you. I'm not good enough even to take off his sandals, as a junior servant does.

I'm just ³baptising you with water. But he will do something much greater: He will ⁴baptise you with God's Holy Spirit.

¹He wore a leather belt: We need to understand how people dressed in the hot Middle East in those times. Both men and women, boys and girls, wore a long, loose robe. When the men went to work, or needed to travel or run, they lifted up the bottom of the robe and tucked it into their belt. Their legs would then not get tangled in the robe. But when they walked slowly, in town, their robes would hang right down to their feet. This looked smarter than tucking the bottom of the robe into their belt. Rich people, important people, powerful people never tucked their robes into a belt.

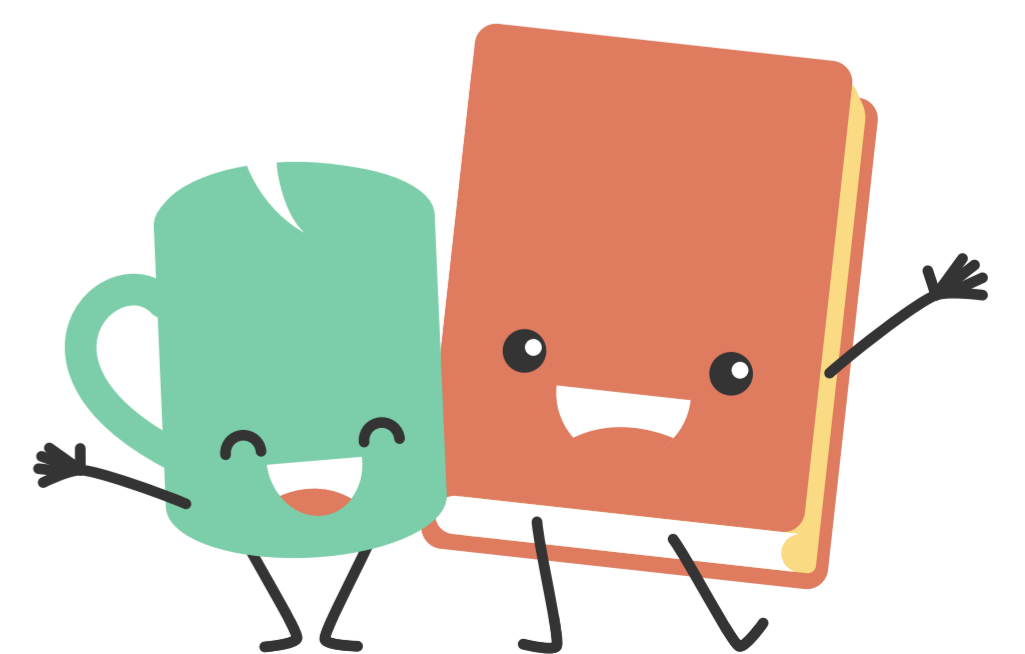
²lived on locusts and the honey of wild bees: Locusts provide quite good food. They have plenty of protein, which is good for strength, as well as some fat that provides energy. Honey has lots of sugar, and it gives one lots of energy. Honey is a very healthy food. It is the only food that does not get rotten after a long time.



Long ago in a Sunday School the teacher told the children that John lived on locusts and wild honey.

When one little boy was asked what he knew about John the Baptist he said: "He ate locusts and was wild hungry!"

Not quite what teacher said.



³**baptising you with water**: Being baptised with water means that someone regrets being dirty, and wants to become clean.

Baptism is a sign that one really wants to stop sinning against God and would like to live a better life in future.

⁴**baptise you with God's Holy Spirit**: Baptism with God's Holy Spirit does something far greater than baptism with water:

God's Holy Spirit makes us what we want to be and what we should be:

- **He helps us to stop sinning.**
- **His Spirit actually makes us clean.** He cleans our inner life, our soul and heart.
- **He gets our thinking right, as well as our attitude.** He makes us what God wants us to be.
- **God's Spirit helps us to do what we ought to do.**
- **He changes us and makes us better people.**
- **God's Holy Spirit enables us to keep God's laws and to live with a clear conscience.**

Baptism with water is a sign that we want to become clean.

Baptism with the Holy Spirit makes us clean.

Water baptism is repenting for sin.

The Holy Spirit's baptism puts an end to sin.

Water baptism means we have come to believe truly and really in heaven, and we hope to go there.

The Holy Spirit's baptism gets us safely to heaven.

1:9-11 JESUS IS ALSO BAPTISED BY JOHN

Then something especially important happened in those days when John was baptising people. Jesus, who was from Nazareth in Galilee, came there. ¹He was also baptised in the Jordan River by John.

Then, straight after that, as Jesus was getting up out of the water, ²he saw heaven being ripped open. He saw the Spirit of God, looking like a dove, coming down and onto him.

Then there came a voice out of heaven: ³You are my Son whom I love so much. I am very, very pleased with you!

¹He was also baptised: Jesus was baptised, but it was not because he was a sinner or needed to repent and be forgiven. Jesus was baptised to show, **first**, that God was pleased with him. **Secondly**, it was to show that God appointed Jesus to baptise with the Holy Spirit. **Thirdly**, by being baptised by John it showed that God and Jesus approved of the work that John was doing for both God and Jesus.

A sinner is someone that God is not pleased with. Jesus was different: he was perfect. He had never sinned, not even when he was young. He received God's Holy Spirit in this special way, as a prize from God, because he had always pleased God. He had loved and obeyed God even as a baby and a boy. He had also never failed to love and obey the Lord as a man.

Jesus was different: he was perfect. He had never sinned, not even when he was young.

Jesus was baptised something like 3 or 4 years before 30 AD. He was then about thirty years old.

interesting
fact

Many years ago, it was decided that the date when Jesus was born would be the year zero in history. The world then used that as its dating system. The years before Christ were called BC (Before Christ), and the years after Christ were called AD (the Latin words, Anno Domini, meaning, In the year of the Lord.) So the year 2000 should be exactly 2,000 years after Jesus was born.

But later experts have discovered small mistakes in the original calculations. Jesus was born somewhere between 2 and 5 BC, and not in the year zero.

But when the mistakes were found it was too late to change the dating system that the world was using. Also, we still do not know in exactly what year Jesus was born, or died.

No one can change the dates of history, but people who do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God have found a way to change the way the dates are written. Instead of saying 1000 BC or 1000 AD, they prefer to write the dates as 1000 BCE or 1000 CE.

CE stands for the Christian Era, and BCE stands for Before the Christian Era. They thus shift the focus from the life of Jesus Christ to the history of the Christian church.

²**he saw heaven:** Because the Holy Spirit is invisible, God made sure that something could be seen when he sent his Holy Spirit down onto Jesus. The sky was torn open, and a dove flew down out of heaven and into Jesus.

The sky was opened up to reveal heaven beyond it. Heaven is real, even though it is normally invisible to us. The dove coming down was visible. God made sure that what he was doing for Jesus, with his Holy Spirit, could be clearly seen. God also made sure that he himself, who is God, could be heard on this special occasion. God publicly announced that Jesus was his dear Son, and that he was very pleased with him.

This is the only time in the gospels when God the **Father** in heaven, and his **Son** at the Jordan River, together with his **Holy Spirit**, all came into the picture at the same time. Just this once the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit could be seen or heard together.

³**You are my Son:** In the Bible “the son” means someone who is like his father. So the Son of God means someone who is just like God. When Jesus Christ is called the Son of God it means that he is actually God. Here it is God himself who is calling Jesus his own Son.

The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit are God.

1:12-13 JESUS IS TEMPTED BY SATAN

Straight after being baptised, ¹the Holy Spirit made Jesus go out into the desert.

He was in the desert a long time, for ²forty days. During this time he was challenged and ³tempted by Satan, the devil, who put him under great pressure and strain. He was also surrounded by wild animals that were dangerous. But angels looked after him.

¹the Holy Spirit made Jesus go: Mark uses a strong word here. He says that the Holy Spirit “chased” Jesus out into the desert. The Holy Spirit made Jesus go there, the way a boss might order a worker to do a difficult and unpleasant task. Mark uses the same word when he says later on in this chapter that Jesus “chased” a demon out of a man.

What this means is that the Holy Spirit took Jesus through a very difficult and unpleasant experience. This was the sort of difficulty that Jesus, as a man, did not want to do. But the Holy Spirit of God made him do it, and Jesus was willing to get on with what God wanted him to do, even if he did not look forward to doing it.

In the same way God makes all of us go through hard and upsetting times in our lives. But God also gives us the Holy Spirit to help us through those difficulties.

²forty days: Forty days is mentioned a number of times in the Bible. It means that something very important was happening. Imagine going to a local sports meeting that lasts for a day, and then going to an international sporting event that lasts for a month. You would then easily notice which one is more important. The following important events took place in the Bible:

- The rain in Noah’s flood lasted **40 days**.
- When Jacob died in Egypt his son Joseph had him embalmed. It took **40 days**.
- Moses was with the Lord on top of Mount Sinai [sigh-nigh] for **40 days**.
- The men Moses sent to inspect the land of Canaan [kay-nin] took **40 days** to spy out the country.
- For **40 days** Goliath [g’ligh-ith] challenged the Israelites to find a soldier who could fight him.
- Elijah the prophet travelled for **40 days** through the desert in his great struggle against the evil of Queen Jezebel [jez-z’bel], and her husband, the wicked King Ahab [ay-hab] of Israel.

- Jonah warned the evil city of Nineveh [nin-a-va] that they had **40 days** in which to repent, or else God would destroy them.
- After he was baptised, Jesus was tempted by the devil in the desert for **40 days**.
- After Jesus rose from the dead, he appeared to his followers for **40 days**.

This was to prove that he was really alive, and to prepare them to continue his work.

Jesus' temptation by the devil is a very important part of the gospel. Jesus went off alone into the desert. He faced the temptation as a man. He had nothing to eat, and became weak and tired and hot and cold, as well as lonely. It was a miserable forty days for Jesus. The devil took full advantage of this. But Jesus never gave in to him.

In the gospels of Matthew and Luke we are told what the devil's temptations were. But the important thing is that Jesus stood up to the devil.

- He showed the devil that it is possible for a human being to do God's will.
- He showed us how we must do God's will no matter how difficult things are for us.
- Most importantly, he showed everyone that he was truly fit to be God's Son and also the Messiah and leader of God's people. He is perfectly fit to be our Saviour to save us from the devil and sin.

tempted by Satan: Jesus was tempted or challenged by the devil. This would show us that Jesus, although he was the Son of God, had the same sort of struggles that we have in life. Since Jesus was tempted it is a sign that those who believe in Jesus can also expect to be tempted by the devil.

Temptation is when we find it very hard to do what is right, and would much rather do what is easier, even if it is wrong. Being tempted to do what we should not do when we are down and discouraged and struggling is very, very hard. We need God's Spirit to help us keep to what is right. This is like a war. If the devil gets us to give in to temptation he wins a battle. We must not give in and surrender to the devil. That is our Christian duty. We are to stick to God's will and God's orders.

We need God's Spirit to help us keep to what is right.

When we don't give in to temptation it is a good sign that we are genuine believers.

1:14-15 JESUS BEGINS TO PREACH

After John was arrested and put to death, Jesus came into Galilee. There he announced the gospel, the good news of God.

He told the people that the time the prophets had predicted had now come. Jesus said: ¹The kingdom of God is near. It is now here, just as the prophets predicted. So you must repent and change the way you live. You must believe the gospel.

¹The kingdom of God: The Kingdom of God has two meanings:

- **The first is that God now comes into our lives.** He rules over us. We become his people. God comes first in our lives. We obey him. We do what he says and what he wants. He is our King, our Lord and Ruler. We are his people. He looks after us. It means that we have now found the answer to life, and how to live well.
- **The second meaning is that God is going to take over the whole world one day.** He will get rid of everything that is bad and wrong, and make the whole world a perfect and lovely place to live in. This means that the kingdom of God is the same as heaven. It is glorious! It means that we have something lovely and wonderful to look forward to.

Jesus was saying that it is most important that we are ready to meet God. If heaven is near it means that we are soon going to have to meet God. We never know how soon that may be. We must all be ready for it at all times.

1:16-18 JESUS CALLS SIMON AND ANDREW

As Jesus was walking next to ¹the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew throwing their nets into the sea. They were fishermen.

Jesus said to Simon and Andrew: Come with me! I'm going to train you to work for God. Instead of fishing for fish, you will fish for people.

²They immediately left their nets, and went off with Jesus.

¹the sea of Galilee: The sea of Galilee is a large inland lake. It is over 20 kilometres long and nearly 10 kilometres wide. It is over 600 feet below sea level (nearly 200 metres.) It's a lovely lake, and contains a lot of fish. So there were many fishermen living there.

A river from Mount Hermon [her-min] in the north flows into Lake Galilee. Water then flows out of the southern part of the lake into the Jordan River where John was baptising. The Jordan River ends in the Dead Sea, which is the lowest place on earth, far below sea level.

²They immediately left their nets: Peter and Andrew both gave up their work as fishermen to go and work for Jesus. They believed that Jesus was more important than their own business.

1:19-20 JESUS CALLS JAMES AND JOHN

Going a bit further, Jesus saw James and his brother John. They were the sons of Zebedee [ze-b'dee], and were busy mending their fishing nets.

Jesus then called them as well. ¹James and John left their father Zebedee in the boat, with the fishermen who worked for him, and they went off with Jesus.

¹James and John left their father Zebedee: It looks as though Zebedee was an important man. He had built up a big business, which would one day belong to James and John. Yet both James and John could see that Jesus was more important than their Dad and his successful business. Zebedee was much older than Jesus. Yet he also realised that his two sons should do what Jesus asked them to do. He let them go. This was even though he probably wanted them to take over his successful business one day.

1:21-26 JESUS CHASES A DEMON OUT OF A MAN

Jesus and his followers went into the town of ¹Capernaum [k'per-nee-im]. When it was ²the Sabbath day Jesus went straightaway to ³the synagogue, where he started to teach.

The believers were utterly amazed at Jesus' teaching, because he spoke as though he knew all about God, and could explain clearly what God wanted us to know and to do. He taught with authority. He spoke the truth. Their usual teachers were quite different. Although they had been trained in God's laws, they were sometimes unsure about exactly what God wanted. Often they did not understand the Bible well enough to make it really clear to people. They were not reliable teachers.

Suddenly, during their worship in the synagogue, a man with ⁴a demon in him shouted out at Jesus:

Leave us alone, Jesus of Nazareth! Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: You are the Holy One who has come from God!

But Jesus got angry and rebuked the demon. He said: Stop it! Be quiet! Come out of this man!

The demon caused the man to shake violently, but then with a loud shriek it came out of him.

¹**Capernaum:** Capernaum [k'per-nee-im] is at the top end, the north end, of the Sea of Galilee. That is the town where Simon Peter and Andrew lived. Capernaum was a fishing town, a little to the west of the Upper Jordan River where it flows down into the Lake of Galilee. The town Bethsaida [beth-sai-ee-da] is on the other side of the river, to the east.

²**the Sabbath:** The Jews worshipped God on Saturdays. That was the Sabbath day during Jesus' life and work. It was the seventh day of the week, the day God finished his work when he created the heavens and the earth. God rested on that day and made it holy. Jesus kept the Sabbath.

The change of the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday was begun during the time of the apostles because it was the day that Jesus rose from the dead.

Acts 20.7: On the first day of the week (Sunday) the Christians were gathered together to break bread.

In later years the Sabbath showed the difference between the Jews and the Christians. The Jews did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God. The Christians did believe in Christ, and that he had risen from the dead. The Jews continued to worship on Saturday while the Christians started to worship on Sunday, called the Lord's Day.

Revelation 1.10: I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day.

The Lord's Day became important to Christians when people confused them with the Jews. The problem was that many Christians were Jews. On top of that both Jews and Christians believed in the Scriptures. (That was the Old Testament.) Most people came to know the difference between the Jewish and the Christian religions because Christians got together to worship God on Sunday. This was to honour and celebrate the day that Jesus rose from the dead. That was the day that Christ conquered sin and death and the devil.

About six hundred years later the religion of Islam came into existence. The Muslims, who follow the prophet Mohammed, keep their Sabbath on Friday, the Jews on Saturday, and the Christians on Sunday. These are three completely different religions of the world.

³**the synagogue:** The synagogue [**sin-a-gog**] was a Jewish church. That is where the Jews gathered together to worship God, to study the Bible, and to pray. Syn-agogue [**sin-a-gog**] is a Jewish Greek word that means "together-gathering." Christians use the words "church" or "congregation" or "assembly." It all means the same thing. It means getting together because we believe in the Lord.

⁴**a demon:** We do not know much about demons. Demons are spirits that are extremely bad. Long ago they used to be angels in heaven. But they rebelled against God. They were led by the devil who had been a senior angel to begin with. He led the rebellion in heaven against God and his Son Jesus. But Jesus defeated the devil and his followers. They were then expelled from heaven and put into prison, to wait for Judgement Day.

Jesus demonstrated that he had more power than the demon.

But some of them were able to get out, or be let out, somehow. They then looked for an opportunity to get into certain people. In the time of Jesus they were very active. It seems that all these evil spirits declared war against God yet again by attacking all sorts of people when Jesus was a man on earth. They took over people's lives. They made those people do and say horrible things. There was little or nothing anyone could do to put a stop to this. Demons could be very powerful. People were very scared of them because they did a lot of harm.

Jesus demonstrated that he had more power than the demon. The demon knew very well who Jesus was, even though the people did not.

This showed clearly that Jesus was the holy One of God. The demon admitted it.

Jesus chased many demons out of a lot of people. That was an important part of his work, mainly among the Jews, but also for people from other countries.

The reason why there was so much demonic activity at that time was because the country was in such a poor state. There was little proper faith in God, and a big lack of obedience to God. Therefore the nation was suffering in all sorts of ways. Active demons were just one of the great problems people had to suffer from and live with. There were also a lot of sicknesses among the people. Another major problem was that the country had been conquered by the Romans. The Romans ruled over the Jews, and forced their authority and ideas on them. Life was very hard for the Jews, and there was a lot of suffering, in the time of Jesus Christ.

**Jesus was
the holy One
of God.**

We have more trouble from demons than we usually realise. Wherever there is cruelty, evil, bitter or nasty ruthlessness, terrorism, war, hatred of God and God's people, demons are behind it or involved in it. In some cases ugly sicknesses or mad behaviour can also be caused by demons. Demons can either attack good people or take control of some people who do not believe in the Lord. Demons can also cause trouble among religious people.

We have two means of defence against demons and against fear. They are:

- to believe in God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and
- to obey God's commands and orders and be faithful to Christ Jesus.

We have two weapons against demons and against fear. They are:

- to believe in God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and
- to obey God's commands and orders and be faithful to Christ Jesus.

1:27-28 PEOPLE ARE AMAZED AT JESUS' TEACHING

All the people there were stunned, and even frightened. It caused them to do a lot of talking with one another about what had happened. They said: What is this? It's a new kind of teaching, with ¹amazing authority! He can even tell demons what to do, and they have to obey him.

News about what Jesus had done straightaway spread in all directions through the whole area of Galilee.

¹amazing authority: In the past, whenever religious leaders had tried to get rid of a demon, there had always been a great performance. A special ceremony was laid on, with lots of loud, earnest praying, and noise. People got worked up to try to drive or frighten the demon away. In those days trying to get rid of a demon was as difficult and as frightening as trying to hunt a lion. It required a tremendously bold effort by a whole group of men.

No one had ever heard of someone simply telling it to go, and then it goes - just like that!

1:29-31 JESUS HEALS PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW

Straight after this Jesus and his disciples left the synagogue, and they went to the home of Peter and Andrew. James and John were with them.

Now the mother of Peter's wife was sick. She was lying in bed, helpless, with a fever. As soon as Jesus got there, they told him about her.

Jesus went to her, and he got her up just by taking her hand. Immediately her high temperature left her and she was completely better. ¹She even got busy serving a meal for them.

¹She even got busy: Usually when a person has been sick, and gets better, he or she feels weak for a while. So a person first has to get better, and then get stronger. When Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law she not only became well straight away, but she also became strong immediately. She wanted to serve them a meal. She felt like it. She had completely recovered her health and her strength and her interest in cooking and making lunch. Amazing!

1:32-34 JESUS HEALS MANY PEOPLE

Then evening came. For the Jews, this was ¹the end of the Sabbath day. So when the sun set people started bringing all those who were sick to Jesus. They also brought people who had demons in them.

The whole town was gathered together at the door of Peter's home.

