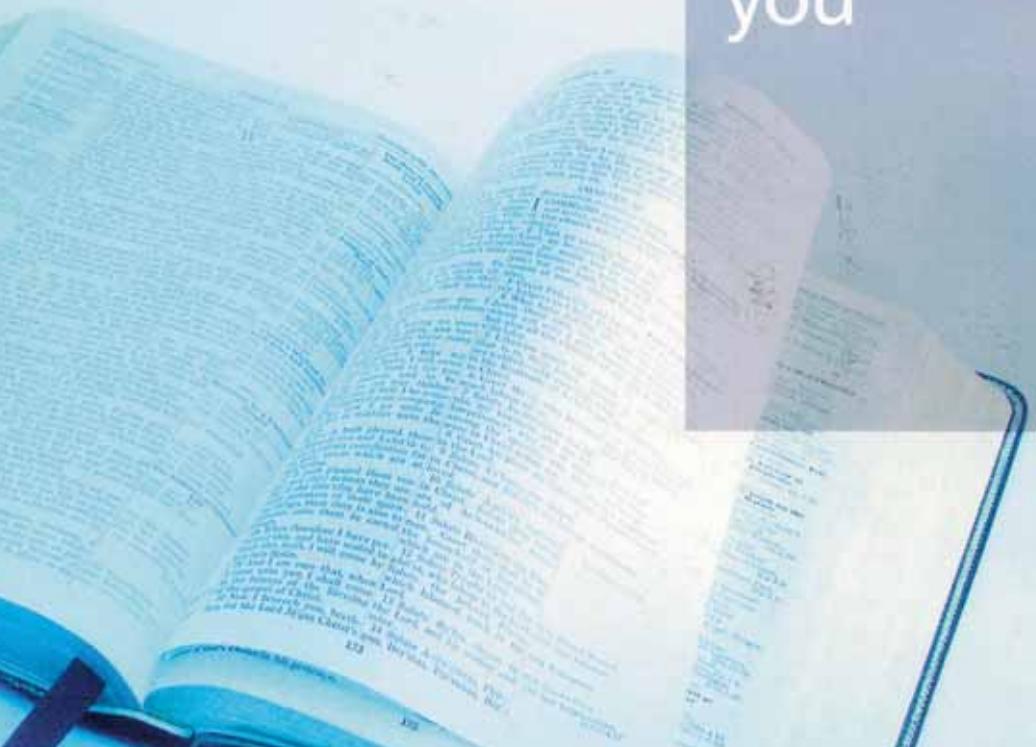


The GOD of the Bible

What He
should
mean to
you



The God of the Bible

This booklet explains how we can know about the God who made the world, who revealed Himself and His purpose in the Bible and who sent His Son the Lord Jesus Christ to save the world. it consists of eight different sections, as follows:

- 1. God Exists**
- 2. What The Bible Reveals**
- 3. God as Creator**
- 4. What is God Like?**
- 5. How God Treats Mankind**
- 6. God's Many Names and Titles**
- 7. God the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ**
- 8. The God of the Bible and You**

1: God Exists

This booklet exists. You know that because you're holding it and reading it. If somebody said it didn't exist, you would only have to show it to them and they would have to accept its existence as a fact.

That's how we usually prove that things exist – by applying our senses, like sight, touch and taste. But that doesn't work for everything. For example, how do you know that I exist? You may never have seen or met me, heard me, touched me or smelled me! But that doesn't mean that I'm not here. In fact, a little bit of logical deduction will work just as well as your senses to prove my existence.

If I'm not here, then these sentences formed themselves or came together by accident. That would mean that structured things can just happen by themselves; but we know that isn't our usual experience. If you leave dirty dishes in the sink, they're still there when you get back; they don't wash themselves. Even if they're in a dishwasher, somebody has to turn it on. Nothing happens without somebody making it happen.

It's the same with Almighty God. We can't see Him, and our five senses are no use in proving His existence. But somebody made the world – it's such a wonderful place, and things work in such a marvellous way that somebody must have made it. Either there is a plan and purpose behind everything, or things came about by accident and we are just part of a random happening. This would mean that our lives have no long-term meaning; that we are just creatures of the moment.

A dragonfly is a beautiful creature; you might have seen the sun sparkling on its almost transparent wings as it skims the surface of a stretch of water, or settles on a grass stem. But in its adult form it will only live for a very short period, not more than a few months, and then it's gone forever. Is human existence like that? Are we really "here today and gone tomorrow"? That's a fascinating question to consider.