Jesus then healed many sick people who had all kinds of illnesses and diseases. He also chased away many demons. He never allowed the demons to say anything, because ²they knew him.

¹the end of the Sabbath: The Jewish Sabbath began on Friday evening, when the sun set, and lasted until sunset on Saturday. So, for the Jews, the Sabbath day ended early on Saturday evening.

Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law who was sick when he visited her on the Sabbath, but the people of the town had to wait until the end of the Sabbath before being healed.

There is a difference between helping someone in need on the Sabbath, and working on the Sabbath.

What a lovely way to end the Sabbath: getting healed; getting better; recovering one's health and strength and interest in life!

What a lovely way to end the Sabbath: taking someone who was ill or suffering to get completely healed!

²they knew him: The demons knew that **Jesus was the Son of God**. Jesus did not want people to know this because it would cause trouble with the religious leaders who did not like him and the work that he was doing. They were jealous of him. If they heard that he called himself the Son of God, they would say that he was dishonouring God, and have him killed.

Jesus spent a lot of his time and energy helping people and making them better.

That is exactly what happened in the end, when they had Jesus arrested, charged with insulting God, and then made sure that the Romans crucified him.

It is clear from what Mark tells us that Jesus spent a lot of his time and energy helping people and making them better. He was a very kind person. During his time on earth he must have brought relief and happiness to many, many people.

He is a wonderful man!

He has continued to do this throughout the world and throughout history since he went back to heaven.

He is a wonderful God!

1:35-39 JESUS PRAYS AND MOVES ON

Very early the next morning, while it was still dark, Jesus left the house and went away to a lonely place. There he prayed.

But Peter, and some friends with him, tracked him down.

They found Jesus, and said to him: All the people are looking for you.

But Jesus said to them: Let's go off somewhere else, to the other villages and towns around here, so that I can also preach there. That's ¹the reason why ²I've come away.

So Jesus went around preaching in their synagogues throughout the whole of Galilee. He also chased demons out of people who suffered from them.

¹**the reason why:** Jesus did not do what people wanted him to do, even when they liked him and wanted him. He did what God wanted him to do.

Mark lets us know what Jesus was praying about. Peter and his friends wanted Jesus to stay where he was, because everyone was looking for him. But Jesus had been praying, and knew that God wanted him to move on to other places so that he could preach there as well. He knew that he was needed everywhere in Galilee. That was God's purpose for him.

²**I've come away:** In the English version of the Bible it says, **That's the reason why I've come.**

People then think that Jesus means that this is the reason he had come to earth from heaven.

But in the Greek version it says, That's the reason why I've come out. Jesus means that he has come away from the house belonging to Peter. Jesus wanted to get away from the people he had helped so that he could pray. He also wanted to get away from all of them so that he could go to help other people who needed him.

When one becomes popular, it is not easy to get away from people. It takes a special effort. Serving God is not about becoming popular, as politicians try to be.

To serve God is to do God's will.

To know God's will we need to pray and to listen to him.

When one becomes successful it is difficult to get away from success. It takes a very special effort. Serving God is not about becoming successful, as everybody tries to be.

To serve God is to do God's will.

To know God's will we need to pray and to listen to him.

1:40-45 JESUS HEALS A MAN WHO HAD LEPROSY

A man with ¹leprosy came to Jesus begging him for help. He went on pleading with Jesus. He would even go down on his knees in front of him. He kept on pleading, saying: If you want to you are able to make me well.

Although ²Jesus got cross with the man, he reached out his hand and touched him. No one had ever touched him since he had caught this dreadful disease. Then Jesus said to him: Yes, I DO want to help you! So, get well.

Straightaway the leprosy left him, and his skin became completely healthy and normal.

But Jesus sent him away immediately with a strict warning and a clear order:

He said to him: Make sure that you do not say anything to anyone, but ³go straight to the priest and show him your skin. Then give thanks to God for your healing, the way the Bible says. Now off you go, straightaway, and see that you do as you are told!

But instead of doing what Jesus had told him to do, the man went away and started to do a lot of talking. He went around telling everyone everywhere what had happened to him. The result was that Jesus was no longer able to go freely into any town without creating a lot of excitement. He now had to stay out in the empty desert countryside. Yet people still came to him from everywhere.

What Mark writes about here is difficult to understand for three reasons:

- **First**, the disease leprosy was horrible. It was so horrible that someone with leprosy was not allowed to go anywhere near other people. Nor was anyone allowed to go near the person with leprosy. That was to avoid catching that horrid disease.
- **Secondly**, why did Jesus get cross with this man who had leprosy? The reason is that the man talked too much, and this ended up causing Jesus a lot of trouble.
- **Thirdly**, when Jesus healed the man, he told him to go to the priest. This was because only the priest could give him permission to go back home and live with other people again - if he ever got better.

¹**leprosy:** This was one of the worst diseases in those days. It caused a person's skin and flesh to rot away.

The worst thing was that he had to stay away from everybody, so that nobody else would also catch this horrible disease. Those with leprosy were cut off from everyone else. No one dared to go anywhere near them. They were outcasts. They lived lonely and miserable lives. Anyone with leprosy was cut off even from his own family. That is why they were called lepers. It was an awful stigma, on top of being a lonely, miserable and most uncomfortable handicap. To have leprosy was horrid!

By disobeying Jesus this man caused Jesus a lot of trouble: Jesus could no longer work the way he wanted to.

²**Jesus got cross with the man:** Here we have a problem. If you turn to the Bible, you will find that it may say that Jesus touched the man because he was filled with compassion for him.

There are experts who think that what Mark actually wrote was that Jesus was cross with the man when he touched him. Then, many years later, someone else changed what Mark had written. That person wrote that Jesus reached out and touched the man because he was sorry for him. It was changed because that is what most people would like to think Jesus did. It sounds better. That's the sort of person that people believe Jesus to be. And, of course, that is true. Jesus was someone who cared deeply for others and felt sympathy for them in their suffering. But this time there was a problem, and it was not Jesus' fault; it was the man with leprosy's fault.

The problem is that when Jesus gave the man a strict order not to tell anyone anything, but to go straight to the priest, he was definitely cross with him. Mark clearly says so.

Then Mark tells us why Jesus got cross. It was because the man did not do what Jesus had clearly told him to do. By disobeying Jesus this man caused Jesus a lot of trouble: Jesus could no longer work the way he wanted to. He had wanted to go around the towns of Galilee. Now he had to stay away from them simply because this man would not do as he was told, even after he had been wonderfully helped.

The man asked Jesus for help because he knew that Jesus could help him. But he did not have enough faith or confidence in Jesus just to ask. He thought that he must put pressure on Jesus to get him to do this. So he pestered Jesus. The man was a nuisance because he talked too much. That annoyed Jesus. So Jesus gave him a firm, strict order not to talk to anyone, but to go straight to the priest.

The fact that Jesus touched the man, and healed him, shows clearly that Jesus DID feel sorry for him. That is so obvious that Mark did not need to say it.

Jesus sorted out the man's problems even though the man caused him problems. What we can learn from this is that even believing Christians can be a nuisance at times. There come times when we know what we would like and may then feel that we must push people to get what we want. Jesus was against this. What is important is simple faith in the Lord. All we need to do is ask, and then wait. There is no need to be pushy just because something is important to us. Being pushy is unpleasant to other people, and therefore also to God.

What is important is simple faith in the Lord. All we need to do is ask, and then wait.

Jesus healed the man for two reasons:

- **The first was because the man believed that Jesus could help him.**
- **The second was because Jesus had compassion for him, and cared about him.** Getting cross with the man did not stop Jesus from caring and helping and saving him.

(Parents also do not stop caring for their children even if they do get cross with them sometimes. Nurses sometimes get cross with patients who will not do what they should, but most nurses still look after them, and look after them properly and well.)

How do experts know?

How do experts know if a part of the Bible was changed by the early Christian church?

In those days a lot of people made copies of the books of the Bible. If one compares all those copies one can see where differences occur. Experts can then get a good idea of where a copy was changed for any reason.

If you get a Greek Bible or New Testament, you can see which copies the experts looked at. They are listed at the bottom of the page. So, with a bit of training and a bit of practice you can actually understand how the experts decided where changes were made. You can follow how they worked out which were the oldest and the most reliable copies.

Christians kept making little changes to the gospels for nearly a thousand years after Christ. Then the experts said enough of that, and more or less agreed on what the writer of the book actually wrote. But they kept some of those changes if they felt that they were good ones. They kept other changes as footnotes at the bottom of each page.

This makes it possible for trained people to know what were the changes made by those who did the copying a long time ago.

3go straight to the priest: The Bible, written by Moses, said that if someone noticed something wrong with his skin, he had to go to the priest. The priest would examine his skin. The priest must then decide whether that person had leprosy, or not. If it really was leprosy, the priest would have to tell him to get out of town and stay away from all other people, even his own family.

Usually, if a person caught leprosy, he never got better. No one knew how to cure this disease. But the Bible also said that if anyone ever did get better, he must first go to the priest and show him that the leprosy was gone. The priest must examine the person's skin and decide whether he was truly healed. If he was indeed cured, the priest must perform a cleaning-up or cleansing ceremony for him. The man would also give God a gift to say, Thank You.

After this the priest will give him permission to go back home and live a normal life.

- In this way, if things were done properly, there would be no danger of anyone else catching the disease.

(You can read about this in the book of Leviticus, the first half of chapter 14.)

- If they obeyed God like this, then God would also get the thanks and respect that he deserves for having helped someone in such great trouble to get better. It would be a miracle.

- When Jesus told the man to go straight to the priest, it would also show the priests that God does still work miracles.
- It would also show the priests who worked for God how reliable the Bible is. The Bible told them what to do if someone did get better. And here was someone getting better even though no one thought that could happen. This would show the priests that the Bible was always right.
- It would also show these priests that Jesus did everything the way the Bible ordered. He always did things the right way, the Bible's way, which was God's way. Jesus kept God's rules.

That was why Jesus spent time praying before he set off on his journeys. He knew that things were going to be difficult, and especially that people were going to be difficult. He needed God's guidance and support and help. He got it by praying. To pray he needed to be alone.

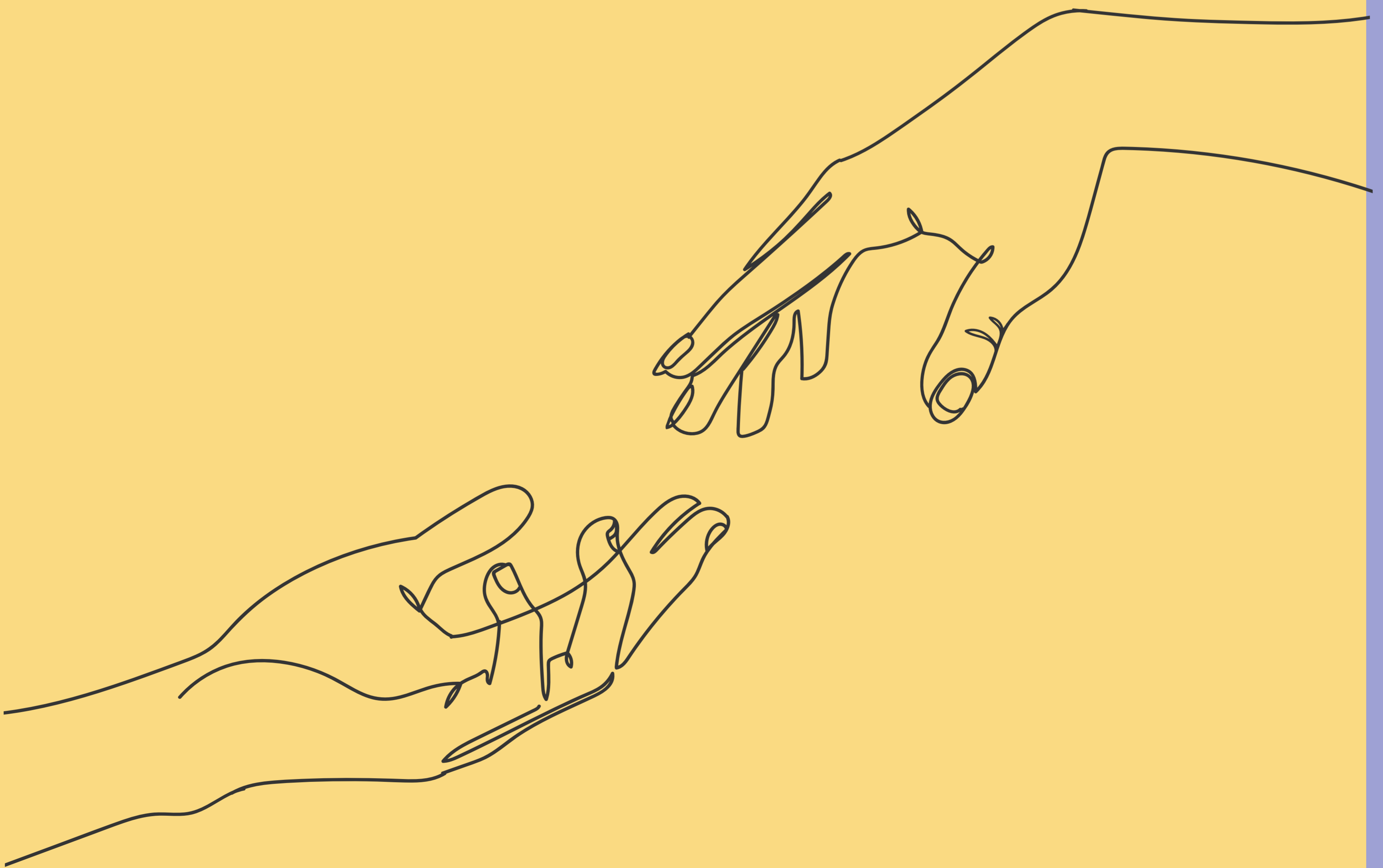
The beginning of the gospel shows that Jesus not only helped people with their problems, but that he also had to deal with people who caused problems - even those who believed in him.

In this leprosy case Mark tells us that Jesus not only dealt with big problems that people had, but also with people who caused problems. This is all part of what the gospel is about.

The beginning of the gospel shows that
Jesus not only helped people who had problems,
but he also had to deal with people who caused problems -
problems caused even by people who believed in him.

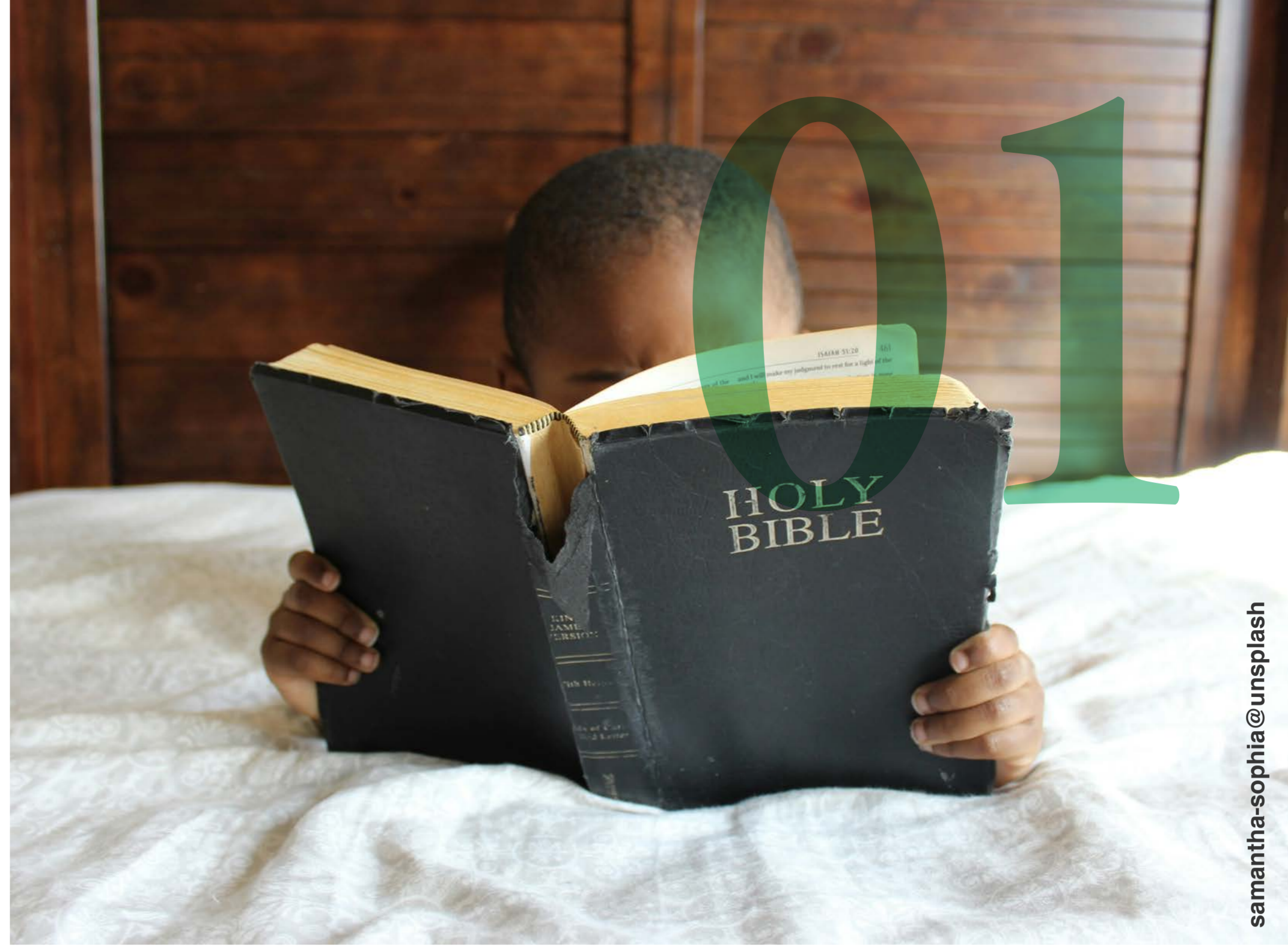


Ruth 1-4



Ruth 1-4

A Simple Bible Translation



samantha-sophia@unsplash

START HERE!

Read this simple translation to understand the passage, then read it in your own Bible.

PART ONE Chapter 1

1:1-5 A JEWISH FAMILY MOVES TO MOAB

In the days when the Judges were in charge of Israel, there was no rain in the country, and not enough food. So a Jewish man from Bethlehem in the land of Judah left his home to stay in the country of Moab [Moh-ab]. He took with him his wife and his two sons.

The man's name was Elimelech [e-lim-a'leck], while the name of his wife was Naomi [nay-oh-mee]. His sons' names were Mahlon [mach-lawn, ch as in loch] and Kilion [kilee-yawn]. They belonged to the old family of Ephratah [ef-ra-tah] that had lived for many years at Bethlehem. But because of the terrible drought they left their home town of Bethlehem and went to the foreign land of Moab on the other side of the Jordan River, and stayed there.

Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died. Naomi was left as a widow, with her two sons.

They married Moabite women. The name of the one was Orpah [or-pah], and the name of the other was Ruth [rooth]. The family of five lived there for about ten years.

Then both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left alone as a widow. She had lost both her sons as well as her husband. She was devastated.

1:6-9 NAOMI DECIDES TO GO BACK HOME

Naomi and her daughters-in-law got ready to leave the land of Moab. She took this decision when news came to the land of Moab that God had answered the prayers of his people by breaking the drought and providing them with food.

So Naomi left the place where she had been staying, and her two daughters-in-law went with her. They went to the road that goes back to the land of Judah.

Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law: No, girls, you must go back. Go back, each of you, to your own mother's home. May God be kind to you both, just as you were kind to my sons and to me.

May God look after you and help you to find another good husband and a good home. Then Naomi kissed them goodbye, and they all began to cry.

1:10-14 NAOMI TELLS HER GIRLS WHAT TO DO

Naomi's daughters-in-law said to her: No, Mom, we are going to go back with you to your people.

But Naomi insisted: No, my dear daughters, you have to go back to your own country. Why do you want to come with me? I'm not going to produce any more sons for you to marry!

Go back, my daughters. Please go! I'm too old and tired now to marry again. Even suppose that I could marry some man and have sons straight away,

Would you then sit around waiting until they grew up? Would you stay single for years until you could marry them? No, my dear girls, life has become much worse for me than it is for you. You can still make another start in life, but life has become bitter for me, because God has turned against me.

They all started to cry again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye. But Ruth clung to Naomi. She would not leave her.