If God exists then there is a real prospect that we are part of some purpose that can give us hope for the future. If He doesn't exist this is all there is. Is it just you and me, and everybody else, as part of a huge accidental happening that has given us seventy or eighty years of existence, and that's that?

Do you notice that finding out about God and His existence has suddenly become more than something that could satisfy your curiosity or tickle your fancy? It really matters to us and our long-term life expectancy.

Long-Standing Practices

From very ancient times different people in many civilisations have worshipped some sort of Divine Being. The worship has been very different; sometimes quite disturbing. People once offered their children in sacrifice to satisfy their deity; or they committed vile acts to celebrate a good harvest or to ensure victory in battle. But what was it that made them look beyond themselves and worship someone or something they considered greater and more powerful?

It might have been thought that the world seemed so obviously the product of a Creator. Every morning the sun came up; as the seasons came around they made it possible to plant, grow and reap, to sustain life. Every evening the sun went down, to give them rest and sleep. Even a primitive person could have worked out that someone or something was making it all happen; so he or she would kneel in worship.



The result is that by today there are many different religions, all claiming to worship God, although the gods in question are quite different, so all those different religions can't be right. Finding out about the sort of God who really exists is the next stage. At the moment we are thinking about His or Her existence, as something we might be able to discover.

One of the nations that came to worship God was a bit different from others. They were descendants of a man called Abraham and became known as the Jewish people. The Holy Bible is their history book and it is all about their experiences with the God of the Bible, this remarkable book being the starting point for all Jewish and Christian beliefs. The Jews had a system of worship which was quite like other nations, with a temple, sacrifices, feasts and a Divine Law they had to obey. But there was something very different as well. Their Bible – known today as the Old Testament Scriptures – contained prophecies about their national future, and very unflattering ones at that.

Divine Foresight

God's Law required the Jewish people to live in a highly moral way. They had to obey His commandments to the letter and if they disobeyed they were told that they would live to regret it. That Law was given to the prophet Moses over three thousand years ago, so we have had ample time to see its effects and, now that science has progressed, we can also see its wonderful health-giving qualities. The history of the Jewish nation is a testimony to the existence of God in a very remarkable way. Think about just one key point.

The Bible tells their history from God's point of view – good and bad points alike. It holds back no punches, but tells the truth without hesitation or deviation. God told His people that they must obey His law or they would cease to live as a nation, and be

dispersed throughout the world. They disobeyed and they were dispersed – the Jews called that part of their existence “The Diaspora” – the dispersion. It lasted over 2000 years!

All that happened – just as God had predicted – to show that Almighty God can foretell future events. Bible prophecy is another evidence, both of God’s existence and of His control over both the present and the future.

To show that this is not a case of being ‘wise after the event’, here’s what one of God’s prophets said, more than 2500 years ago, about the long-term future of the Jewish nation. The Jews, he said, were God’s witnesses to all nations. If those nations wanted evidence of God’s existence and His purpose, they should look at what was happening to the Jews:



“Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled. Who among them can declare this, and show us former things? Let them bring out their witnesses, that they may be justified; or let them hear and say, “It is truth.” “You are my witnesses,” says the LORD, “And my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me, and understand that I am he. Before me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the LORD, and besides me there is no saviour” (Isaiah 43:9-11).

Summary

- ☑ There’s a lot more to say about the Bible, but we’ve started by thinking about the existence of God. We cannot see or hear Him, but the world exists as a witness to the existence of a Designer and from ancient times people have felt there was something or someone there, who deserved their worship.
- ☑ If there is no God, and we are just the product of a happy set of accidents, then this is all there is in life and we should make the best of it. But if there is a God who has a plan and purpose, we have some prospect of becoming part of that, and of finding a way in which our life can acquire a deeper and fuller meaning. So finding out about God is much more than just a matter of curiosity; it really matters to us.
- ☑ God has not left Himself without witnesses. He has a group of people who are a living testimony to the way He controls events and works things out to further His gracious purpose. The Jewish people would probably rather they were not special in that sense; few of us would want to swap our national history for theirs, with all its tragedy and upheaval. But God says they are special and that we should learn from them and their experiences, if we want to find out what we should do to please Him.

2: What The Bible Reveals

If you want to know what somebody is really like, you need to spend some time with them, preferably at their home and with their family. People can put on an act for a short time, when they're with others, but if you live with them for a while you'll find out the truth before long – and they'll find out just what you're like. It works both ways!

But how do you find out what those people are like that you never get to meet? You may think you know them because you've seen their photographs, their films, or read their books. But are they really like that, or is it all an act? It's the desire to know that which leads people to buy newspapers, magazines and books about famous people that give the 'inside story', and the reality is often very different from the impression previously given.

It's just the same with Almighty God. You can work out quite a lot by observing the wonders of the world that He has made. He is clearly a brilliant Designer and Maker of things; that's why people the world over have found it natural to worship. But what should they worship: the Sun – like the Incas; the Moon – like the Canaanites; or what? If there is nothing more than natural law to guide us, we would come to very different ideas about God. So most people who wanted to worship ended up with some sort of written Scripture which explained what their God was like. Hindus have their sacred Scriptures, as do Buddhists, Muslims, Jews and Christians.

Bible Revelation

The Bible is a combination of the Old Testament Jewish Scriptures and the New Testament, which tells about the life and work of the Lord Jesus Christ and his followers. It makes no attempt to prove the existence of God; that is taken for granted; something that is self-evident to anybody who stops to think about it. So it starts with the sentence:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth ..." (Genesis 1:1).

And it makes some very bold assertions about those who say that God does not exist. Here are just two of them:

"The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none who does good" (Psalm 14:1);

"Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the



things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools” (Romans 1:20-22).

The Bible does not spend time proving the existence of God, because it has a job to do by way of revealing what Almighty God is like, what His gracious plan is, and what that means to us. It would be a tough book to read if it was just a series of commandments – just “do’s and don’ts”. After a while we would get fed up of being told what to do, and what not to do, however much the book insisted that it was for our good.

Do you remember how we responded to our parents when they told us what to do? We wanted to do the very opposite, just as children do now. And God knows that, because He knows everything; that’s the sort of God we discover Him to be. That’s why He caused a Book to be compiled – by lots of different writers, and over a long period of time – which explains His unfolding purpose and chronicles how different people responded to the message and what it meant to them.



The result is a fascinating collection of messages and experiences which took hundreds of years to write, but which is one remarkable and unified message from God. Even the length of the message from God tells you something about its heavenly Author and what He expects of us. Patiently and carefully God revealed His plan of salvation, often to people who didn’t really want to know. He once warned an entire civilisation that they were facing imminent destruction, and only eight people took up His offer of salvation. Everybody else perished, either because they couldn’t be bothered or because they didn’t believe that God really meant what He said. That was their loss, of course.

The very length and complexity of the Book – which is really 66 books bound into one volume – shows that God expects us to invest a bit of personal time and effort finding out what it’s all about. The God of the Bible is someone who took time to reveal Himself and wants us to be equally interested in what He has to say.

God’s Invitation

The Bible is much more than a good read. By revealing intimate details about the lives of different people, God gives us an insight into the best way of living.

- * He challenged Adam and Eve to obey His Law, and they failed bringing disastrous consequences;
- * He gave Israel a Law at Sinai, when Moses collected the ten commandments, but that Law was soon broken;

- * He asked the nation of Israel to be obedient, and patiently explained why that would be to their national advantage, but they too declined and chose to do what seemed best to them – much to their national disadvantage;
- * Then God sent His Son – the Lord Jesus Christ – to explain in very personal terms both what He was really like and what He has to offer mankind; but only a very few people listened to what Jesus had to say.

The coming of Jesus was a continuation of the unfolding purpose and a revelation from God of quite a different sort. You may not be able to get to live with someone you admire, or want to know more about; but what if one of their children came to live with you! Wouldn't that be a way of finding out what the parent was like, by seeing the family likeness close-up? That is how the New Testament describes the new insight into the character and mind of God that the coming of Jesus provided:

“God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by his son, whom he has appointed heir of all things ...” (Hebrews 1:1);

Philip said (to Jesus), “Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? “Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does the works” (John 14:8-10).

It was a case of ‘like Father, like Son’. Jesus was the only-begotten son of God and, like nobody before him or since, he was able to show just what God is like. The words that Jesus spoke, the things he did, and the way he treated people, show us in a very personal way just how much God loves us and that He wants the best for us.