PART TWO

1:15-18 RUTH WANTS TO GO WITH NAOMI

Naomi pleaded with Ruth: Look, your sister-in-law is going back to her people and to her gods. She's going back to her own culture and way of life. Please, go back with your sister-in-law!

But Ruth had other ideas. She said to Naomi: Don't try to get me to leave you, or try to force me to turn back from going with you, because where you go, I shall go. Wherever you live, I'm going to live with you. Your people will become my people, and your God will always be my God.

Where you die, there I shall stay until I die, so that I can be buried next to you. I promise you, in the name of the Lord, that nothing, not even death, will ever separate me from you.

Naomi realised that Ruth had made up her mind to go with her. She was not going to take “No” for an answer. So Naomi stopped trying to persuade Ruth to go back to Moab.

1:19-22 NAOMI'S SAD RETURN HOME

Naomi and Ruth travelled on until they came to Bethlehem. When they got to Bethlehem, there was lots of excitement in the whole town because of them, especially among the women. The women there could not believe that this really was Naomi. The old Naomi they had known was such a cheerful lady, but this Naomi who had come back was a very sad old woman.

So Naomi said to them: Don't call me Naomi anymore. Instead, call me Mara [mah-ra], because the Lord Almighty has made life very bitter for me.

When I left here, I had a lovely family, but the Lord has brought me back here with nothing. I've lost my whole family. I've lost my home and everything that I once had. So why do you still call me Naomi? No, the Lord Almighty has answered my prayers by hurting me and bringing a great disaster upon me.

That's how Naomi came back. With her was Ruth the Moabite woman, her daughter-in-law. Naomi came back from the foreign country of Moab. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

PART THREE Chapter 2

2:1-3 RUTH STARTS TO WORK

Naomi had a contact that was connected to her late husband Elimelech. This contact was an important man in Bethlehem, and was of the same clan or family as Elimelech. He was a relative or cousin, and his name was Boaz [boh-az].

Ruth, the foreigner from Moab, said to Naomi: May I go to work in the fields? I want to go and pick up the leftovers of the harvest wherever I can find a farmer who will allow me to do this. Naomi said to Ruth: Yes, my girl. You can do that.

So Ruth left and went and gleaned in the field. She followed behind the harvesters, picking up any bits of barley that they left lying in the field as they worked. It just so happened that the part of the field she was gleaning in belonged to Boaz who was of the same clan as Elimelech.

2:4-9 BOAZ WELCOMES AND HELPS RUTH

Then Boaz himself came from Bethlehem to the field. Boaz was a good man and a godly farmer. He greeted his workers, saying: The Lord be with you! They called back to him: May the Lord bless you!

Then Boaz asked his assistant, the foreman in charge of the harvesters: Whose girl is that?

The foreman who was in charge of the harvesters replied: She's a young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab.

She asked permission to glean around the sheaves behind the harvesters. She has worked non-stop from this morning until now, except for a short break at the hut.

Boaz then spoke to Ruth: Listen to me, my girl: Don't go to glean in any other field, and also don't wander away from here. Stay as you are with the women who work for me. Keep your eyes on the field where my girls are harvesting, and stay with them.

Stick to the field where they are harvesting. I've also already told my men to leave you alone and not cause you any trouble. When you are thirsty you may go and drink from the water that my men fetch.

2:10-13 BOAZ BLESSES RUTH

Ruth bowed down to the ground in front of Boaz, and said: I cannot imagine why you are so kind to me, and why you take any notice of me at all. I'm just a foreigner.

But Boaz said to her: I have been told about all you did for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband. I know how you left your own father and mother and even your own home country. I understand that you came to live among people you had never known before.

May the Lord reward you for your goodness! May you receive a special reward from the Lord God of Israel, since you have come to live under his care and protection!

Ruth replied: I am very grateful for your kindness, Sir. You have comforted and encouraged me, even though I don't work for you.

2:14-16 BOAZ LOOKS AFTER RUTH

When it was lunch-time Boaz invited her to come and eat with his workers, so that she could have a proper cooked meal. When she joined them, Boaz offered her so much food that she had a full dinner, and even had leftovers to take home with her.

When she got up to go back to her gleaning, Boaz gave his men an order that even if she picked up the best bunches of grain that they cut, they must not say anything to put her off.

Boaz also told his men that they must deliberately pull some of the stalks of grain out from the heaps they cut and leave them lying on the ground for Ruth to pick up. Boaz wanted his men to help Ruth to glean.

2:17-20 RUTH TELLS NAOMI HER GOOD NEWS

Ruth gleaned in the field until evening, when she had to stop. Then, at the end of the day she did one more thing. She threshed the grain she had managed to collect. She ended up with over half a sack full of barley. Half a sack would give them food for weeks. All this was from just one day's work.

Ruth carried the sack of barley to the town. She showed her mother Naomi what she had gathered in that one day. Naomi stared at it, amazed. She also brought out the leftovers from lunchtime and gave Naomi what she had been unable to finish.

Her mother-in-law asked Ruth: Wherever did you glean today? Where did you do all this? May God bless the person who decided to be so kind to you! Then Ruth told her mother-in-law who she had worked for. She said: The name of the farmer I worked for today was someone called Boaz.

Naomi was thrilled. She said to her daughter-in-law: May he be blessed by the Lord. So the Lord has NOT stopped being kind to us. He is kind to those of us who are still alive, and he is also kind to those of our family who have died. Then Naomi shared some information with Ruth: That man is actually a relative of our family. He is what we Israelites call a redeemer. He is the person we may rely on to help us.

2:21-23 NAOMI TELLS RUTH TO STAY IN BOAZ' FIELDS

Then Ruth, who came from Moab, said to Naomi: Well, let me tell you something else: Boaz even said to me that I must stay with the harvesters who work for him until they finish the whole of his harvest.

Naomi then gave Ruth her daughter-in-law this advice: My dear daughter, the best thing you can do is to stay and work with the women of Boaz. On any other farm it is quite possible that the men will pick on you and cause you trouble.

So Ruth joined up with the women who worked for Boaz to glean until the barley harvest was finished. She stayed with them for the wheat harvest as well. All that time she lived with her mother-in-law and looked after her.

PART FOUR Chapter 3

3:1-5 NAOMI WANTS TO HELP RUTH

Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, came up with an idea for Ruth, her daughter-in-law. She said: My girl, I really ought to get you married, so that you can have a good home.

We are fortunate that Boaz is our relative, and you have the advantage of working with his young women. You've seen how he looks after them. Look, Boaz is separating the barley at the threshing floor tonight.

I want you to make yourself lovely. Have a good wash, and put on perfume, and dress up in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing-floor. But make sure that he does not see you until he has finished eating and drinking.

Then, when he goes to lie down, note the place where he lies so that you can go there in the dark. When you get to him, you must uncover his feet and lie down there at his feet. That will be a sign to him that you need his help. This is an old Israelite custom. He will then tell you what you must do.

Ruth said to Naomi: Yes, Mom, I'll do everything you have told me to do.

3:6-9 RUTH WANTS TO HELP NAOMI

Ruth went down to the threshing-floor and did everything her mother-in-law had told her to do.

When Boaz finished eating and drinking, he was in a good mood. He went to lie down at the far edge of the heap of grain. Ruth went quietly across to him, and lay down at his feet, and then pulled over her the part of his cloak that covered his feet.

Halfway through the night something disturbed the man and woke him up. He got a big surprise: A woman was lying at his feet. He asked: Who on earth are you?

She answered: I am Ruth, your servant. I have come to you for your help for the family. Please take me under your wing and give me your support. I need you to recover what belongs to Naomi's family. If you are willing to guide me through this, then put your cloak over me for protection, and I shall do whatever you tell me to do, because you are the the family's redeemer.

3:10-13 BOAZ DECIDES TO HELP RUTH

Boaz was amazed! He said: The Lord bless you, my girl! This generous kindness that you are now showing to the family is even greater than your kindness at the beginning

when you left Moab to come here. You have sacrificed looking for a nice young man as a husband for yourself. You could have hoped to marry for love or money. But you have chosen instead to marry for the honour and dignity of Naomi's family. You are simply wonderful!

Now, my girl, don't you worry. I'll do for you everything you have asked. It won't be difficult because all the leaders of my people know what you are: an honourable and unselfish young lady.

But there is one difficulty about the law. Yes, it is true that I am a relative and therefore a lawful redeemer of the family. But there is a redeemer who is a closer cousin to the family than I am. So he has to have the first option.

Stay here for the rest of the night. Then, in the morning, if he chooses to redeem you, well and good. It is his right and his responsibility. But, if he doesn't want to redeem you, then I promise you, as surely as the Lord lives, that I shall redeem you. Now, lie down until morning and get some sleep.

3:14-15 BOAZ BEGINS TO HELP RUTH

So Ruth lay at Boaz' feet until the morning. She got up very early, while it was still so dark that no-one could recognise anybody else. Boaz had warned her: No-one must find out that this woman had come to the threshing-floor.

Early in the morning Boaz said to Ruth: Bring that shawl you are wearing, and hold it out for me. When Ruth held it out for him, Boaz poured out about six scoops of barley into her shawl, and placed it on her shoulder. It was a gift to Naomi. Then Boaz went off to town.

3:16-18 NAOMI KNOWS WHAT BOAZ WILL DO

When Ruth came back to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked her: Well, my daughter, what happened? Where do you stand now? Do you have any idea who you are going to marry?

Then Ruth told Naomi all that the man Boaz had done for her. She also said: He gave me these six scoops of barley, and said that I must not go back to my mother-in-law empty handed.

Naomi said to Ruth: Now, my daughter, you must just wait until you find out how this matter turns out. The one thing I can tell you is that the man will not let this matter rest. You can be quite sure that he will sort out this business today.

PART FIVE Chapter 4

4:1-4 BOAZ INFORMS THE FAMILY RELATIVE

So Boaz went to the place at the town gate where the people of Bethlehem would meet to do their business. He sat down there. After a while the man who was the family's number one redeemer came along. He was the very man that Boaz had told Ruth about. Boaz called out to him: Ah, So-'n-so, please come over here and sit down with me. So the man came across and sat down.

Then Boaz invited ten men who were elders or leaders of the town to come and sit there. They also came and sat down.

Boaz then spoke up in front of everyone at the gates to the man who was first in line as the family's redeemer. He said: There's a piece of land that properly belongs to our brother who died, the late Elimelech. Naomi, who has come back from the land of Moab, is putting it up for sale.

So I have taken it upon myself to inform you personally about this. I am giving you the opportunity to buy it in the presence of these official witnesses sitting here, these elders of my people. If you want to redeem it and buy it yourself, then go ahead now and redeem it. But if you don't want to redeem it, then let me know, for no-one else is entitled to redeem it except you, and I am next in line. The man answered: Yes, alright, I'll redeem it myself.

4:5-6 BOAZ EXPLAINS ABOUT REDEMPTION

Then Boaz said to So-'n-so: The moment you buy the land, which belongs both to Naomi and to Ruth the Moabite, who is the widow of Naomi's dead son, you have a responsibility. You then have to protect and look after the dead man's good name as well as his property.

When he heard this, the man who was the closest relative to the family immediately changed his mind. He said: No! Sorry, then I cannot redeem it for myself because I might lose out where my own inheritance is concerned. So you can redeem it instead. I now give you my right to redeem it because I cannot redeem it myself.

4:7-8 THE RELATIVE GIVES HIS RIGHTS TO BOAZ

In the early days, in Israel, there was an old fashioned custom about redeeming or buying any property. It applied to an agreement to change the ownership of a property. Every business deal was settled when the man who sold the property took off his shoe

and gave it to the man who bought the property. This was the way that a business deal was properly or legally done in Israel in those early days.

So the man who had first right to get Naomi's property and belongings, said to Boaz: Alright then, you buy it for yourself. And he took off his sandal.

4:9-10 BOAZ BECOMES THE FAMILY-REDEEMER

Then Boaz announced to the elders, and to all the people standing there watching and listening: Today you are witnesses that I have bought everything that belonged to Elimelech. I have also bought whatever belonged to Kilion and to Machlon. I have bought it from Naomi.

On top of that, I have now got Ruth, the woman from Moab, the widow of Mahlon, as my wife. I have done this to preserve the good name of the dead man, together with his property. His name must not be lost from his family, nor from the list of the citizens of his home town. To this you people are witnesses today.

4:11-12 THE PEOPLE WISH BOAZ AND RUTH WELL

All the people at the town gates as well as the elders, who were witnesses, responded to Boaz, and said: May the Lord give his blessing to this woman who is coming into your home. May the Lord make her as special as Rachel and Leah [lee-a], Jacob's wives. Those two women were the mothers of the whole nation of Israel. Boaz, may you do well and have success and power in Ephratah as well as respect and a good reputation in Bethlehem.

Boaz, may your family, be like the family of Perez [perets], whose mother was Tamar [tah-mar] and whose father was Judah. May the Lord also give you children through this lovely young lady.

4:13-17 EVERYONE LOVES RUTH'S BABY

So Boaz married Ruth, and she became his wife. He made love to her and the Lord enabled her to have a baby, and she gave birth to a boy.

Then the women of Bethlehem congratulated Naomi. They said: The Lord be praised! You see, he has not denied you a redeemer now! May your little boy become someone special in the whole of Israel.

May he make life better for you, and look after you when you get old. You are so fortunate to have such a daughter-in-law. She loves you so much, and she has produced this little boy for you. Actually, she is better for you, and is a greater asset, than seven sons would have been.

Naomi was so thrilled with the baby that she adopted him as her own son and as Elimelech's son. She put the little baby boy on her lap, and she cared for him herself.

The women who were Naomi's neighbours and friends suggested a name for the baby. They said: A son has been born for Naomi. So they gave him the name, Obed [oh-bed OR aw-ved in Hebrew]. Oved [aw-ved] is Hebrew for a servant. That meant that he should look after Naomi when he grew up.

PART SIX

4.18-22 THE FAMILY OF PEREZ

This is the family record of Perez. (Perets means "Breakthrough".)

Perez was the ancestor of Nahshon [nach-shawn],

and Nahshon was the father of Salmon [sal-mawn],

and Salmon was the father of Boaz.

Boaz was the father of Obed [aw-ved],

who became the father of Jesse [Jessee OR Yi-shai in Hebrew],

who was the father of David [In Hebrew either dah-vid OR dah-veed].



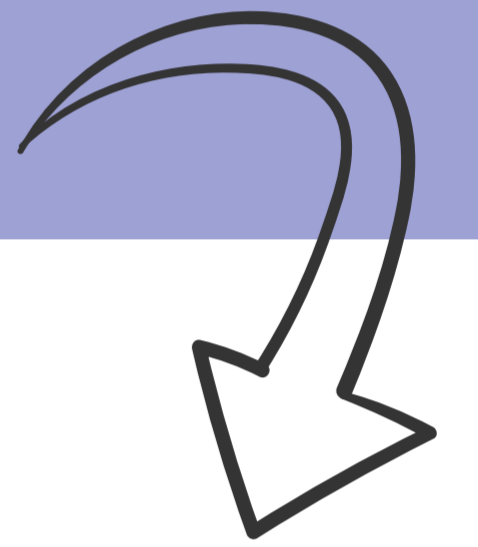
NOW YOU CAN READ RUTH IN YOUR OWN BIBLE.

Ruth 1-4

Passage background & introduction



Read this part to get to know the background of the chapter you read in Section 01. Interesting things like who Ruth was and what sort of person she was, and what Naomi's worries were about, and how wonderfully God blessed them.



CHAPTERS 1-4 INTRODUCTION

The book of Ruth is one of the most famous stories in the whole world.

It is also one of the loveliest. On top of this, it is a true story. It happened exactly as told in the Bible. It's a simple book. It's about two people talking to each other: first, it is Ruth and Naomi, her mother-in-law. Then it is Ruth and Boaz, the farmer at Bethlehem.

The book of Ruth in the Bible is unusual because it does not tell us anything about God and what he did. But it is clear that Ruth and Naomi and Boaz all loved God deeply. The book is like a puzzle: you have to think about what it teaches us about God. We must read it and study it and see what we can learn from it about God. It's a book that makes one think. That is actually what the whole Bible is:

**The Bible is to get one to think and to believe
and to live properly and well.**

If you read this book you will come to like Ruth. You will probably love her. If you do, then you must go on to love God, for he made her into such a lovely soul. Because she loved Naomi and God she did so much good. And then God did her so much more good, far more than she, or anyone else, could have imagined.

Ruth lived over a thousand years before Jesus Christ. This was sometime between when Joshua conquered the Promised Land and when David was born who became the second king of Israel. He was also the best ruler that Israel ever had. In the time after Moses and Joshua, and before the kings Saul and David, Israel was ruled by

judges. Three of the best known judges were Deborah, Gideon and Samson. Ruth lived sometime during this period of the Judges.

Moses was the leader of Israel who gave the Israelite people their special way of life. Moses was an exceptionally godly man who was very close to God. God gave to Moses the Ten Commandments and two types of Law:

- The main law was to tell the Israelites how to live a godly and a good life. This was the Law that God wants the whole world to keep.
- The second type of Law was especially for the Israelites. It told them how to live as a nation in a world that was evil and wicked, utterly bad and very sinful. These rules gave the Israelites their national character. It made them different from all the other nations. These second types of laws and rules were designed to help them to keep the main Law and commandments of God.

The problem with the Israelites was that they found the second types of laws easier to keep than the more important type. It was easier, for example, to sacrifice a sheep for the Lord and have a feast according to Moses' rules than to make sure they did not tell any lies. So they concentrated more and more on the minor laws. They became so keen on them that they even made more and more of them. But as they focused on the minor ones they began to forget the major ones. They sacrificed sheep strictly according to the rules, and enjoyed their feasts, but they told lots of lies. The problem is that lies and other sins lead to

trouble. The Israelites began to behave badly, and things got bad as the years went by.

What made things even worse was that the Israelites did not have the kind of fixed leadership that they had when Moses and Joshua were their leaders. Without good leadership to discipline and control them, the people began to do as they liked. When people do as they like they don't listen to God and they don't obey him. When that happens things get into a mess for the country. People become lawless. They disobeyed God's main laws and they even began to ignore his laws for the nation of Israel, his chosen people. God's people lost their respect for God and for others and for themselves. Their behaviour became more and more ugly.

For this God would punish them. He allowed other nations, their enemies, to attack them and beat them. Life under their enemies' rule was unbearable. They were forced to become slaves. When things got too bad they turned back to God and begged him to

Moses was an exceptionally godly man who was very close to God. God gave to Moses the Ten Commandments and two types of Law.

help them. God then kindly sent them leaders who were able to defeat their enemies and drive them out of their country. Those leaders were called judges. A judge was someone who would put matters right. But the problem then was that the same poor behaviour would begin again some years after the judge had died.

The book of Judges begins quite well. The first judge was called Othniel [oth-nee-el]. He was the son-in-law of the grand old man Caleb [kay-lib or kelev in Hebrew]. In Hebrew Caleb or Kelev means Dog. Kelev was a good old dog! He was a great man, a legend in Israel.

When the Israelites came out of Egypt in the great exodus, they had to make plans to conquer the land that God had promised them. The problem was that they all got cold feet. They gave up before they started.

However, there were two men who did not give up. Joshua and Caleb were willing to attack the giants in the Promised Land. They believed that God would support them, because he had told them to do that. But Joshua and Caleb were not able to convince the rest of the nation to do what Moses had told them to do. The result was that the nation was punished by God. They had to stay in the desert until everyone older than 20 had died there in the desert without ever getting to the Promised Land. Only Caleb and Joshua made it to the Promised Land, and Kelev was rewarded by becoming the owner of the town of Hebron. Hebron still exists today. Hebron is about 30 kilometres or 20 miles south of Jerusalem. Hebron is famous as the place where Abraham died.

Othniel, his nephew, helped Caleb to conquer the area around Hebron, and as a reward married Caleb's sensible and bold daughter. Othniel, the first judge, got the book of Judges off to a good start. He was a good leader and a worthy son-in-law of the grand old man Caleb, the oldest man and the most senior man, to conquer the Promised Land.

God sent them good and competent leaders, but the people kept falling away from their loyalty to the Lord.

But as the years passed, Israel began to let God down more and more. God sent them good and competent leaders, but the people kept falling away from their loyalty to the Lord. In the end things got very bad. The last few chapters of Judges are tragic and disgraceful. This was an especially bad time in Israel. What is interesting for us is that it was during this time of the judges that Ruth lived. So while the book of Judges was a poor and even very bad time in Israel's history, God was using this girl Ruth to get us a book in the Bible about one of the greatest and most beautiful happenings in the history of the Old Testament. Some of the things that happened in the time of the judges were horrible, ugly, nasty, appalling. There was no discipline, no

proper control, and so there was no decency and no peace. There was no godliness. By contrast, the life of Ruth during that time was beautiful, lovely, good, decent, pure and honourable. She was honest, she was faithful, and she is encouraging to us. She was such a godly woman!

Whenever things around us seem to be bad and worrying or frightening, we must realise that God is still doing some wonderful things in our world and in our times. Whatever is going wrong, there are always lovely people who are doing God's marvellous will. We must never give up when so much news is bad. We must keep going, because God is doing a lot of good somewhere.

What the book of Ruth is about is that:

**the good that God does
is greater than
the harm that people cause.**

What we must remember is that however bad a country or a community may become, there are always some really super and excellent people living there. Even if churches go wrong and Christians become hypocrites, there are always some lovely Christians in every church. This is what the book of Ruth encourages us to see and helps us to believe.

The last of the judges was a very godly man called Samuel. It is possible that he was a boy when Ruth was an old woman. Israel was in a mess when Samuel was born, but God used Samuel to make it possible for Israel to recover. When Samuel was an old man he anointed young David as Israel's next king. King David, a prophet of God, got the kingdom of Israel right. David's father's granny was...guess who...?

She was Ruth!

If in those days you flew south-east from Jerusalem, or from Bethlehem, across the Dead Sea, you would come to what was then the country of Moab [moh-ab]. Today it is part of the Arab country of Jordan. The roots of the nation of Moabites go right back to Abraham. Abraham had a brother who died, but he left a son who was Abraham's nephew. His name was Lot. He travelled with his Uncle Abraham from Iraq or Syria to Palestine. Lot became a rich man and settled in the valley that the Dead Sea is in. But the people he went to live with were utterly corrupt. God decided to wipe them out, but warned Lot and his family to get out of the valley. God then destroyed that valley, which seems to have been at the south end of the Dead Sea.

Lot survived and ended up living in a cave with his daughters. His daughter tricked Lot into getting completely drunk and then giving her a baby. She had sex with her own Dad and had a child by him. The boy's name was Moab. Moab grew up to have a big

family that went to live to the east of the Dead Sea. The family became so powerful that they took over the leadership of the people who lived there. Eventually the country was named after them: it became the country of Moab.

The Moabites became enemies of the Israelites, in fact, bitter enemies. About 600 years later Moses brought the Israelites from the Sinai Desert, to pass to the east of the Dead Sea and get to the Jordan River. But the Moabites refused to let them cross their country. The Israelites were not even allowed to use the highway that all other trading nations used. The Moabites would not sell them any food or water. They even threatened to get their army to fight the travelling Israelites. The Israelites, of course, had their families, their children and their cattle and animals with them.

But the Moabites sank even lower than just being unhelpful and rude. They tried to get a prophet to put a curse on the nation of Israel that God had miraculously brought out of slavery in Egypt. The Moabites knew what God had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. They knew that the Israelites were descended from Abraham, Lot's uncle. But God made their attempts to use the false prophet to curse the Israelites fail. Instead of being cursed, the Israelites were blessed by God.

(By the way, the name of the prophet that the Moabites used to try to curse Israel was Balaam [bay-lim] and he is famous for having a donkey that talked to him. The poor donkey that he beat when he got angry rebuked him for not obeying God's orders.)

It would be a good thing if we had more donkeys like that today!

When Balaam failed to put a curse on the Israelites he then did something particularly nasty. He told the Moabites that there was a way they could bring serious trouble onto the Israelites even though they were protected by God. They must get their pretty women to go and have parties with the Israelites. They were to get them drunk and have sex with them. The Israelite men would fall for this. They would then break one of God's major laws, and God would then turn against them. This horrible plan worked, to some extent. God punished the Israelites who fell into this trap by putting them to death, as he had warned them previously. Then God went back to looking after the rest of his people again.

Because of this Moses gave the Israelites another minor law. No Moabites would be allowed to become Israelite citizens. Even Egyptians could join the Israelite nation if they became believers in God, but not Moabites. The Egyptians had treated the Israelites very badly. They had bullied them without mercy. But what the Moabites had done was worse: they had got the Israelites to sin against God. So Moses had told the Israelites to regard the Moabites as enemies permanently. The Israelites must never marry Moabites. Moabites must never be welcome in Israel.

When we study the Law of Moses we also see something else. An important part of the major laws was about love. We must love God. We must love him more than anything or anyone else. To show this kind of love to God our Father in heaven, we must love others. We must love our people. We must even love strangers and foreigners.

To show God that we truly love him we must love people. This includes people who cause us trouble and do not treat us well. We must cause them no trouble and we must treat them fairly and properly and decently. All this is most important if we want God's love and favours and blessings.

So what do we do? What do we do when the minor law says have nothing to do with those people because they will lead you to sin? And what do we do when the major law says we must love people, even those who don't like us? Which law do we obey?

The answer is that we must obey both laws. We must love people, and we must also not allow them to lead us into sin. We must have nothing to do with whatever is wrong, and we must always treat people properly, even if they do what's wrong. It also means even if they do wrong to us. This is what makes religion so difficult for all of us. Yet it is also why religion is so important for us.

But this is the rule that God has chosen to test whether we truly love him or not. Will we do as he says? Or will we make some excuse not to do what he has told us to do? The big mistake that many believers make is to take God's minor laws seriously but then fail to keep his major laws. We concentrate on the laws we think are right, especially those that suit us, yet we ignore or neglect laws that are most important because we find them too difficult. We even argue that the laws we don't like are not necessary, or are out of date nowadays. We say that everyone ignores them anyway, or claim that God will understand if we can't help doing what's wrong.

We must love people, and we must also not allow them to lead us into sin. We must have nothing to do with whatever is wrong.

But all these arguments are false. They are huge mistakes with serious consequences, and are even dangerous. They ruin people's lives. Arguing with God does not work. We just end up with our lives in a mess.

The book of Ruth is about how a lovely young woman who came from Moab yet won the hearts of the Jewish people. She put love first, and the result was that religious people who obeyed Moses came to love her despite the fact that she came from Moab. Because she kept God's laws she got God's support. She kept God's major laws and even

decided to learn his minor laws and obey them. For doing that God rewarded her by making her the great-grandmother of Israel's greatest king.

She even became the ancestor of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Saviour of the world, and the permanent King of the Kingdom of God and of heaven.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

Every book in the Bible is showing us what the future is going to be. Every book in the Bible also teaches us something about God, even if the name of God is not mentioned, as in this book of Ruth. Every book also shows us something about the Son of God, Jesus Christ, the Messiah of Israel.

The book of Ruth shows us how God allowed Naomi to get hurt. That is a clue or a picture of how God the Father allowed his Son Jesus to get hurt. God also allows us to get hurt.

But it also shows us how wonderfully God caused things to turn out for Naomi in the end. In the end God raised Jesus out of all his sufferings and death, and took him up to heaven and put him on God's own throne. God has also promised to save us from all our troubles and sufferings, and lift us up to heaven. There he will give us a special place in his kingdom. Whenever we suffer, we actually have something wonderful to look forward to. It is something that we cannot see now, but God is planning and preparing it for us. That is what is called living by faith.

This book shows how wonderfully unselfish, loyal and faithful Ruth was. What God is telling us is that he loves that sort of thing. Here is someone, a young Moabite widow, who truly loved just one person, and God made a big thing of it. God has used Ruth to inspire us to love people. That's what God wants. The secret, though, is that our love must be genuine. It must be unselfish. It must be godly. It has to be something that really helps somebody.

When we do love someone in such an honourable or noble way we can then understand what Jesus has done for us. The way Ruth loved Naomi is the way Christ loves the Church, and all God's people. Jesus' love and self-sacrifice was even greater than Ruth's, by far.

A Christian is someone who appreciates Christ's love for us.

God's minor law, with God's support and help, made it possible for Boaz to redeem Elimelech and his family's good name and fortune. Jesus Christ's sacrifice and death on the cross has redeemed all God's people from sin, which the law of God condemns. He has also redeemed us from death, which is our punishment for having sinned.

As Ruth had a baby boy, called Obed, so Christ's resurrection from the dead has given us the hope of new life and everlasting happiness in heaven. This is thanks to God's Son becoming both the Servant of God and the Servant of man. Obed means "servant."

Jesus became our servant.

The amazing thing about the book of Ruth is that God used and blessed a young woman from Moab, who became the great-grandmother of Israel's greatest king. This tells us two things about God's wonderful plans:

First, he would one day use a young woman who was not yet married, a virgin, to be the mother of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Redeemer and the Messiah and the Saviour and Lord of the whole world.

Secondly, God showed that he wants to bless all the nations of the world, even those that were not Israeli or Jewish. He chose a woman from Moab, which is today the country of Jordan. The people who live there nowadays are Arabs. They are also Muslims. That Moabite girl, Ruth, was an ancestor not only of King David, but also of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And Jesus, of course, was a descendent of David. Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the whole world. He is the way for all nations to find God. This hope is not only for Christians, but is also available for Jews and Arabs, as well as for Muslims or any other religion. Jesus Christ is the way to God for all of us. What we have to do is to believe in him. We must believe in him and obey him.

Bethlehem was both the home of David when he was a boy, as well as the birth place of Jesus. Bethlehem is two Hebrew words, Beth-Lehem [bet lechem, ch as in loch]. Bethlehem means "House of-Bread." One can translate that as "a good source of food," in other words, a good farming area. Jesus, who was born in Bethlehem, called himself

"The Bread of Life."

We can translate that as

The True Food of God that gives us Eternal Life.

Ruth 1-4

A Bible study on our passage



dawid-zawila@unsplash

Now let's grasp the points of each paragraph and the issues being spoken about and together we can grow in our knowledge and love of God.



RUTH

Here is the story about Ruth's amazing unselfishness, and how God blessed her for it.

It's about Ruth's goodness to her mother-in-law, and about God's great goodness to Ruth and her mother-in-law.

PART ONE: Chapter 1

The first part is about how things went terribly wrong for an Israelite family whose home had been in Bethlehem.

1:1-5 A JEWISH FAMILY MOVES TO MOAB

In the days when ¹the Judges were in charge of Israel, there was ²no rain in the country, and not enough food. So a Jewish man from ³Bethlehem in the land of Judah left his home to stay in the country of ⁴Moab [Moh-ab]. He took with him his wife and his two sons.

The man's name was Elimelech [e-lim-a'leck], while the name of his wife was Naomi [nay-oh-mee]. His sons' names were Mahlon [mach-lawn, ch as in loch] and Kilion [kilee-yawn]. They belonged to the old family of ⁵Ephratah [ef-ra-tah] that had lived for many years at Bethlehem. But because of the terrible drought they left their home town of Bethlehem and went to the foreign land of Moab on the other side of the Jordan River, and stayed there.

Hebrew names: When unusual names are used for the first time, they are put in brackets and broken into sections, to help the reader to pronounce them.

Names in Hebrew, which look strange to us, often have meanings. For example, Elimelech, pronounced el-ee-melech in Hebrew, ch as in loch: El means God; Eli means My God, and Melech means King. So Elimelech means My God (is) King.

¹**the Judges:** To begin with, when the Israelites left Egypt and settled in Canaan [kay-nin] they had no kings. Canaan is a Hebrew word that means business or trade. A Canaanite means a businessman. Unfortunately doing business over the centuries had made them wicked, corrupt and rotten to the core. This is what the love of business and wealth and money does to people in the end.

So when the Israelites took over Canaan God appointed judges as leaders to rule the country. The function of the judges was to make sure that the people obeyed God and lived decently. They would then be able to live safely and happily.

²**no rain in the country, and not enough food:** This was their punishment from God because of the way most of the country was disobeying God and living in a heathen and disgraceful way.

³**Bethlehem:** Bethlehem was a farming community in the area where the tribe of Judah settled. Centuries later the tribe of Judah became known as the Jews. The name Bethlehem means a “good farming area.” Bethlehem, in Hebrew, is “House of Bread.” Beth [bet] means House, and Lehem means bread [lechem, ch as in loch]. Bethlehem is about ten kilometres to the south of Jerusalem. The town Bethlehem is still there in Israel today.

Over a hundred years after Ruth, David would become the second king of Israel. He would grow up in Bethlehem. It would be his home town. A thousand years after David, the Lord Jesus Christ would also be born in Bethlehem. Jesus was of the family of David.

⁴**Moab:** Moab [moh-ab] was a neighbouring country on the other side, the east side, of the Dead Sea. It was next to the lower or southern half of the Dead Sea. Today Moab is part of the country of Jordan. From Bethlehem one looked over the Dead Sea to the distant hills of Moab.

The Jews were descended from Abraham, and the Moabites were descended from Abraham’s nephew, Lot.

⁵**Ephratah:** Ephratah [ef-ra-tah] was possibly the ancient name of Bethlehem, or it may have been the area in which the town Bethlehem was situated. Bethlehem was

9 kilometres south of Jerusalem. The local people were proud to live in Bethlehem-Ephratah, which was an important part of the start of the Jewish nation. The prophet Micah prophesied that the future Messiah would be born there. (Micah chapter 5).

Micah's prophecy was made somewhere around 700 years before Jesus Christ, but Ruth lived long before that, well over a thousand years before Christ.

1:6-9 NAOMI DECIDES TO GO BACK HOME

Naomi and her daughters-in-law got ready to leave the land of Moab. She took this decision when news came to the land of Moab that God had answered the prayers of his people by breaking the drought and providing them with food.

So Naomi left the place where she had been staying, and her two daughters-in-law went with her. They went to the road that goes back to the land of Judah.

Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law: No, girls, you must go back. Go back, each of you, to ¹your own mother's home. May God be kind to you both, just as you were kind to my sons and to me.

May God look after you and help you to find another good husband and a good home. Then Naomi kissed them goodbye, and they all began to cry.

¹your own mother's home: Naomi was trying to do what was best for the two young women, who had no children. They had fallen in love with two Israelite men and married them. Machlon and Kilion were good husbands. So their widows now wanted to go to Israel where their darling husbands had come from. Naomi began to realise that this would be a mistake. They would not be welcome in Israel, especially in Bethlehem-Ephratah where the Jewish religion was strong. "Go back to your own mother's home" was a way of saying, go back to your own people and your own culture where you grew up. The two young women were very keen to go to Bethlehem with Naomi. They had packed up and started the journey with her.

1:10-14 NAOMI TELLS HER GIRLS WHAT TO DO

Naomi's daughters-in-law said to her: No, Mom, we are going to go back with you to your people.

But Naomi insisted: No, my dear daughters, you have to go back to your own country. Why do you want to come with me? I'm not going to produce any more sons for you to marry!

Go back, my daughters. Please go! ¹I'm too old and tired now to marry again. Even suppose that I could marry some man and have sons straight away,

Would you then sit around waiting until they grew up? Would you stay single for years until you could marry them? No, my dear girls, life has become much worse for me than it is for you. You can still make another start in life, but life has become bitter for me, because God has turned against me.

They all started to cry again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye. But Ruth clung to Naomi. She would not leave her.

¹I'm too old and tired now to marry again: Orpah and Ruth married into a very special Jewish family. But, sadly, that had now come to an end. Naomi knew that her daughters would not get the same chance to marry good Jewish men again. She is now persuading them that there is absolutely no chance that she can ever again give them a good husband. The happiness they have known in the past has now gone forever. Death has broken up their family.

PART TWO:

Ruth decided that she would look after Naomi for the rest of Naomi's life. Ruth was determined to do that even if that meant that she would have to be just a servant for the rest of her life.

1:15-18 RUTH WANTS TO GO WITH NAOMI

Naomi pleaded with Ruth: Look, ¹your sister-in-law is going back to her people and to her gods. She's going back to her own culture and way of life. Please, go back with your sister-in-law!

But Ruth had other ideas. She said to Naomi: Don't try to get me to leave you, or try to force me to turn back from going with you, because ²where you go, I shall go. Wherever you live, I'm going to live with you. Your people will become my people, and your God will always be my God.

Where you die, there I shall stay until I die, so that I can be buried next to you. I promise you, in the name of the Lord, that nothing, not even death, will ever separate me from you.

Naomi realised that Ruth had made up her mind to go with her. She was not going to take "No" for an answer. So Naomi stopped trying to persuade Ruth to go back to Moab.

¹your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods: When Naomi told her daughters-in-law to go back to their own country and their gods, she was not telling them to give up on the true God. She did not tell them to go and worship other gods. She had been living in Moab for ten years as an Israelite who believed in God. The two young women had married Israelites and the whole family believed in Israel's God.

But now Naomi was in trouble, and she was trying to help her sons' widows not to get themselves into more trouble with her. She felt helpless and desperate. She would not be able to help them anymore. Naomi knew that her people would not welcome two Moabite women. In Judah they would always have to live as servants. They would not be well-treated or respected. No Israelite man would want to marry a foreign woman, especially not from Moab. It would be better for the girls to go back home, to their own country, their own people and their own culture. They would have a better chance to get married there and have a home of their own, instead of just being servants in someone else's home.

Sadly, life would be better for them in their own country where people worshiped false gods. Even though they believed in God they would be better off in Moab than in Judah.

It would be possible for Orpah and Ruth to live in Moab as believers in God. Even today there are Christians who live in countries that have turned against Christianity. They worship God, but Sunday may not be a day of rest for everyone, and there may be no Christian churches that they can go to. It is not easy to worship and obey God in a country with a different religion, but it is possible. Even among the Moabites there were a few people who believed in the true God. There always are such people in every country, and certainly in the countries that were neighbours to Israel.

Many years later David sent his father and mother, who were believers in God, to live in Moab. King Saul was trying to kill David and he had to get his parents to safety.

Naomi knew that Orpah and Ruth would always love God. They both loved Naomi and Naomi's God. Naomi wanted God to bless the girls when they went back to their own people with their own culture and gods. Naomi had said to them:

May God be kind to you both, just as you were kind to my sons and to me.

May God look after you and help you to find another good husband and a good home.

There would be very few men in Moab who believed in God, so things would of course be difficult for the two girls. But Naomi was sure that there would be no men at all in Bethlehem-Ephratah who would want to marry a widow from Moab. In fact, nobody would want Moab women in their town. That was Naomi's problem. It is difficult to go to another country where nobody knows you. But it is especially difficult to go somewhere where nobody wants you! Going back to Moab would be difficult but not impossible. Going on to the land of the Israelites, the people of God, would be hopeless for these two Moabite girls.

That's what Naomi thought, as she desperately and unselfishly tried to help her two daughters-in-law. Naomi badly wanted them to have a family. The chances of that in Bethlehem were, in her experience, very poor.



Famous Bible Words

2where you go, I shall go:

Where you go, I shall go.

Wherever you live, I'm going to live with you.

**Your people will become my people,
and your God will always be my God.**

**Where you die, there I shall stay until I die,
so that I can be buried next to you.**

I shall always be with you,

I promise you in the name of God,

that I will still be with you even in death.

These words are very famous. Many people have loved them. Ruth is saying that she is going to change her country and her people in order to go and live with Naomi for the rest of her life. She will also change her culture, and, of course, would be perfectly happy to go on worshiping the God of the Israelites. She is willing to live as a humble servant looking after Naomi for the rest of her life. She loved Naomi, and she loved Naomi's God. She was prepared to learn to love Naomi's people, even if they were difficult or did not want her. She would rather do all that than leave Naomi in order to make a new home for herself.

Ruth's promise to Naomi is important. Ruth will not only be with Naomi for the whole of her life, but will stay with Naomi even when they die. They shall be together forever! It is her descendant, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who will make it possible for us to keep up our precious connections with those we love, after death. This is what is meant by the gift of eternal life by the grace of Jesus Christ.

1:19-22 NAOMI'S SAD RETURN HOME

Naomi and Ruth travelled on until they came to Bethlehem. When they got to Bethlehem, there was lots of excitement in the whole town because of them, especially among the women. The women there could not believe that this really was Naomi. The old Naomi they had known was such a cheerful lady, but this Naomi who had come back was a very sad old woman.

So Naomi said to them: Don't call me ¹Naomi anymore. Instead, call me ¹Mara [mah-ra], because the Lord Almighty has made life very bitter for me.

When I left here, I had a lovely family, but the Lord has brought me back here with nothing. I've lost my whole family. I've lost my home and everything that I once had. So why do you still call me Naomi? No, ²the Lord Almighty has answered my prayers by hurting me and bringing a great disaster upon me.