- ❖ Some mothers once wanted to bring their children to Jesus for him to bless them, an event which speaks volumes about the sort of lovely man he was, and though he was busy and troubled about many things he made time for them, telling his disciples that they should never block such access;
- ❖ Some people had been following Jesus for days and they were far from shops or food supplies, so Jesus fed them himself, with loaves and fishes;
- ❖ His close follower Peter had three times denied Jesus at a time of crisis, and Jesus later sought him out and quietly worked things out with him, rebuilding and reinvigorating his disciple.

That's the sort of man Jesus was, and is, and that's just what God is like too. God is patient and kindly, purposeful and determined; capable and careful. It turns out, as we



get to know God by reading the Bible, that God is everything we could have hoped for, and more! And the Bible invites us to become part of God's purpose, which is for everyone. It's not a matter of birth or background. If you want to be part of God's set-up, both in the present and the future, God wants you:

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Summary

- ☑ The Bible is absolutely vital in helping us to know what sort of a God created the heavens and the earth. Without that it would be all wishful thinking. But God has taken great care to reveal Himself through history, and by interweaving His purpose with the lives and experiences of people to whom He made Himself known.
- ☑ The result is the Bible – a remarkable series of books, spanning many centuries, but which are held together by one unifying purpose. They show what God is like – a patient long-suffering God, who goes to great lengths to get His message across.
- ☑ At last, God caused His Son to be born to the virgin Mary, so that we could see the family likeness at first hand, and be encouraged by the remarkable life and death of Jesus to want to know more about God.

3: God as Creator

What does God have on offer for the world He has made; and what does He expect from us? The first thing to realise is that God deliberately and carefully made a world which is suitable for animal and human habitation. Had He placed it a bit nearer the sun everything would have been burned up; a bit further away and everything would have been frozen. So He positioned it just right, because He wanted an environment in which men and women could live without too much difficulty, giving them time to think about the deeper things of life.

If life was so hard for us that we had to spend every moment of our time thinking about survival – what we are going to eat tonight and tomorrow – we would never get

a moment to think about God. But we have time on our hands, if we choose to use it wisely, and that is what God intended. Once, addressing a famous group of philosophers in Athens, the apostle Paul explained it like this:

“God, who made the world and everything in it, since he is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is he worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed anything, since he gives to all life, breath, and all things. And he has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:24-27).



His main point was that God is the Creator, Sustainer and Manager of human life. It's not that God needs anything from us; rather that He has provided everything for us, both initially – when the world was created – and continuously, by giving each one of us the priceless gift of life. And the reason why God has done this, and much else, for us is that He wants us to search Him out.

Seeking for God

It's not that God is hiding. Far from it! As we have seen, Scripture says that God has declared His existence both by the world He created and the Word – the Bible – He revealed. There are lots of signposts about, when you start to look for them, which point you in God's direction; but you won't see them unless you're looking. Our blindness has to do with our nature and our natural inclinations. Although we have some inbuilt sense of right and wrong, we are strongly inclined to go our own way. And God doesn't force Himself upon anyone; He wants people who really want Him.

Think about it. God could have created a world in which His message to mankind was indelibly inscribed somewhere – such as on a high rock face, or across a mountain range. A Persian King once did that, to leave his mark for future generations, and nobody now disputes his existence, or his stated achievements. But God wants us to make the effort to find Him, and then to understand His purpose.

- ❖ The Bible calls the first act *“faith”* – the challenge to believe in God because of the unmistakable evidence that exists.
- ❖ The second challenge is *to read and understand the Bible for yourself* – to give you a sure and certain hope; nobody can do it for you.

Reading the Bible is a personal thing: a bit like somebody inviting you to a party. If you had sent someone else instead, however often they told you how much they enjoyed it, and what a great time they had, it's not likely to be the same as going yourself. In fact, their account of what a good time they had might make you feel quite miserable. That's why you have to try the Bible for yourself and find out what it really teaches.



God's Invitation

God invites us to seek Him out, and promises that if we do so we will be amply rewarded for the trouble we take. Here are a few of those invitations, which were given to people during Bible times, but which remain open to us. For God has not yet said that the time of opportunity is over. Remember, He wants to save as many people as He can, before His plan of salvation moves into the final phase.

"Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in him!" (Psalm 34:8);

"Let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the LORD. Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his face evermore" (Psalm 105:3,4);

"Incline your ear, and come to me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you – the sure mercies of David ... Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near" (Isaiah 55:3-6);

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Matthew 7:7,8);

"Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28,29).