That's how Naomi came back. ³With her was Ruth the Moabite woman, her daughter-in-law. Naomi came back from the foreign country of Moab. They arrived in ⁴Bethlehem at the beginning of ⁵the barley harvest.

¹Naomi, Mara: Remember that the book of Ruth was written in the Hebrew language:

Naomi [nay-oh-mee] means 'My Loveliness', or 'I'm a Pleasant, Happy Person.'

Mara [mah-rah] means 'Bitterness', or 'Something Horrible has Happened.' "Ra" in Hebrew is something bad or horrible.

²the Lord Almighty has answered my prayers by hurting me: The Old Testament Bible was translated from Hebrew into Greek about 150 years before Jesus Christ. When translating the book of Ruth, the Greek translators left out of their Bible these unhappy or painful words of Naomi.

This shows that there are parts of the Bible that even believers do not like to hear.

But it is important that we listen to everything that God has told us, rather than just what people like to hear or want us to hear. The reason why the Bible is so important to us is because it is the truth. Sometimes the truth does not sound like what we want to hear.

Naomi realised that nothing happens to us that God does not know about, or allow to happen. God does sometimes let us get hurt, just as he allowed Job and Naomi and Ruth and Jesus to get hurt. Naomi thought that God had turned against her.

But the book of Ruth shows us that God always has a plan when this happens to his people, and that it is a very, very good plan. In this case it was an especially amazing and marvellous plan. That is what God is like, even when things go wrong. He is always amazing and marvellous, no matter what happens to us.

If we keep faith with him we shall sooner or later find out how wonderfully good he is.

God is a specialist at bringing great good out of our worst troubles.

³**With her was Ruth the Moabite woman:** To Naomi things would now be even more difficult because her daughter-in-law was a foreigner. This would be difficult for her, and, of course, even more difficult for poor Ruth, that lovely, loyal girl.

⁴**Bethlehem:** Bethlehem is a Hebrew word that actually means “The House of Bread” or The Farming Area that produces food for the country. (In Hebrew “Beth” [bet] is a house, and “Lechem” [lechem, ch as in loch] is bread.)

⁵**the barley harvest:** The farmers reaped their barley harvest in late April and early May, at the beginning of summer. Barley was ground into powder or flour, which was used to make bread.

So, guided by God, Naomi and Ruth got to Bethlehem at just the right time. It was harvest time when they got there. This means not only that there was plenty of food, but also that all the people were in good spirits. Harvest time was always a happy time.

PART THREE: Chapter 2

Ruth goes to work on a farm so that she can provide food for Naomi.

2:1-3 RUTH STARTS TO WORK

Naomi had a contact that was connected to her late husband Elimelech. This contact was an important man in Bethlehem, and was of ¹the same clan or family as Elimelech. He was a relative or cousin, and his name was Boaz [boh-az].

²Ruth, the foreigner from Moab, said to Naomi: May I go to work in the fields? I want to go and pick up the leftovers of the harvest wherever I can find a farmer who will allow me to do this. Naomi said to Ruth: Yes, my girl. You can do that.

So Ruth left and went and ³gleaned in the field. She followed behind the harvesters, picking up any bits of barley that they left lying in the field as they worked. It just so happened that the part of the field she was gleaning in belonged to Boaz who was of the same clan as Elimelech.

¹the same clan: The nation of Israel was divided into twelve tribes. Elimelech belonged to the tribe of Judah (who many years later, during the time of Esther, became known as the Jews.) Each tribe was divided into clans. A clan was a group of families who all came originally from the same ancestor. This meant that all the members of a clan felt that they belonged together in a special or close way, like cousins or relatives.

²Ruth, the foreigner from Moab: Ruth realised that it might be difficult for her to get any work. She was a foreigner from a country that Israelites hated. Farmers would allow poor people to pick up gleanings in their fields because that was what the Law of Moses said they must do. But, would they allow a foreigner from Moab to come onto their land?

³Ruth gleaned in the field: In Israel it was a custom, during harvest time, to let poor people come and glean. When the harvesters cut the crops and stacked them into bundles, or sheaves, little bits would always fall onto the ground. The same would happen when the sheaves were loaded onto carts. Those bits would not be picked up. They would deliberately be left lying there. That was to allow poor people to go behind the harvesters and pick them up. They could then take whatever they collected home with them. In this way the farmers helped the poor people by allowing them to help themselves to get some food at harvest time. That was one of the minor laws of Moses. **Leviticus 19.9-10.**

2:4-9 BOAZ WELCOMES AND HELPS RUTH

Then Boaz himself came from Bethlehem to the field. Boaz was a good man and a godly farmer. He greeted his workers, saying: The Lord be with you! They called back to him: May the Lord bless you!

Then Boaz asked his assistant, the foreman in charge of the harvesters: Whose girl is that?

The foreman who was in charge of the harvesters replied: She's a young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab.

She asked permission to glean around the sheaves behind the harvesters. She has worked non-stop from this morning until now, except for a short break at the hut.

Boaz then spoke to Ruth: Listen to me, my girl: Don't go to glean in any other field, and also don't wander away from here. Stay as you are with the women who work for me. Keep your eyes on the field where my girls are harvesting, and stay with them.

Stick to the field where they are ¹harvesting. I've also already told my men to leave you alone and not cause you any trouble. When you are thirsty you may go and ²drink from the water that my men fetch.

¹**harvesting:** At harvest time the reapers were both men and women. The men would cut the crops and the women would follow them and tie them up into bundles. The poor people were allowed to follow behind the team of workers and pick up or glean anything that the reapers or the women had left lying on the ground.

²**drink from the water that my men fetch:** These gleaners were not normally allowed to drink this water. It was provided for the reapers who were paid to work for the farmer. This was because the water had to be carried in heavy clay pots from the wells to the fields. Therefore water had to be carefully rationed.

2:10-13 BOAZ BLESSES RUTH

Ruth bowed down to the ground in front of Boaz, and said: I cannot imagine why you are so kind to me, and why you take any notice of me at all. I'm just a foreigner.

But Boaz said to her: ¹I have been told about all you did for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband. I know how you left your own father and mother and even your own home country. I understand that you came to live among people you had never known before.

May the Lord reward you for your goodness! May you receive a special reward from the Lord God of Israel, since you have come to live under his care and protection!

Ruth replied: I am very grateful for your kindness, Sir. You have comforted and encouraged me, even though I don't work for you.

¹I have been told about all you did for your mother-in-law: It is amazing how news gets around. When people do something good, or useful, or do well or are kind, people talk about it. The result is that one gets a good reputation.

Boaz did not criticise Ruth because she was a Moabitess. He could easily have done that. Instead he concentrated on her good character. He ignored her background and encouraged her good attitude.

2:14-16 BOAZ LOOKS AFTER RUTH

When it was lunch-time Boaz invited her to come and eat with his workers, so that she could have a proper cooked meal. When she joined them, Boaz offered her so much food that she had a full dinner, and even had leftovers to take home with her.

When she got up to go back to her ¹gleaning, Boaz gave his men an order that even if she picked up the best bunches of grain that they cut, they must not say anything to put her off.

Boaz also told his men that they must deliberately pull some of the stalks of grain out from the heaps they cut and leave them lying on the ground for Ruth to pick up. Boaz wanted his men to help Ruth to glean.

¹gleaning: Most farmers listened to God's rule and allowed the poor to glean in their fields. But poor people would sometimes take advantage of this. They would cheat by trying to steal some of the grain out of the sheaves. So the harvesters had to keep an eye on them and make sure they stayed away from the sheaves.

We also have the same sort of problem. There are many people who feel for the poor and want to help them. However, there are also some poor people who take advantage of this, and would lie and steal. We need to learn how to cope with this problem, and how to handle it. We must help the poor, but we need to realise that sometimes they may try to get away with doing something that's wrong. We need to be careful not to let this happen.

But even if some poor people do cheat we must still not give up doing what we can for other poor people. That's what God wants. We help them, but we also have to be careful that they do nothing wrong.

2:17-20 RUTH TELLS NAOMI HER GOOD NEWS

Ruth gleaned in the field until evening, when she had to stop. Then, at the end of the day she did one more thing. She ¹threshed the grain she had managed to collect. She ended up with ²over half a sack full of barley. Half a sack would give them food for weeks. All this was from just one day's work.

Ruth carried the sack of barley to the town. She showed her mother Naomi what she had gathered in that one day. Naomi stared at it, amazed. She also brought out the leftovers from lunchtime and gave Naomi what she had been unable to finish.

Her mother-in-law asked Ruth: Wherever did you glean today? Where did you do all this? May God bless the person who decided to be so kind to you! Then Ruth told her mother-in-law who she had worked for. She said: The name of the farmer I worked for today was someone called Boaz.

Naomi was thrilled. She said to her daughter-in-law: May he be blessed by the Lord. So the Lord has NOT stopped being kind to us. He is kind to those of us who are still alive, and he is also kind to ³those of our family who have died. Then Naomi shared some information with Ruth: That man is actually a relative of our family. He is what we Israelites call ⁴a redeemer. He is the person we may rely on to help us.

¹**threshed:** The crops of barley or wheat were cut at the bottom of the stalk. These were then tied into bundles or sheaves, to be carried back to the threshing floor. There the stalks, with the ears of corn on them, were threshed or beaten on the floor so that the grain fell off the stalks.

Then the grain was thrown into the air for the wind to blow the chaff away from the grain.

The chaff was the thin little coverings or husks that covered the grain as it grew. Once the grain was ripe, the husks dried out to form light chaff that could easily blow away in the wind.

The wind at that time of the year would start to blow in the afternoon, and stop blowing just after it got dark. That was the time the reapers had to work at the threshing floor, using the wind to blow away the chaff.

After all this was done, the reapers were left with a large pile of grain. This grain would then be scooped into sacks or large bags. It would be sold to people to grind the grain into flour and make bread with it. That was their main form of food.

²**over half a sack full:** This large amount was thanks to Boaz' kindness, and to the help the harvesters gave Ruth. It was also the result of Ruth's own hard work.

All this success was arranged by God.

³**those of our family who have died:** A widow never forgets the family she has lost. Naomi was always thinking about, and worrying about, what her family deserved and what they had lost.

A very important truth and principle in the Bible is that God never lets us down. He may take us through difficulties and disappointments, but he will never forget us. Whatever happens, we can be sure that God is going to sort things out and get them right for us. God is going to bring something really good out of even our worst problems.

⁴**a redeemer:** God, through Moses, gave the Israelites lots of rules to keep. These included rules on how to help people in need. They were to be helped first of all by someone in their own family. The relative who was supposed to help was called a redeemer. His responsibility was to redeem or recover whatever someone had lost. Usually he would be an important man, as well as a rich man.

The law of Moses said:

- If someone related to the redeemer lost his home or his land, the redeemer could get it back for him.
- If he lost his freedom and was sold as a slave, the redeemer could buy his freedom back for him.
- If someone was murdered, the redeemer was allowed to go and catch the murderer and punish him.
- If a family became poor and needy and helpless, the redeemer would be the one to help them get back on their feet again.

Moses also said that if a man died without having a child, his widow could marry the redeemer and have a child with him. That child would then be regarded, by law, as the child of the dead man. In that way the dead man's good name and all his property or belongings could stay with his family, and benefit them. This would save them from losing everything and becoming poor when the husband and father died.

(You can read something about this law in Deuteronomy 25.)

2:21-23 NAOMI TELLS RUTH TO STAY IN BOAZ' FIELDS

Then ¹Ruth, who came from Moab, said to Naomi: Well, let me tell you something else: Boaz even said to me that I must stay with the harvesters who work for him until they finish the whole of his harvest.

Naomi then gave Ruth her daughter-in-law this advice: My dear daughter, the best thing you can do is to stay and work with the women of Boaz. On any other farm it is quite possible that the men will pick on you and cause you trouble.

So Ruth joined up with the women who worked for Boaz to glean until the barley harvest was finished. She stayed with them for the wheat harvest as well. All that time she lived with her mother-in-law and looked after her.

¹Ruth, who came from Moab: It is quite clear that Ruth realised that she was very lucky indeed to have found someone who would support her instead of turning her away.

But, of course, this “luck” was of God's doing. Ruth and Naomi knew this.

PART FOUR: Chapter 3

Ruth finds a way to bring great happiness to Naomi.

3:1-5 NAOMI WANTS TO HELP RUTH

Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, came up with an idea for Ruth, her daughter-in-law. She said: My girl, I really ought to get you married, so that you can have a good home.

We are fortunate that Boaz is our relative, and you have the advantage of working with his young women. You've seen how he looks after them. Look, Boaz is separating the barley at ¹the threshing floor tonight.

I want you to ²make yourself lovely. Have a good wash, and put on perfume, and dress up in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing-floor. But make sure that he does not see you until he has finished eating and drinking.

Then, when he goes to lie down, note the place where he lies so that you can go there in the dark. When you get to him, you must uncover his feet and lie down there at his feet. That will be a sign to him that you need his help. This is an old Israelite custom. He will then tell you what you must do.

¹the threshing floor: At this time of year the wind would blow from the afternoon until just after dark. So the farm workers had to do their threshing during that time.

Boaz, the boss, chose to have his supper at the threshing-floor, and sleep there. Some of his workers did the same thing, but the boss would lie down alone on the far side of the pile of grain. Since everyone worked long hours during the harvest, and had to be up very early in the morning, they would all be asleep quite soon after dark.

²make yourself lovely: One of the great gifts that God has given to girls and women is to be beautiful and attractive. This is very important when it comes to love and marriage.

Although God has made women lovely, there is something that they can do to make themselves lovely. There are all sorts of tricks they can use such as perfume and pretty clothes.

Naomi has realised that Ruth is getting on well with the people on the farm, and that everyone likes her. She also knows that Boaz is very kind to Ruth. What Naomi wants now is to see if Ruth can find a good husband, so that she can have a home and a family. Boaz knows that Ruth is a good kind of person. Naomi wants him also to realise that she is beautiful and attractive. She is the sort of woman who deserves a good husband.

³Yes, Mom, I'll do everything you have told me to do: Although Ruth agreed to do what Naomi told her to do, Ruth also had other plans. Instead of going to Boaz to find a good husband for herself, she had decided that she would rather ask Boaz to help Naomi. Naomi had lost her family-home and all its property. Ruth wanted to ask Boaz to help Naomi to get back what had belonged to Elimelech. Because of the drought and because he had died ten years before, Elimelech and his family had lost everything they once owned in Bethlehem.

So Ruth did what Naomi told her to do, but with a different purpose.

3:6-9 RUTH WANTS TO HELP NAOMI

Ruth went down to the threshing-floor and did everything her mother-in-law had told her to do.

When Boaz finished eating and drinking, he was in a good mood. He went to lie down at the far edge of the heap of grain. Ruth went quietly across to him, and lay down at his feet, and then pulled over her the part of his cloak that covered his feet.

Halfway through the night something disturbed the man and woke him up. He got a big surprise: A woman was lying at his feet. He asked: Who on earth are you?

She answered: I am Ruth, your servant. I have come to you for your help for the family. Please take me under your wing and give me your support. I need you to recover what belongs to Naomi's family. If you are willing to guide me through this, then put your cloak over me for protection, and I shall do whatever you tell me to do, because you are the ¹the family's redeemer.

¹the family's redeemer: Ruth, a foreign Moabite woman, was asking Boaz, an Israelite gentleman, for help for Elimelech and Naomi's family. Ruth had married their son, so she was a part of their family. Naomi was too old to marry again and have another child herself for her family. So Ruth was now volunteering to do this for her.

To do this, Ruth would have to marry a relative who would be able to buy back all Naomi's property. He would also have to give the family a son who would one day become the owner of that property. That son would then, by law, be regarded as Elimelech's grandson, and his heir. To Ruth it did not matter who she married, as long as the man would get Naomi's family name and belongings back for Naomi.

What Ruth was now trying to do was an utterly unselfish and extremely noble deed. The custom in those days for anyone asking for this kind of help was to ask the redeemer to put her under his wing or care. To do this she would ask him to put his cloak over her as a sign of his protection and care. In Hebrew the word used here for a cloak is the same as the word for a hen's wing that covers and protects her little chickens.

For her to be covered with the redeemer's cloak, or protected under his wing, did not only mean that HE would look after HER. It also meant that SHE would obey HIM. He would help her, and she would do whatever he told her to do.

3:10-13 BOAZ DECIDES TO HELP RUTH

Boaz was amazed! He said: The Lord bless you, my girl! This generous kindness that you are now showing to the family is even greater than your kindness at the beginning when you left Moab to come here. You have sacrificed looking for a nice young man as a husband for yourself. You could have hoped to marry for love or money. But you have chosen instead to marry for the honour and dignity of Naomi's family. You are simply wonderful!

Now, my girl, don't you worry. I'll do for you everything you have asked. It won't be difficult because ¹all the leaders of my people know what you are: an honourable and unselfish young lady.

But there is one difficulty about the law. Yes, it is true that I am a relative and therefore a lawful redeemer of the family. But there is a redeemer who is a closer cousin to the family than I am. So he has to have the first option.

Stay here for the rest of the night. Then, in the morning, ²if he chooses to redeem you, well and good. It is his right and his responsibility. But, if he doesn't want to redeem you, then I promise you, as surely as the Lord lives, that I shall redeem you. Now, lie down until morning and get some sleep.

¹all the leaders of my people know what you are: News travels fast and far, and even to high places. That is especially true when people behave well and do well.

if he chooses to redeem you, well and good: Here we see clearly what sort of person Ruth was, and also what Boaz was really like. According to Moses' law, the other redeemer had first right to marry Ruth. When Boaz said, "Well and good," it meant that he and Ruth were willing for that man to have Ruth as his wife. All that mattered to Ruth was that the redeemer would buy back all Elimelech's property for Naomi. Boaz supported Ruth. Of course, what was very awkward for both of them was that they both would have preferred Boaz to marry Ruth and redeem Elimelech's good name.

But above all, their top priority was to do what God had told Moses to lay down as law. They put what was right first, and what they dearly wanted and longed for, second.

To Ruth, and to Boaz, the important thing was to regain for Naomi what Elimelech had lost because of the drought. They were both very unselfish. Unselfishness can be a great sacrifice. When Jesus came to rescue us from our loss of being able to live permanently, he had a most unselfish spirit. He was the most unselfish person who has ever lived. And he paid a very heavy price for his unselfishness. Being a Christian means learning how to be unselfish in order to bring respect to God for people.

Over a thousand years later Mary and Joseph would have the same sort of struggle. They loved each other and wanted to get married. But God decided that Mary would have a baby and that Joseph would NOT be the father. For Mary to become pregnant before she got married was a huge struggle for her. But she decided to agree and submit to what God wanted. This meant that Joseph no longer wanted to marry her. But when God spoke to Joseph he agreed to do what God wanted. He married Mary even though he would not be the father of her first child. They obeyed God and have been honoured ever since throughout history. Every Christmas they are heroes throughout the world.

What Ruth and Boaz, and Mary and Joseph, have shown us is that God's will comes first. Even love and marriage and all our dreams must all fit in with God's laws and God's will. What God wants comes first, not what we want. What God wants is always best for us.

3:14-15 BOAZ BEGINS TO HELP RUTH

So Ruth lay at Boaz' feet until the morning. She got up very early, while it was still so dark that no-one could recognise anybody else. Boaz had warned her: ¹No-one must find out that this woman had come to the threshing-floor.

Early in the morning Boaz said to Ruth: Bring that shawl you are wearing, and hold it out for me. When Ruth held it out for him, Boaz poured out about six scoops of barley into her shawl, and placed it on her shoulder. It was a gift to Naomi. Then Boaz went off to town.

1No-one must find out: Boaz did not want anyone to find out that Ruth had come to the threshing-floor at night.

During the harvesting, the men had to work over-time. So it was easier for them to sleep at the threshing-floor where they worked. For that reason, no woman was allowed to be there at night.

But Boaz' main reason was that Ruth was highly respected. She had a good name and a good reputation. If someone started saying that she had spent the night where the men were sleeping, people, especially women, would lose their respect for her.

Naomi had taken a risk in telling Ruth to go secretly to the barn at night to see Boaz. Naomi's idea was that everyone was in a good mood at harvest time. Ruth must go to Boaz when he was happy and in a good mood, which would make him even kinder and more helpful. To find a husband is just one of those sorts of things that need to be done secretly. But Naomi knew both Boaz and Ruth well. She knew that she could trust both of them to behave decently, even secretly. However attractive and lovely Ruth might be, and however secretly they met, Naomi knew that Boaz would not take advantage of Ruth in the dark during the night. Naomi was quite right in trusting Boaz like that.

The problem was not that those two excellent and noble people might do something wrong. The problem would be how other people would react if they found out that these two had met secretly during the night. Most people would jump to a nasty conclusion. This is what Boaz wanted to avoid.

There was a strict and good rule that no women were allowed into the barn at night during the harvest time. Here we see clearly, in the Bible, the difference between breaking a rule and sinning. The rule was to prevent sinning, of course. But rules are only rules. The important thing is keeping all God's commands. Even though Ruth was so lovely, and Boaz was in love with her, he did not sin against God. He did, of course, break his own rule. So did Ruth. So did Naomi. But what they did was to do a lot of good, and not any harm. But they were wise to do what they did carefully and secretly, because so many people are so quick to criticise and come to ugly conclusions.

3:16-18 NAOMI KNOWS WHAT BOAZ WILL DO

When Ruth came back to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked her: Well, my daughter, what happened? Where do you stand now? Do you have any idea who you are going to marry?

Then Ruth told Naomi all that the man Boaz had done for her. She also said: He gave me these ¹six scoops of barley, and said that I must not go back to my mother-in-law empty handed.

Naomi said to Ruth: Now, my daughter, you must just wait until you find out how this matter turns out. The one thing I can tell you is that the man will not let this matter rest. You can be quite sure that he will sort out this business today.

¹six scoops of barley: All this happened a thousand years before Christ, so we do not know exactly how much barley Boaz gave Ruth. But the reason why he gave her this large gift was to let Naomi know that he was going to look after both of them.



PART FIVE: Chapter 4

Boaz finds a way to help Ruth get what she wants Naomi to have.

4:1-4 BOAZ INFORMS THE FAMILY RELATIVE

So Boaz went to¹the place at the town gate where the people of Bethlehem would meet to do their business. He sat down there. After a while the man who was the family's number one redeemer came along. He was the very man that Boaz had told Ruth about. Boaz called out to him: Ah, ²So-'n-so, please come over here and sit down with me. So the man came across and sat down.

Then Boaz invited ten men who were elders or leaders of the town to come and sit there. They also came and sat down.

Boaz then spoke up in front of everyone at the gates to the man who was first in line as the family's redeemer. He said: There's a piece of land that properly belongs to our brother who died, the late Elimelech. Naomi, who has come back from the land of Moab, is putting it up for sale.

So I have taken it upon myself to inform you personally about this.

³I am giving you the opportunity to buy it in the presence of these official witnesses sitting here, these elders of my people. If you want to redeem it and buy it yourself, then go ahead now and redeem it. But if you don't want to redeem it, then let me know, for no-one else is entitled to redeem it except you, and I am next in line. The man answered: Yes, alright, I'll redeem it myself.

¹the place at the town gate: In those days many towns were surrounded by a wall to protect them. To get into the town or get out of the town you went through the main gate. Even towns without a wall had a gate where the road entered the town. Just inside the gate was a large open space. That was like a town square. It was where people could meet and where they could do business together, like a conference hall. It was also the place where the town council would meet, like a town hall. It was a very busy place, with all kinds of business being done by all sorts of people. It also meant that there were lots of people milling around who could keep a close eye on who came in through the town gate. The main purpose of this sort of set-up or arrangement was that everything that was done at the gate was done publicly and openly. This encouraged honest business.

²**So-'n-so:** We are not told what the man's name was. Boaz would have used his name when he called him, but the writer does not want to tell us what that man's name was.

(See the verses of the next section for the reason.)

³**I am giving you the opportunity to buy it:** While Naomi was in Moab all those years, other people had looked after the farm and spent money on it. They would not have made a profit because of the drought. If Naomi decided to reclaim the land back, these people wanted their money back. So Naomi was "selling the farm" in order to be able to pay back all the debts that had built up over the years. By selling the farm, the redeemer could buy it and give it back to Naomi's family.

It was the Law of Moses that made sure that someone who lost everything could always have the chance to get it back again. No one in Israel could cheat anyone out of what belonged to him, just because things had gone horribly wrong for that person. The laws of Moses were designed to make sure that dishonest people could not take advantage of someone in need who had gone through bad times.

4:5-6 BOAZ EXPLAINS ABOUT REDEMPTION

Then Boaz said to ¹So-'n-so: The moment you buy the land, which belongs both to Naomi and to Ruth the Moabitess, who is the widow of Naomi's dead son, you have a responsibility. You then have to protect and look after the dead man's good name as well as his property.

When he heard this, the man who was the closest relative to the family immediately changed his mind. He said: No! Sorry, then I cannot redeem it for myself because ²I might lose out where my own inheritance is concerned. So you can redeem it instead. I now give you my right to redeem it because I cannot redeem it myself.

¹**So-'n-so:** We do not know who this other man was, who was Elimelech's closest relative. We also do not know why he would have lost his own inheritance if he had married Ruth. All we know is that this was the way God made things work out for Ruth.

The man who was first in line as the redeemer was an important man. Yet, strangely enough, we are not told what his name was. This is because he should have helped the family, but he did not want to. All he was interested in was what he could get, or keep, for himself. He was somewhat selfish. He was completely different from Ruth who was utterly unselfish. Therefore he was not highly respected. This is why his name is not mentioned in this story. If he had really cared for the family, he would have helped, as he should have by law. He would then have had his name written in the Bible.

But, of course, he did not have to help. He was free to choose not to. He could have helped but decided not to. For this he is not criticised, so his name is not mentioned. But since he was not unselfish nor is he honoured. The Bible simply shows us the difference between selfish So-n-so and very unselfish Ruth.

There is a big difference between selfish people and unselfish people. They are two completely different types of people, even if they belong to the same family or are relatives.

²I might lose out: The Jewish laws of Moses were complicated. They were all designed to get people to do what was right and fair. When someone got into trouble or became poor, there were laws that were meant to help.

Helping people can be difficult and even costly. Exactly how this man would lose out, we do not know. But if he bought the property that had belonged to Elimelech and his sons, he would have to marry Elimelech's son's widow, a Moabite woman. That would have been a problem for him: He would also have to have a son by her who would be half a Moabite. He would then have to look after Ruth's son as he grew up. When the boy became a man, he would then have to give him all the property he had bought for the family. For some reason or other that was all too much for him. He just opted out of it all.

The man could see that he would not be better off if he got Ruth as his wife. He realised that he would lose out in the long run if he tried to help her in this way. Obviously he did not have the same sort of love for the family that Ruth had.

4:7-8 THE RELATIVE GIVES HIS RIGHTS TO BOAZ

In the early days, in Israel, there was an old fashioned custom about redeeming or buying any property. It applied to an agreement to change the ownership of a property. Every business deal was settled when the man who sold the property took off ¹his shoe and gave it to the man who bought the property. This was the way that a business deal was properly or legally done in Israel ²in those early days.

So the man who had first right to get Naomi's property and belongings, said to Boaz: Alright then, you buy it for yourself. And he took off his sandal.

¹his shoe: In those days, in that hot country, they actually wore sandals. The owner of the property who was selling it took off his sandal so that the new owner who was buying it could step into his shoe. Then the seller kept one sandal while the buyer got the other. This was their proof that they had agreed or consented to do a deal together.

The idea was that as the two shoes matched each other, so the business deal suited both of them. The picture or symbol of the pair of shoes was that their owners “walked together” in agreement about their business with each other.

²**in those early days:** By the time the book of Ruth was written many years later on, that way of doing business had changed to a more modern way. The end of the chapter will show that the story of Ruth was written after David became king of Israel. As the life of David brought even more honour to Ruth, so the life of Ruth brought extra honour to David.

As our lives bring honour and glory to the Lord Christ Jesus, so King Jesus will honour us with a place in his Father’s glory in the Kingdom of God.

4:9-10 BOAZ BECOMES THE FAMILY-REDEEMER

Then Boaz announced to the elders, and to all the people standing there watching and listening: Today you are witnesses that I have bought everything that belonged to Elimelech. I have also bought whatever belonged to Kilion and to Machlon. I have bought it from Naomi.

On top of that, I have now got Ruth, the woman from Moab, the widow of Mahlon, as my wife. I have done this to preserve the good name of the dead man, together with his property. ¹His name must not be lost from his family, nor from the list of ²the citizens of his home town. To this you people are witnesses today.

¹**His name must not be lost:** This is what was really important. What we own and possess is important, but what we are and what we are like is even more important. Our name is our reputation. Losing a good name is worse than losing things that belong to us. One’s family is a source of pride, and one needs one’s family to be respected in order to be proud of them. People and their good name was something important in the Law of Moses. Our good name is not only important to us; it is also important to God.

²**the citizens:** A person is not only important as a member of a family, but also as a member of the community to which he belongs. This may be a school or a town or a farming area. That person belongs there, and is important. That is what a citizen is. Boaz was very keen that Elimelech’s family should not lose their citizenship in Bethlehem.

4:11-12 THE PEOPLE WISH BOAZ AND RUTH WELL

All the people at the town gates as well as the elders, who were witnesses, responded to Boaz, and said: May the Lord give his blessing to this woman who is coming into your home. May the Lord make her as special as ¹Rachel and Leah [lee-a], Jacob's wives. Those two women were the mothers of the whole nation of Israel. Boaz, may you do well and have success and power in Ephratah as well as respect and a good reputation in Bethlehem.

Boaz, may your family, be like the family of ²Perez [perets], whose mother was Tamar [tah-mar] and whose father was Judah. May the Lord also give you children through this lovely young lady.

¹**Rachel and Leah, Jacob's wives:** Abraham's son was Isaac, and Isaac's son was Jacob. Jacob married his two cousins Rachel and Leah. God changed Jacob's name to Israel. He was the father or ancestor of the nation of Israel. Rachel and Leah, between them, had twelve sons and a daughter. The descendants or children of the twelve sons became the twelve tribes of Israel, named after Jacob's twelve sons. One of Leah's sons was Judah.

²**Perez, whose mother was Tamar and whose father was Judah:** Judah was the father of the tribe of Judah. Many years later that tribe became known as the Jews.

Tamar did not grow up as an Israelite. She was born and bred as a Canaanite. But she married Judah's son, whose mother had also been a Canaanite. Then, like Ruth, she also lost her husband, who died without having any children. So Tamar needed a redeemer to give her a son. Judah's other son should then have married her. But Judah, her father-in-law tricked her so that she could not get a redeemer. So she tricked him, and he became her redeemer without knowing it. Judah became the father of Tamar's twins, one of whom was Perez [Perets].

When Tamar was giving birth to the twins, it looked as though Perez' twin would be born first, but, to everyone's surprise, Perez was born first, so they called him "Breakthrough" (which in Hebrew is "Perez [perets].")

The people of Bethlehem, who belonged to the clan of Perez, the Perezites [pe-r'zights], hoped that Ruth would have a son who would also be a great breakthrough for the people of Bethlehem. Just as Tamar had been a mother in Israel and Judah despite being a Canaanite, so the people hoped that Ruth would be a good mother in Judah and Israel even though she was a Moabite girl.

Little did they know that God would bless their good wishes for Ruth in a far greater way than they could imagine. Though Ruth was not a Jew, Ruth and Boaz' son would be the grandfather of David, the greatest king of Israel.

A thousand years later, Ruth's family line would produce the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of all God's people in the whole world.

So thanks to the way God blessed Ruth, the Messiah, or Christ, would come from the Jews. He would be the Messiah for the Jews, but Ruth proves that the Messiah would also be the saviour for the whole world.

(You can read about Judah and Tamar, and the birth of Perez, in Genesis chapter 38.)

4:13-17 EVERYONE LOVES RUTH'S BABY

So Boaz married Ruth, and she became his wife. He made love to her and the Lord enabled her to have a baby, and she gave birth to a boy.

Then ¹the women of Bethlehem congratulated Naomi. They said: The Lord be praised! You see, he has not denied you a redeemer now! May your little boy become someone special in the whole of Israel.

May he make life better for you, and look after you when you get old. You are so fortunate to have such a daughter-in-law. She loves you so much, and she has produced this little boy for you. Actually, she is better for you, and is a greater asset, than seven sons would have been.

Naomi was so thrilled with the baby that she adopted him as her own son and as Elimelech's son. She put the little baby boy on her lap, and she cared for him herself.

The women who were Naomi's neighbours and friends suggested a name for the baby. They said: A son has been born for Naomi. So they gave him the name, Obed [oh-bed OR aw-ved in Hebrew]. Oved [aw-ved] is Hebrew for a servant. That meant that he should look after Naomi when he grew up.

¹the women of Bethlehem: The girl Ruth, who was a foreigner, but who was so kind and loyal, so generous and unselfish, became a favourite among the Jews who normally did not like foreigners, especially Moabites. The women of Bethlehem especially loved Ruth very much.

This is the only time in the whole Old Testament when a baby was named by other women instead of its parents. This was very special. It was a sign of how much they

loved Naomi and Ruth, and how thrilled they were at how things had turned out for them. The women of Bethlehem had completely accepted Ruth as one of them. Naomi had not thought that this could possibly happen, but God had achieved the impossible and brought it about.

As parents look after their children when they are young, so children, when they grow up, should look after their parents when they get old. Where children do take care of their old parents this is a blessing from God. To women, caring for children and caring for old people, is important. Those who are young and small, and those who are old and weak, do need care.

PART SIX:

The family line runs from Ruth to King David.

Let's now look at a part of the family record of Perez. (**Perets** means "Breakthrough".)

Perez [perets] went to live in Egypt at the time that his uncle Joseph was governor of Egypt.

While the Israelites were in Egypt for 400 years, three important leaders of the tribe of Judah were **Hezron** [chets-rawn, ch as in loch] who was the father of **Ram** [rahm] the father of **Amminadab** [a'minna-dav].

At the end of 400 years, at the time of the exodus, **Nahshon** [nach-shawn] was the leader of the tribe of Judah. He was one of the twelve leaders of Israel under Moses. His father, Amminadab, was the father-in-law of Aaron, the brother of Moses.

Nahshon died before the Israelites crossed the Jordan River to go into the Promised Land when Joshua was the leader of Israel. But Nahshon's son **Salmon** [sal-mawn] crossed the Jordan. Salmon married **Rahab** [ray-hab OR rah-chav, ch as in loch] who lived in Jericho and saved Joshua's spies by hiding them on the roof of her house. Salmon and Rahab's son was **Boaz**.

4.18-22 THE FAMILY OF PEREZ

This is the family record of Perez. (Perets means “Breakthrough”.)

Perez was ¹the ancestor of ²Nahshon [nach-shawn],

and Nahshon was the father of ³Salmon [sal-mawn],

and Salmon was the father of Boaz.

Boaz was the father of Obed [aw-ved],

who became the father of Jesse [Jessee],

who was the father of ⁴David.

¹**the ancestor:** In Hebrew, father and ancestor (or forefather) is the same word. This means that we cannot tell the difference between the word ‘father’ and the word ‘ancestor’ just by reading our Bible. Father or grandfather or great-grandfather or even great-great-grandfather is all the same word in Hebrew. We need the help of experts, or scholars, special teachers, to help us know whether ‘father’ means ‘father’ or ‘grandfather’ or just ‘ancestor.’

²**Nahshon [nach-shawn]:** Nahshon was the famous leader of the tribe of Judah in the time of Moses and the exodus.

³**Salmon [sal-mawn]:** Salmon was the leader of the tribe of Judah in the time of Joshua, when the Israelites conquered the Promised Land. That was why his son Boaz was such an important person in Bethlehem.

⁴**David:** Ruth became the granny of King David’s Dad, Jesse. So Ruth was King David’s great-grandmother. David’s grandad was Ruth’s son Obed [aw-ved].



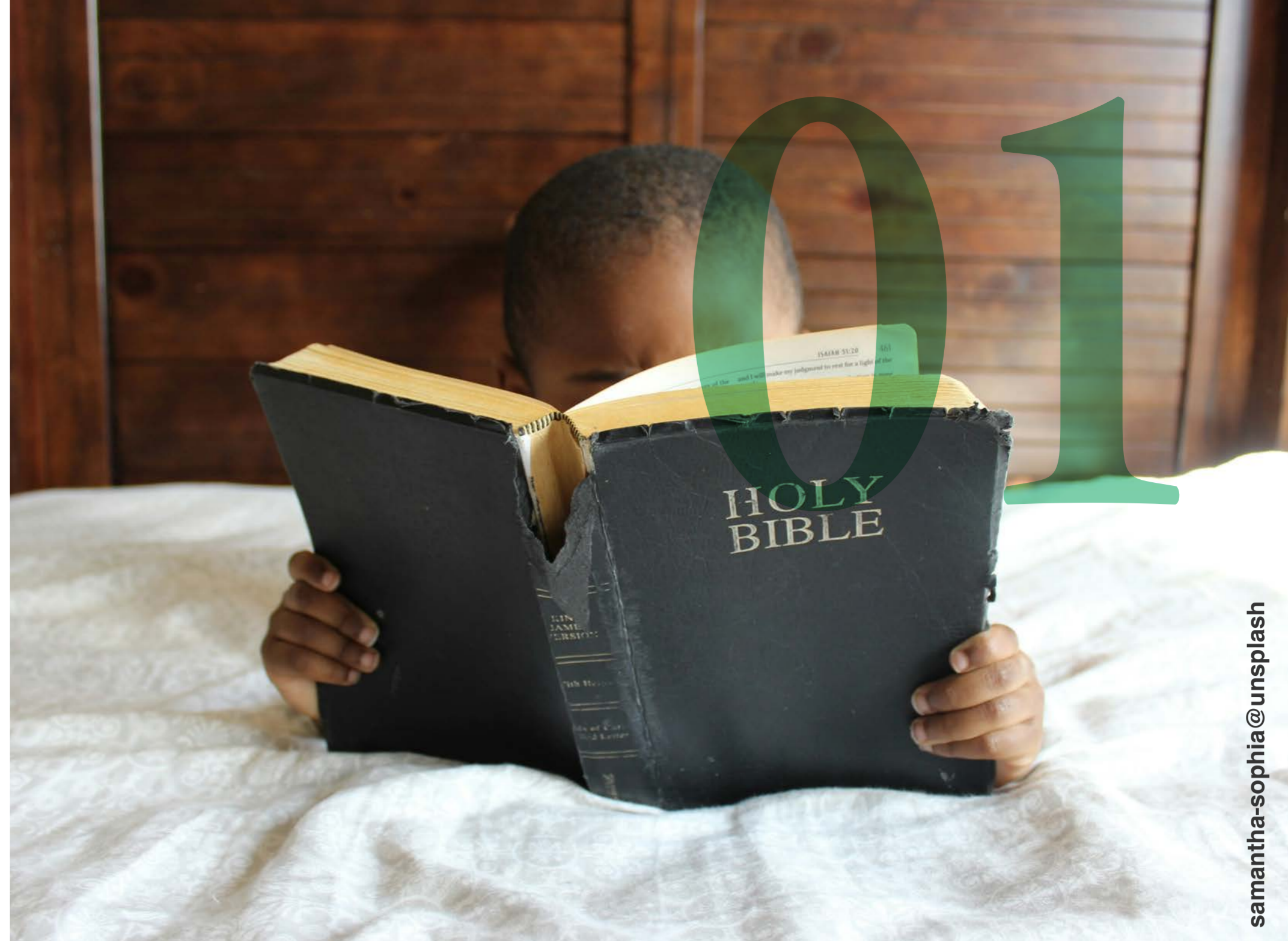
**Christians are my dear family,
and Jesus Christ is my Lord and God.**

Acts 1



Acts 1

A Simple Bible Translation



START HERE!

Read this simple translation to understand the passage, then read it in your own Bible.

PART ONE

1: 1-5 JESUS TELLS HIS DISCIPLES WHAT TO DO

Dear Theo, In the first part of my book I wrote about all the things that Jesus began to do, as well as to teach.

When the time came for him to go, he gave instructions to his apostles, the men whom he had chosen and trained. He gave them the Holy Spirit so that they could do what he told them to. Then he was taken up to heaven.

After he had suffered and died, Jesus proved to them that he was alive. He did this for forty days, in many ways that were absolutely convincing. He let them see him, and he talked to them about the kingdom of God.

When Jesus met together with his apostles, he gave them orders not to leave Jerusalem, even though that was a dangerous place to be for anyone who believed in Jesus. They were to wait there for the promise given by God the Father. Jesus said: You heard me tell you about that promise.

That promise was given in the time of John the Baptist, because John baptised only with water. But in a few days' time you are going to be baptised with the Holy Spirit.