There are lots more passages like that in the Bible, because our response to God's offer is vital. Everything that God has said will happen. But will we have made the best use of life? Will we have achieved something more than mere existence? That's a vital question. It's not that God will discriminate between those who show an interest in His purpose and those who don't. He's not like that. He shares the blessings of this life with everyone, whether they deserve them or not. But He reserves the blessings of the age to come for those who want to participate. If we ask we find; but if we don't ask, we shouldn't expect to have eternal life thrust upon us.

Believing God's Promises

Notice that we have come back to what the Bible has to tell us about God's purpose. Left to ourselves we could guess at all sorts of things, as people have. It is widely believed in certain circles that everybody will live on after death, or that there are people now existing in heaven who once lived on earth. Both those are comforting thoughts and it's understandable that people believe them. But are they right, and how do we know?



We can only work out what beliefs are right, and which

are wrong, by reading the Bible and checking things out. Do that carefully and you will find that those two beliefs are not what the Bible promises, disappointing though that might be to some. In fact, what the Bible promises is much better and more satisfying, for those who find out what it is and then believe it, making a positive choice to follow where God leads. As the Bible says:



“By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible ... But without faith it is impossible to please him, for he who comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:3,6);

“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

Summary

- ☑ Belief in God and belief in His Word – the Bible – is the very beginning of our quest to learn more about the sort of God who made us, and who keeps us alive. It’s not a jump in the dark, a blind leap, or anything like that. We are given good and solid reasons for believing the Bible to be the Word of God and, if we choose to know more about God’s purpose, we discover that it contains remarkable promises about this life and a life to come.
- ☑ We have to check those things out for ourselves; nobody else can do that for us and give us that feeling that these things are really true. You can’t get a new life second-hand. God says that if we take the trouble to investigate we will not be disappointed; we will be amply rewarded.
- ☑ Getting a living faith is a wonderful thing. It gives us hope for the future and the strength to cope with whatever present problems we might have.

4: What is God Like?

When you start to read the Bible and begin to get acquainted with the God of the Bible, one of the first things you will want to know is “What sort of a God is He?” Bear in mind that we can do nothing to change the God who made the world and revealed Himself in the Bible. If He should turn out to be cruel, ruthless, power-crazy; or if He was to make unreasonable demands on us, or had expectations we could never fulfil – that would just be too bad! For the God who is powerful and clever enough to make the world would be far beyond our ability to change or even influence. Once again we have reached a vital issue.

Is the God of the Bible someone we are going to like?

Exploring the Bible

If you were to start reading at the beginning, in the Book of Genesis, all the time asking yourself: “What does this teach me about God?” you wouldn’t need to read for long before you got some fairly clear answers. Right from the start, when God is introduced with those words: *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”*, you would know about His power as a Creator and, only two verses later, you would know about the power of His word of command: *“Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light”* (Genesis 1:3).

God spoke, and it was done; just like that! But, as the first chapter unfolds, you cannot escape noticing how orderly and planned everything is. Step by step, and in exactly the right order, God brings the earth, the vegetable, and then the animal kingdoms into existence; until at last man and woman are created, at the end of the creative cycle. Then God begins to communicate and keep company with them, through his angels. They meet together in the garden in Eden; Adam and Eve are instructed about God and His ways; and then (only in the second chapter of Genesis) God tells them of one thing they must not do. They are free to eat of any tree in the garden except one; the fruit of that tree is forbidden.

So there you have it in just the opening two chapters of the Bible. The God of the Bible is powerful and purposeful. He can separate light from darkness; and He is interested in showing right from wrong. The distinction may not have been very complicated, but it was critical. Not eating from that particular tree was right; eating from it was wrong. And when first Eve and then Adam ate the forbidden fruit (see Genesis chapter 3), God showed that He is a God of justice and righteousness. What he had said, when He warned about the consequences of disobedience, came to pass exactly as He had said.



The God of the Bible is a God who says what He means and means what He says. And it turns out, from all of subsequent human history, that what God said was for the good of mankind. Adam's disobedience was the beginning of human rebellion against God, and once people had a taste of that sort of freedom, there was no stopping them. One act of rebellion led to another and, in no time at all, the whole of mankind was out of line. God said one thing; they did another. At last God issued an ultimatum, warning them that He would destroy their godless civilisation unless they repented of their sin and chose to obey His Law, for their good. But they were so far gone in wilful disobedience that only eight people listened and obeyed, even though God gave them about a hundred years warning of what would happen if they didn't listen.