1:6-8 JESUS TELLS THE APOSTLES WHAT WILL HAPPEN

So then, when the apostles got together with Jesus at the end of these forty days, they asked him: Lord, are you going to bring back the kingdom of Israel for us, as it used to be in the good old days of King David?

But Jesus answered them: It is not your business to know when God is going to carry out his plans for the future, or how he is going to do this. God has made that his own private business.

But you will get special power when the Holy Spirit comes into you. Then you will have authority to tell people about me. Tell the people in Jerusalem. Tell people in Judea and Samaria as well. Then go everywhere in the world, even to the furthest countries, and tell them about me.

1:9-12 JESUS GOES BACK TO HEAVEN

When Jesus had said this, he was taken up to heaven as his apostles watched. Then Jesus disappeared from their view behind a cloud.

They were watching, fascinated, as he went up to heaven. Suddenly two men dressed in white clothes stood there next to them. They were angels.

They said: You men from Galilee, why are you standing here staring like this into the sky? This man Jesus has been taken away from you, up into heaven. But he will come back the same way you saw him going to heaven.

With that the apostles left that place, called the Mount of Olives, and went back to Jerusalem. That hill is quite near to Jerusalem. One can walk that distance even on the Sabbath day.

PART TWO: The apostles replace Judas with another apostle

1:13-14 THE APOSTLES WAIT AND PRAY

When they got back to Jerusalem, the apostles went to the upper room. An upper room, upstairs, meant a more private place. There they stayed put, as Jesus had told them to. Peter was there, as well as John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew [**b'thol-a'mew**] and Matthew, another James, the son of Alpheus [**al-fee-is**], and another Simon, the Zealot [**zeh-lit**], and another Judas, the son of someone else called James (who was well-known in those days, but nowadays we don't know who he was.)

They all spent their time in prayer. They kept on praying, and they prayed together. They were completely united in the way they felt and believed. They prayed with the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus. They also prayed with the brothers of Jesus who had not believed in him until he died and rose from the dead.

1:15-20 PETER SPEAKS ABOUT JUDAS AND THE BIBLE

In those days, after Jesus had gone back to heaven, Peter took the lead among the Christians. The believers were a big group. There were, all together, about a hundred and twenty of them.

Peter spoke to them: Men, brothers, The Bible had to come true. It had to be fulfilled. What it says came from the Holy Spirit who spoke to us using the words of King David. What David said applies to Judas who became a guide to help those men who arrested Jesus. We must listen to the prophet David, because what Judas has done is utterly unacceptable.

The problem is that Judas was one of us. He had a part in this work and ministry that the Lord Jesus has given us. So what are we going to do about this? We must follow the guidance that the Bible gives us.

Judas bought a field with the dirty money he got for betraying Jesus. And there he committed suicide. He died horribly. His stomach burst open and all his insides came out.

This became known to all the people living in Jerusalem. They know that God punished him. That field has even been called, in their own language, “The field of blood.”

Now this is written, by David, in the book of Psalms: ***His house must be left empty. No one must live in it anymore.*** (Psalm 69) It also says in the book of Psalms: ***Let someone else take over his work.*** (Psalm 109) That means that God is guiding us that Judas must no longer be regarded as one of us.

1:21-22 HOW THEY SHOULD REPLACE JUDAS

So Peter said: Because of what happened, it's important that we now get someone to replace Judas. That person will have to be one of the men who knew the Lord Jesus well. He has to be someone who was with us men all the time that we were there when Jesus was teaching and working.

He must have been with us from the time of the baptism of John, right until the day when Jesus was taken from us up to heaven. It's important that one of these men has to become a witness with us of the resurrection of Jesus.

1:23-26 HOW THE APOSTLES DID REPLACE JUDAS

So they suggested or proposed two men. One was a man called Joseph Barsabbas [**bar-sab-bas**], which means ‘Son of the Sabbath.’ That was his Jewish name. He also

had a Roman name, which was Justus. Justus means just or fair. So he was a good man, a religious or godly man. He was just the sort of man the apostles and the other believers wanted. The other man they suggested or proposed was Matthias [m'tigh-is].

Then they prayed to God: Lord, you know everybody's heart. You know what someone is really like deep inside. Please show us which one of these two men you choose to take on this ministry as an apostle, because Judas did what was very bad and has died.

Judas has gone, and must take full responsibility for what he has done. He now has nothing more to do with this apostolic ministry. He has now gone to meet his end.

So they left the decision for the Lord to take by casting lots. The lot went to Matthias. So he was then regarded as an apostle along with the other eleven.



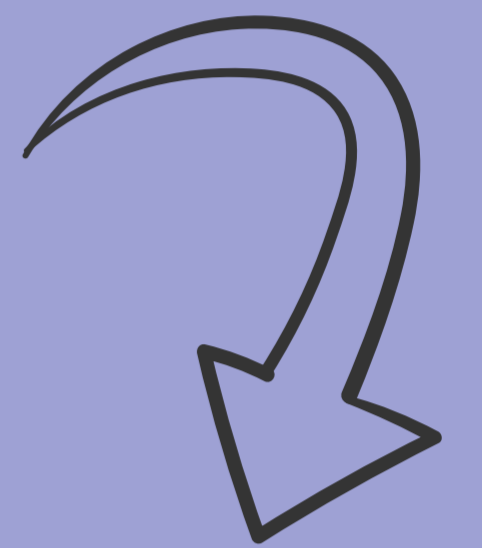
NOW YOU CAN READ ACTS 1 IN YOUR OWN BIBLE.

Acts 1

Passage background & introduction



Read this part to get to know the background of the chapters you read in section 01. Interesting things like why Luke wrote the book of Acts, and how the apostles began the work that Jesus gave them to do.



Luke was either a teenager or a young man in the time of Jesus.

So he was more or less the same age as Mark who was the first to write a gospel about Jesus. Luke became a doctor when he grew up. He also became a good friend of the apostle Paul, and travelled with Paul on some of his journeys. Another friend of Luke was an important Roman called Theo or Theophilus [thee-o-f'lis]. Theo was interested in Jesus and Christianity and Luke wrote to him to tell him all about it.

Luke wrote two whole books about Jesus and Christianity to Theo. He wrote more of the New Testament than any other writer. So, in the Bible we get more information about Christianity from Luke than from any other writer of the Bible. We are therefore very thankful that Theo was so interested in what Luke had to say.

Luke is the only person to have written reliably about what happened in the first thirty five years after Jesus had finished his work in Palestine. After Luke's history of the Acts of the Apostles, the history of the Christian church is unknown for many years. We know that Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans soon after Luke wrote his book of Acts. The Romans attacked Jerusalem in the year 70 AD. But from then until the next century we have no reliable Christian history. The next thirty to fifty years after Luke's book are just a blank to us. Only after that time did people start to write useful Christian church history.

Luke wrote two books. One was about Jesus' life, called a gospel. There were three other gospels written by Mark, Matthew and John. The other book that Luke wrote was about the work that Jesus' apostles did after he went back to heaven. This was a unique book, the only one of its kind. Actually, what Luke wrote was all one long

book. But somewhere around the end of the first century the Christian church decided to separate Luke's writing into two books. His gospel was placed third in the New Testament and his book of Acts was placed fifth, after John's gospel. Luke's Gospel is the longest book in the New Testament, and his book on the Acts of the Apostles is the second longest book in the New Testament. We owe a lot to Luke. Matthew has more chapters than Luke, but Luke's chapters are longer than Matthew's. So Luke has more pages than Matthew.

Luke's gospel is the easiest of the four gospels to read. People who begin to read the Bible could therefore start with Luke's Gospel.

Luke was trained as a doctor. He lived a healthy life and died when he was well over eighty years old. He never married, so he never had any children. The fact that he was a doctor meant that he knew how to listen carefully to what people had to say, in order to find out what the truth was. When Luke started to write the book of Acts there were other people who were also writing about Jesus. But there was a very important difference. Luke had decided that he was going to concentrate on the truth. That was what Theo wanted. He had heard about Christianity. Now he wanted to know whether what he had heard was true or not. So Luke decided that he would be very careful to make sure that every single thing that he wrote was the truth. He would not tell Theophilus what he thought or liked. He would not even try to impress Theophilus or persuade him about anything. Luke would just tell him the truth. He took trouble to make sure that he had not said anything that was not absolutely true. He checked everything that he found out, the way a doctor checks a patient carefully before deciding what is wrong with him.

Luke's gospel is the easiest of the four gospels to read. People who begin to read the Bible could therefore start with Luke's Gospel.

When Christianity spread into the world it contained some amazing stories. People talked about the miracles that Jesus performed. As these stories spread some people began to make up even more stories. Some stories were made up by people who believed in Jesus. They wanted to impress others and get them to believe. But there were also many stories made up by people who did not believe. They told people stories to put them off believing in Jesus and the preaching of the apostles. So anyone who wanted to believe in Jesus was sometimes not sure what was true and what was not. Someone like Theo did not want to believe stories that other people had just made up. He also did not want to be put off by false news. He just wanted to know what was true.

What happened next took time. Over the years Christians read what Luke had written, and they also read what other writers had written. In time they discovered that the other writers had made some mistakes. They had got some of their facts wrong. They had misunderstood some things, or had even made some things up. It all came out in time. But no one ever found anything wrong with Luke's writing. Whoever questioned what Luke had said, or investigated what he had written, always came up with the same conclusion: that what Luke said was right. It was correct and true. It was completely reliable. That was why the Christian church eventually decided, two or three hundred years later, that only Luke's Acts should be part of the New Testament of the Bible. No one could find any mistakes or faults or any kind of misunderstandings in Luke's writings about the work of the apostles. So God's people all came to believe that God had guided Luke to write this book. All the other writers were interesting, but Luke's writings were the truth. What Luke had written was God's truth.

Luke begins the book of Acts by telling us how Jesus went back to heaven. Then he tells us how Jesus' disciples got ready to do what he had told them to do. They were to do what Jesus had trained them to do. They were to carry on with Jesus' work. Jesus got many people to believe by doing great miracles and by teaching good news. He gave the apostles the power and ability to do miracles also. As the gospel spread Jews and Gentiles saw marvellous miracles performed. These helped many people from many nations to believe in Jesus.

Jesus got many people to believe by doing great miracles and by teaching good news. He gave the apostles the power and ability to do miracles also.

Like Jesus, the apostles came up against a lot of opposition. There were many people who wanted to stop them preaching. A number of the apostles were eventually put to death. But God's power was with them, and through them Christianity grew and spread through the world. Once again it was found, in time, that what Luke wrote about was accurate. What he said was true and reliable.

There is another thing to remember about the book of Acts. The apostle Paul had a deep longing or burden to get the gospel of Christ to the Romans. Luke was a friend of Paul and even went with him to Rome. Theo was a Roman, and an important man. If Luke could explain to Theo the gospel that Jesus had taught the apostles, it would help to get the Word of God to the Romans. So Acts is written to get people in the whole Roman Empire to believe in Jesus and in the message that the apostles took with them all over the empire.

Let's go back to the gospels. Each gospel was written for a purpose:

MARK was the disciple of the Apostle Peter. He was the first person to write a gospel. He wanted people to know that Jesus was the Messiah that the Jews had been waiting for, for centuries. What was surprising about the Messiah was that he was the Son of God. The important thing about the Son of God, that no one would have guessed, was that he had come from heaven to take away our sin.

MATTHEW was one of the twelve apostles. He got to know Jesus very well. He wrote his gospel in order to persuade Jewish people that Jesus was their Messiah. Matthew keeps showing the Jews how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament that they believed in. Matthew's gospel is like Mark's gospel in some ways, so it supports much of what Mark wrote.

LUKE is a bit different. Luke was writing to someone who was not a Jew. Theophilus was a Roman. He was someone quite important, a leader of some sort. Luke did a lot of research to find out what he could about Jesus. He asked a lot of people a lot of questions. He found out the facts. He came to realise that Jesus was not just the Messiah for the Jews but also the Saviour for all the nations in the world. Because Jesus lived and worked among the Jews, Luke needed to explain to Theo the truth about Jesus so that we could understand what Jesus meant to the Jews and also to the whole world. Luke explained Jesus to the non-Jews, the Gentiles.

Luke also decided to tell Theo about what the apostles did after Jesus had gone back to heaven. Read the Acts of the Apostles as if Luke is talking to you.

JOHN wrote the last gospel many years after the other three. Towards the end of the first century some strange ideas were beginning to be taught about Jesus. People trained at universities had problems believing in Jesus. Some of them thought that Jesus, who was a carpenter and was put to death, could not possibly have been God. Others, who believed in him as God, thought that he could not have been a real man or human being like us. They could not see how God can possibly become a real man. John knew Jesus very well, and was a very close friend of his. So he decided to write a gospel to make clear to everyone that Jesus was precisely what the apostles said about him: Jesus was a real man, and Jesus was truly God.

Acts is written to get people in the whole Roman Empire to believe in Jesus and in the message that the apostles took with them all over the empire.

THE APOSTLES TAKE OVER THE WORK OF JESUS

The Book of Acts begins with how Jesus went back to heaven. His work as a man, and his suffering, was finished. As he left them, Jesus told his friends, his disciples, to take over his work. Jesus' work had been to teach people about God. They must now carry on doing what he had been doing.

The first thing that they did was to get together to pray.

The second thing that they did was to organise their leadership properly. Twelve disciples were to lead the Christian work as apostles.

**An APOSTLE was an expert
on the life and teachings and work
of JESUS CHRIST.**

The apostles became the leaders of the Christians. They began their work or ministry roughly somewhere around the date 30 AD. It seems that Jesus died and rose from the dead a few years before 30 AD. The apostles began their work a few months later. Jesus went back to heaven when he was roughly 33 years old. No one is sure about the exact dates.

Long ago it was decided to use the birth of Christ as the dating system for the world. So the date of his birth was taken as the year zero. Any date before the year zero was called BC (**before Christ**). The dates after the year zero are called AD (**Anno Domini, which is Latin for "In the year (Anno) [an-noh] of the Lord (domini) [dom-minee]."**) Nowadays many people use the letters CE, which means the Christian Era.

People who do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and our Lord, prefer to use CE. They also prefer to say BCE (**Before the Christian Era**) than to use BC.

A problem emerged a number of years ago when experts found out that the original calculations had a mistake. Jesus was not born in the year zero. He was born somewhere between the years 5 BC and 2 BC. But the dating system stayed the same because it is impossible to change all the dates in history, and also because we do not know exactly when the real year zero actually was.

**Long ago it was
decided to use the
birth of Christ as
the dating system
for the world.**

Christianity is based on two important things:

First,

**Christianity is about the life, the teachings and the work of
Jesus Christ
the Son of God,
the Saviour of the world,
the Lord of all the nations on earth.**

That is what Christianity means. That is what Christianity is about.

Secondly,

**Christianity is based on the truth about Christ
as the apostles of Jesus have explained that truth to us.**

The New Testament of the Bible was written by the apostles, or by men who got their information from the apostles. The importance of the apostles is that they knew Jesus. They had been taught by him. They had witnessed the things that he did. They had dedicated their lives to him. They were experts or authorities on what Jesus was like. They understood him, and knew what they were talking about.

The Book of Acts is about how the apostles spread the news about Christ through many countries.

When you read the book of Acts the most important question is this:

Do YOU believe what the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ said?

Those who do believe the apostles can be called Christians.

So you can see what an important work the apostles did.

In the book of Acts you can read about their work and teaching.

Acts 1

A Bible study on our passage



Now let's grasp the points of each paragraph and the issues being spoken about, and together we can grow in our knowledge and love of God.



1:1-5 JESUS TELLS HIS DISCIPLES WHAT TO DO

Dear Theo, In the first part of my book I wrote about all the things that Jesus began to do, as well as to teach.

When the time came for him to go, he gave instructions to his ¹apostles, the men whom he had chosen and trained. He gave them the Holy Spirit so that they could do what he told them to. Then he was taken up to heaven.

After he had suffered and died, Jesus proved to them that he was alive. ²He did this for forty days, in many ways that were absolutely convincing. He let them see him, and he talked to them about the kingdom of God.

When Jesus met together with his apostles, he gave them orders not to leave Jerusalem, even though that was a dangerous place to be for anyone who believed in Jesus. They were to wait there for the promise given by God the Father. Jesus said: You heard me tell you about that promise.

That promise was given in the time of John the Baptist, because ³John baptised only with water. But in a few days' time you are going ⁴to be baptised with the Holy Spirit.

(This would happen in ten days' time.)

¹**apostles:** These were the twelve men whom Jesus used to continue with the work that he had been doing. Jesus had chosen and trained twelve men, but Judas Iscariot [joo-dis is-karry-it], who betrayed him, had died. These men had been with

Jesus since he was baptised by John and started his ministry. They had followed him all the time until he went back to heaven. They could teach people what he had been teaching, and they were also able to do some of the miracles that he had been performing. They were the experts who knew the truth about Jesus.

²He did this for forty days: Forty days is mentioned a number of times in the Bible. It means that something very important was happening:

- The rain in Noah's flood [noh-a] lasted 40 days.
- After the ark reached ground again it took another 40 days for the level of the flood to start to drop.
- The funeral arrangements in Egypt for Joseph's father Jacob took 40 days. This was called embalming [em-bar-ming].
- Moses was with the Lord on top of Mount Sinai [sigh-nigh] for 40 days.
- The men Moses sent to inspect the land of Canaan [kay-nin] took 40 days to spy out the country.
- For 40 days Goliath [g'ligh-ith] challenged the Israelites to find a soldier to fight him.
- Elijah [ee-ligh-ja] travelled for 40 days through the desert in his great struggle against the wicked queen Jezebel [je-z'bel] and the wicked king Ahab [ay-hab].
- Jonah [joh-na] warned the evil city of Nineveh [nin-a-va] that they had 40 days in which to repent or else God would destroy them.
- After he was baptised, Jesus was tempted by the devil in the desert for 40 days.
- After Jesus rose from the dead, he appeared to his followers for 40 days to prove that he was really alive, and to train them to take over his work.
- This is one of the ways in which we can see how clearly Jesus is connected to the Bible in the Old Testament. Only Noah and Moses appear twice in that list of 40 days. So does Jesus. God saved the whole human race through Noah, and God saves the whole human race through Jesus. Noah was used by God because he was a righteous man. God used Jesus because he was a perfectly righteous man. God gave Moses the law for the world, while Jesus has been given to us by God to make it possible for us to keep God's laws for mankind. Moses was a very godly man. Jesus was God living among his people.

³John baptised only with water: Like John the Baptist, the Christian church baptises people with water. Water means two things:

First, we use it to wash and clean ourselves. To be baptised means that we want to live a good, clean life. We want to be Christians. We want God to forgive us and make us good. As Christians we are to live with a clear conscience. We want to go to heaven. We need God to do this for us.

Secondly, water is for drinking, especially when we are thirsty. The most important kind of thirst is thirsting for God. That means longing to find God, and longing to be God's friend. It means wanting God in one's life, the same sort of way that married couples want children. Baptism is the way the Christian church welcomes people who want to become part of God's family.

to be baptised with the Holy Spirit: Being baptised with water means that we want to belong to God. We want to be Christians and live Christian lives. The church helps us to see that this is what we need. But to be baptised with the Holy Spirit means that God takes over in our lives. He comes into our lives.

When God's Spirit lives in us it means that we have been forgiven, and that we ARE acceptable to God. His Spirit makes us truly clean. He makes our conscience clean. He gets us a clear conscience. Nothing is as important to us in this life as a clear conscience. God makes us what we want to be. He turns us into true Christians.

- Baptism with water is the sign that we show people that we want God.
- Baptism with the Holy Spirit means that people can see that we actually are God's friends.

1:6-8 JESUS TELLS THE APOSTLES WHAT WILL HAPPEN

So then, when the apostles got together with Jesus at the end of these forty days, they asked him: Lord, are you going to bring back the kingdom of Israel for us, as it used to be in the good old days of King David?

But Jesus answered them: It is not your business to know when God is going to carry out his plans for the future, or how he is going to do this. God has made that his own private business.

But you will get special power when the Holy Spirit comes into you. Then you will have authority to tell people about me. Tell the people in ¹Jerusalem. Tell people in ²Judea and Samaria as well. Then go ³everywhere in the world, even to the furthest countries, and tell them about me.

¹**Jerusalem:** It would be difficult to tell the people in Jerusalem that Jesus is the Son of God. It was the Jerusalem crowd that put pressure on Pilate to crucify Jesus. He was sentenced to death by the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem because he claimed to be the Son of God.

Nevertheless, Jesus told his apostles that this is what they must do. God's Holy Spirit would help them do it.

Jerusalem had a big advantage though. That is also where Jesus had risen from the dead. There could have been as many as a million people, or more, there at the time. All the people there knew that he had been crucified. All of them had been talking about him. They all heard rumours that he had risen from the dead. Many people there actually saw Jesus for themselves, after he had come back to life. With so much interest in what had happened to Jesus, and the talk about his coming back to life, it would not have been difficult to tell people what one knew about Jesus.

But it IS difficult to tell people about Jesus Christ and God if they are against God and against Christ. However, if people are interested in God and Jesus it is NOT difficult to talk to them. In fact, it is very interesting and even exciting.

²**Judea and Samaria:** Judea was the homeland of the Jews. Jerusalem was the capital of Judea. Samaria [s'maree-a] was the country next to Judea, just to the north. In the old days, after King David and King Solomon's time, Samaria used to be Israel, which had broken away from Judea and Jerusalem. But those rebellious Israelites had all been conquered and taken away by the Assyrians. The Assyrians had then put the Samaritans there where the Israelites used to be. Over the years the Jews and the Samaritans became enemies. They argued about religion.

Yet Jesus told his apostles to tell both the Jews and the Samaritans about him. The Holy Spirit would help them to do this. Many Jews and Samaritans did become believers in Jesus Christ. Jews were the first people to believe that Jesus died for our sins, and that he rose again from the dead, and that he is the Son of God.

³**everywhere in the world:** This is the amazing vision or goal of the apostles and of the Christian church. The Lord Jesus Christ has ordered that the whole world must be told about him.

There are so many complications and problems to doing this. We still have many problems and difficulties today. But with the help of the Holy Spirit the apostles started this work, and the Holy Spirit has kept it going until now. Christianity has been planted in many countries in the world. But there still are countries where most people have never heard of Jesus Christ. There are also countries where people are not allowed to believe in him. They may not worship God through Christ.

Missionaries and ministers are continuing the work the apostles began. They are working throughout the world to tell people about the Lord Jesus, who is Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, who saves us from sin. Many of them work in very difficult, and even dangerous, circumstances. Most people don't want to obey God or accept Christ Jesus. Many governments are strongly against religion and believing in God. They think that faith in God is a foolish and harmful idea. This causes Christians a lot of trouble and sadness. But it is really just a challenge to be faithful to our God, and to people who need to hear the very, very good news that Jesus Christ has brought us from God who created us all.

1:9-12 JESUS GOES BACK TO HEAVEN

When Jesus had said this, ¹he was taken up to heaven as his apostles watched. Then Jesus disappeared from their view behind a cloud.

They were watching, fascinated, as he went up to heaven. Suddenly two men dressed in white clothes stood there next to them. They were angels.

They said: You men from Galilee, why are you standing here staring like this into the sky? This man Jesus has been taken away from you, up into heaven. But he will come back the same way you saw him going to heaven.

With that the apostles left that place, called ²the Mount of Olives, and went back to Jerusalem. That hill is quite near to Jerusalem. One can walk that distance even on ³the Sabbath day.

¹He was taken up to heaven: From then on Jesus no longer came to visit his disciples as he had done for the last month or so. The apostles had now seen Jesus go away for good. Before that he had been coming and going, appearing and disappearing mysteriously, a number of times. He had visited them in Galilee and also in Jerusalem and Judea, for forty days.

²the Mount of Olives: The Mount of Olives is a hill near to Jerusalem, on the way down to Jericho. Many olive trees grew there. It was like a park, and was a favourite place for Jesus. The Mount of Olives was opposite the Temple in Jerusalem, on the other side of the valley.

Today that hill is still there, but the temple does not exist. It was destroyed by the Romans in the year 70 AD. The temple has been replaced by a huge Muslim mosque called the Dome of the Rock. The mosque was built just before the year 700, more than a thousand years before the Jews took over Israel in 1948.

The one thing that was there in the time of Jesus and is still there today is what is called The Wailing Wall. It was the huge, high wall on the western side of the temple. It is called the Wailing Wall because that is where the Jews like to go to pray to God. They prayed at the wall, especially whenever they were desperate or in great need. Today they still like to pray there and write out prayers on paper that they stick into cracks in the wall.

³the Sabbath day: The Jews had a rule that one was not allowed to travel on the Sabbath day. The problem was that people had to go to worship God, either at the temple or at a synagogue. So the religious experts decided how far one was allowed to walk to get to worship. One was not allowed to walk further than that. It was called “The Limit of the Sabbath.” The distance was 3,000 feet (**actually, exactly 2,000 cubits**) or just under a kilometre (**or just over half a mile.**) That was the distance the apostles had to walk back to Jerusalem. So Jesus went up into heaven nearly a kilometre from Jerusalem as it was in those days.

(A cubit is the distance between a man’s elbow and the tip of his longest finger, the middle finger. That is about 18 inches.)

PART TWO:

The apostles replace Judas with another apostle.

1:13-14 THE APOSTLES WAIT AND PRAY

When they got back to Jerusalem, the apostles went to the upper room. An upper room, upstairs, meant a more private place. There they stayed put, as Jesus had told them to. Peter was there, as well as John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew [b'thol-a'mew] and Matthew, ¹another James, the son of Alpheus [al-fee-is], and another ²Simon, the Zealot [zeh-lit], and another Judas, the son of someone else called James (who was well-known in those days, but nowadays we don't know who he was.)

They all spent their time in prayer. They kept on praying, and they prayed together. They were completely united in the way they felt and believed. They prayed with the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus. They also prayed with ³the brothers of Jesus who had not believed in him until he died and rose from the dead.

¹another James: Among the twelve disciples, there were two men called James, two Simons and two Judases. Six of Jesus' twelve disciples had the same name as another disciple.

- There was James the son of Zebedee [Zeb-a-dee] and the brother of John (who wrote John's gospel), and there was another James, the son of Alpheus [al-fee-is] (Jesus also had a brother called James, who wrote the book of James.)
- There was Simon who was called Peter by Jesus, and there was another Simon called the Zealot by his friends.
- Then there was Judas who betrayed Jesus, who was from the town of Iscariot [Iss-carry-it]. There was also another Judas, who was sometimes called Thaddeus [Tad-dee-is].

Among the Jews of those times, two very popular names were Jesus and Judas.

- Jesus was a popular name because it was the Greek translation of the famous Hebrew name of Joshua. Joshua was the man who led the people of God into the Promised Land.

- Judas was a popular name because it was the Greek translation of the famous Hebrew name of Judah. Judah was the greatest of the twelve tribes of Israel, and the tribe of the great King David.

But as Christianity spread, people stopped naming their babies Jesus or Judas. Jesus became too good a name, while Judas became too bad a name.

²**Simon the Zealot:** A zealot is a person with zeal, someone who is very keen or enthusiastic. Today we would call him a political person or an activist. In those days the Zealots were a political party. It is possible that they began with a man called Judas who rebelled against the Romans to get independence for Judea and the Jews. His rebellion was when Jesus was a boy, about ten years old. The Romans crushed the rebellion, but the zealots were those Jews who continued to hope that they could get political independence. The Jews wanted to be independent so that they could live by the laws of Moses and the teachings of the Prophets. They hated being ruled and controlled by the heathen Romans. They wanted Palestine to belong to the Jews.

Eventually they rebelled again, in a war against the Romans that lasted four terrible years. They were utterly crushed in the year 70, which was about 40 years after Jesus went back to heaven.

³**the brothers of Jesus:** During Jesus' life, his five brothers did not believe in him. But when he died and rose from the dead, his brothers became firm believers in him. The oldest brother, James, became the head of the Christian church at Jerusalem. He wrote the book of James, which comes after the book of Hebrews. He was not one of the twelve apostles.

The apostle James was the brother of the apostle John. This James was murdered by King Herod III, Herod Junior, grandson of the terrible Herod who tried to kill Jesus as a baby.

Another brother of Jesus was Judas, who wrote the book of Jude that comes just before the book of Revelation. Jude has only one chapter. This third Judas, or Jude, was also not an apostle like the other two Judases.

Some of Jesus' disciples wrote books in the New Testament. Matthew wrote the gospel at the beginning of the New Testament. John wrote the fourth gospel. He also wrote three letters: 1 John, 2 John and 3 John. On top of that he wrote the book of Revelation at the end of the Bible. Peter wrote two books: 1 Peter and 2 Peter.

1:15-20 PETER SPEAKS ABOUT JUDAS AND THE BIBLE

In those days, after Jesus had gone back to heaven, Peter took the lead among the Christians. The believers were a big group. There were, all together, about a hundred and twenty of them.

Peter spoke to them: ¹Men, brothers, The Bible had to come true. It had to be fulfilled. What it says came from the Holy Spirit who spoke to us using the words of King David. What David said applies to Judas who became a guide to help those men who arrested Jesus. We must listen to the prophet David, because what Judas has done is utterly unacceptable.

The problem is that Judas was one of us. He had a part in this work and ministry that the Lord Jesus has given us. So what are we going to do about this? We must follow the guidance that the Bible gives us.

²Judas bought a field with the dirty money he got for betraying Jesus. And there he committed suicide. He died horribly. His stomach burst open and all his insides came out.

This became known to all the people living in Jerusalem. They know that God punished him. That field has even been called, in ³their own language, “The field of blood.”

Now listen to what is written by David in the book of Psalms:

His house must be left empty. No one must live in it anymore. (Psalm 69)

It also says in the book of Psalms: Let someone else take over his work.

(Psalm 109) That means that God is guiding us that Judas must no longer be regarded as one of us.

¹Men, brothers: This was the usual way that someone spoke to a large meeting. Today we say, “Ladies and Gentlemen”. “Men, brothers” actually included women, in the same way that our word “mankind” includes all males and females, or “guys” can mean both boys and girls. However, most of the people, by far, who were there were men.

¹Judas bought a field: Here Luke says that Judas bought the field. But in Matthew 27 we read that Judas threw the money back at the priests in the temple, and that they used it to buy the potter’s field as a cemetery or burial place for foreigners.

Some people say that this is the biggest contradiction in the Bible because Luke is saying something completely different from what Matthew wrote.

- * **Matthew** was writing for the Jews who would have been interested in what the priests in the temple did with the money.
- **Luke** is writing to Theo who would be interested in what happened to Judas.
- * **Matthew** wanted the Jews to know that even Judas realised that he had made a terrible mistake, and that Jesus was innocent.
- **Luke** wanted Theo to know that what Judas had done was so bad that he was severely punished for his crime.
- * **Matthew** wanted Jews to know that the religious leaders had paid a cheap price to get Jesus arrested and killed.
- **Luke** wanted Theo to know that the money Judas earned by betraying Jesus led to his own awful death. He did not profit at all.

When people have got a different reason for telling others about something, they say it in different ways. Sometimes this may even look as though they are disagreeing with one another. But what actually happened is that both of them told the truth in different ways. Remember that both Matthew and Luke wrote their gospels many years after these things happened. That meant that they had both had many years to talk these things over and think these things through. So they both had a better understanding of the complications of all that had happened in the time of Jesus.

Matthew knew that Jews were more interested in certain details, while Luke knew that Gentiles were interested in other kinds of information. By writing so many years later, the authors of the gospels were not only more clear about what they were saying, but also more clear about why they were writing.

Matthew was one of Jesus' twelve apostles. Luke was a first-class writer of history, who got his information by listening to people who knew Jesus.

What actually happened was that the priests bought the plot of land with Judas' money.

³their own language: The language that those people spoke was Aramaic [a-ra-may-ik]. Aramaic means Syrian. Aram [a'rahm] means Syria. That language is very much like Hebrew. In Aramaic the word for 'Field of Blood' is 'Akeldama' [a-kel-dah-ma]. 'Dam' [pronounced dahm] means blood in Hebrew. The name Akeldama would remind the local people of what Judas had done for many years to come.

When the Greek king Alexander the Great conquered Syria, about 300 years before Christ, it resulted in the Greek language being spoken by everyone. Because all people could understand Greek, the New Testament was written in that language, even though

Jesus had spoken in Aramaic or Hebrew. Of course, Jesus could also speak Greek, and did teach in Greek. But his home language was Aramaic. When he was dying on the cross he spoke Aramaic.

1:21-22 HOW THE APOSTLES REPLACED JUDAS

So Peter said: Because of what happened, it's important that we now get someone to replace Judas. That person will have to be one of the men who knew the Lord Jesus well. He has to be someone who was with us men all the time that we were there when Jesus was teaching and working.

He must have been with us from the time of the baptism of John, right until the day when Jesus was taken from us up to heaven. It's important that one of these men has to become a witness with us of ¹the resurrection of Jesus.

1the resurrection of Jesus: The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a most important truth for Christianity.

First, it is so important because it is true. It really happened: Jesus died, and then came back to life again on the third day after his death. On top of that, he is still alive today, and will live forever. Jesus did not come back to life just as a spirit. He came back as a man, with a body. He could be touched. He ate food.

Secondly, this shows us clearly that Jesus is the Son of God. He is the only person in history who has died, and come back to life again, and lives forever. That shows that he is both man and God.

Thirdly, the fact that God raised him from the dead shows that God had a purpose in allowing Jesus to be killed. Jesus was sent by God to die for our sins. When Jesus was crucified, his people's sins were wiped out. The resurrection from the dead proves that this is true and real for us.

God raised Jesus from the dead because he had accepted Jesus' sacrifice for our sins. The resurrection was Jesus' reward for his crucifixion. His reward was from God. Jesus died as a man and he came back to life again as man and God. He died to take away all our sins, and he rose from the dead to give us all eternal life.

Fourthly, God has promised us that just as he brought Jesus back to life, so he is going to resurrect us from death too. We are going to get a new body after death. God has made it clear to us that he has given us this great and marvellous hope. There is a life after death for us, if we listen to God and believe Jesus.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a vital truth that everyone must believe in. This is what God wants. Once we believe this we can have the hope that we shall live forever.

1:23-26 HOW THE APOSTLES DID REPLACE JUDAS

So they suggested or proposed two men. One was a man called Joseph Barsabbas [bar-sab-bas], which means 'Son of the Sabbath.' That was his Jewish name. He also had a Roman name, which was Justus. Justus means just or fair. So he was a good man, a religious or godly man. He was just the sort of man the apostles and the other believers wanted. The other man they suggested or proposed was Matthias [m'tigh-is].

Then they prayed to God: Lord, you know everybody's heart. You know what someone is really like deep inside. Please show us which one of these two men you choose to take on this ministry as an apostle, because Judas did what was very bad and has died.

*Judas has gone, and must take full responsibility for what he has done.
²He now has nothing more to do with this apostolic ministry. He has now gone to meet his end.*

So they left the decision for the Lord to take by ³casting lots. The lot went to Matthias. So he was then regarded as an apostle along with the other eleven.

¹Son of the Sabbath: This is a Jewish saying or expression. It could mean that he was born on the Sabbath day. Or, more likely, it could mean that he was a very religious man.

²He now has nothing more to do with this apostolic ministry: What Peter actually said, in Greek, was:

Someone must take the place of this ministry and apostleship

from which Judas fell away to go to his very own place.

Because Judas betrayed Jesus to his enemies two things happened to him:

- The one was that he lost his life. He died a miserable man, and he died in a horrid way. That is what is meant by **to go to his very own place**. “His own place or fate” meant a wretched death. He had met his end and got what he deserved. That was the result of his treachery. The only hint that we have in the gospels as to why Judas did this is that he betrayed Jesus for some money. He got paid a bribe. It was not really a lot of money, about two or three months’ salary for an ordinary working person. In those days it was what anyone would pay to buy a slave.
- But once Judas realised that the leaders were going to get Jesus killed, he was horrified. We know that Judas deeply regretted what he had done. He tried to undo what he had done, and give the money back, but was not able to. He found himself utterly helpless, and rejected both by Jesus’ enemies and by Jesus’ friends. He felt so bad about what he had done that he took his own life. His death was a horrible and ugly one. As Jesus had warned about him:

It would have been better if he had never been born.

³casting lots: This was rather like throwing a dice or spinning a coin. That was the method often used in that culture to decide difficult matters or to choose someone. They would put two stones in a vase, one for each person. Then they would pray. Someone would then shake the vase, and the first stone to fall out would be the chosen one.

Today we normally decide by voting. The problem with voting is that not everyone who votes truly knows the real character or the future behaviour of the person he or she votes for. The other problem with voting is that sometimes people change their minds after they have voted. Yet another problem is that some of the people who were outvoted could be unhappy with the way the voting went. The biggest problem with voting is this: What if the majority who win the vote are wrong? What if those who lose the vote turn out to be right?

When people in those days did not clearly know what to do, they would ask God to decide by praying and casting lots. That was their normal custom.

Today, when everyone agrees at the beginning to use a coin, they always accept the result that comes from spinning it, if that is done properly.

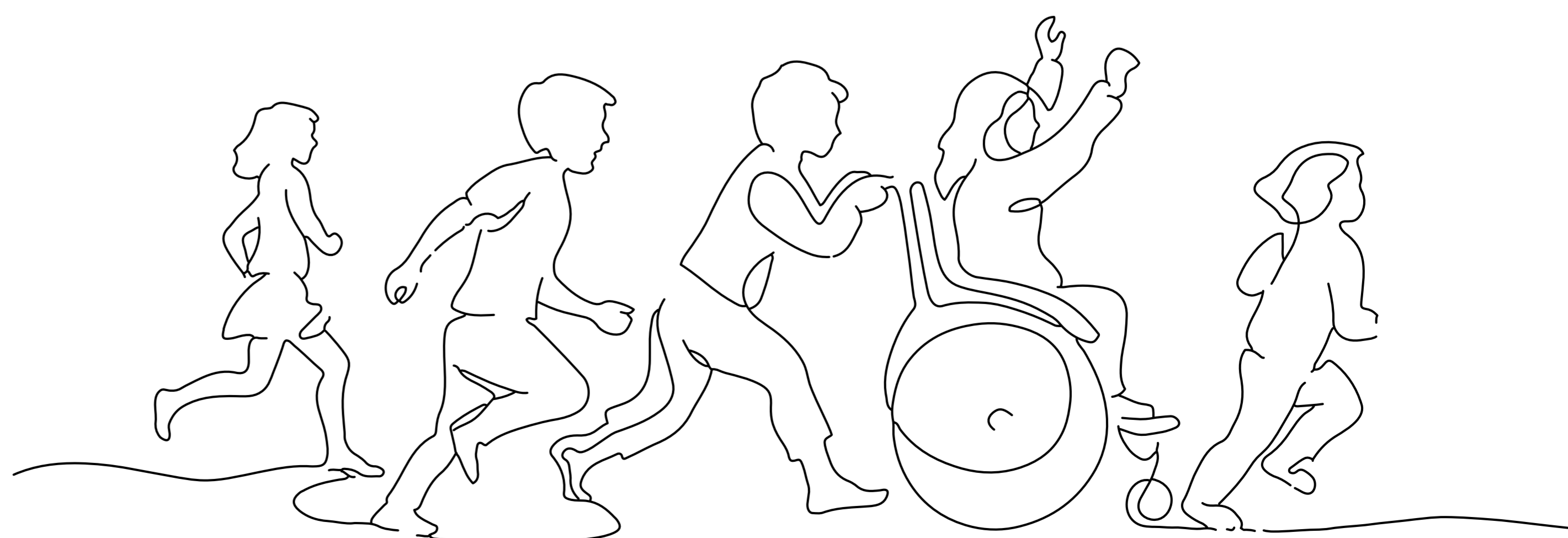
One gets the feeling that if they had voted, Joseph Barsabbas might have been voted in as the twelfth apostle. He was highly respected as a follower of Jesus. But God controlled the lot, and God knew what was deep down in each man's character, as well as what would happen in the future.

We never hear anything more about either of these two men. All that is important is that there were once again twelve apostles, chosen by the Lord.

This also shows us that it was not only the apostles who were godly people. It does not even mean that the apostles were the most godly people. But it does show us that

the apostles were the men whom Jesus had taught and trained very well.

We can thank God that Luke has given us the Acts of the Apostles. Nobody else, in those times, wrote a reliable account of what happened when the apostles of Jesus took over his work. There was quite a lot written about Jesus, but just this one account about the apostles. God used Doctor Luke to tell us the truth about some of the things that the Christian apostles did. God used Luke because he was careful and reliable.





Lord, you know everybody's heart.

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Jesus will come back,
the same way he was seen
going to heaven.



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*(Further volumes 9 to 12 are to be planned, researched and written, God willing.)



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