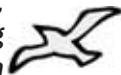
God's Longsuffering

It's clear, then, that God doesn't rush to hasty decisions, when there is still a chance of some response and of saving some more people from destruction. Noah and his family had the faith and courage to respond and to make provision for their long-term safety. When the Flood came, God didn't throw open the doors of the ark to all and sundry on a 'first-come-first-served' basis. Scripture says He shut the doors (Genesis 7:16). He had waited and waited for people to listen and respond to His offer of salvation, but the time of waiting eventually came to an end.

The God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament also. He doesn't change because of the passage of time. Disobeying God is just as dangerous today as it was in ancient times. Obeying God has always been the wise course of action, because God knows what is best for us, and always wants the best for His children. He is just like our earthly parents who tell us what to do, and what not to do, because they have more experience of life than we do, and don't want us to suffer unduly. God wants us to have happy and fulfilled lives, so He guides us by His Word and by His Law.

Looking back at the episode of the flood, the New Testament says that Noah and his family survived because they believed God and did what He commanded; and it encourages us to do the same, if we want to find salvation from the problems that will otherwise overcome us. The apostle Peter was writing about the flood when he said:

"That by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which now exist are kept in store by the same word, reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should



come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:5-9).

God's Rescue Plan

Many times in Bible history we read about God setting out to rescue His people from one critical situation or another. Often they had to set out with Him into the unknown, relying upon what they knew of His character and good intentions, because they could not know what the future held for them. They were never disappointed either, for God is always someone who wants the best for His people. He wants them to become perfect, so they can become like Him.



As we are now, we are all far from being perfect. Anything but, if the full truth was known about us! The Bible says that we are like prisoners, imprisoned by 'Sin' and 'Death' – as though they were our jailors (Romans 6:16). That's a grim picture indeed, but it's a way of helping us realise just how far away we are now from where God wants us to be. The Bible also says that we are like slaves to Sin and God wants to set us free from such bondage and give us everlasting life, in fellowship with Him and His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

Once, long ago, there were several million of God's people who were captive slaves in Pharaoh's Egypt. Moses was sent to get them out, announcing to Pharaoh in the process that he was to 'Let God's people go!'. And go they eventually did, though Pharaoh's resistance cost him dear. In a series of dramatic and powerful acts God rescued his people and they left Egypt to go to the Promised Land. On the way Moses took the opportunity to ask God just what He was like – in fact he asked to see Him! God said that could not be done, for no man can see God and live, but He promised Moses that He would tell him what He is like. Safe in the cleft of a rock, Moses heard the following:

"The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation" (Exodus 34:6,7).

That was a remarkable declaration of what God is like, one that stands the test of time; for the God of the New Testament is seen to be exactly like that too. All God's dealings are characterised by the mercy and grace He shows. We have seen already how longsuffering He is, as when He waited patiently at the time of Noah, for any who might be inclined to listen and be saved. He is a forgiving God, who does not want any to perish; but that doesn't mean that He is a soft option, or that you can persuade Him to overlook wrong and evil things, just because you want him too.

Isaiah' Vision

The prophet Isaiah once obtained a glimpse of godliness when, in a vision, he saw the

Lord high and lifted up. It was a temple scene and the one thing that filled his senses was the sound of the creatures around the throne, and their cries of praise. This is what they sang:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” (Isaiah 6:3)

In all His dealings Almighty God is holy, just and right; He cannot be otherwise. Righteousness and truth are at the very heart of His character; He loves the things that are right and hates those things that are wrong. He is a God who is committed to the things that are lovely and is utterly opposed to evil. As Moses learned, God will not, and cannot, forgive iniquity if people persist in their evil ways. But when people are repentant, when they turn from their evil ways, God is gracious and merciful to forgive their sins and to cleanse them from all unrighteousness.

Summary

- ☑ The God who is revealed in the Bible turns out to be wonderfully gracious, loving, merciful, kindly, compassionate and caring. In short, He is everything we long to be ourselves. His lovely character and Divine attributes give us a real and living hope that we can, with His help, escape the situation we find ourselves in, and find a better way of life.

- ☑ But God will not compromise with sin and can have nothing to do with unrighteous behaviour, or with those people who are wilfully disobedient. He is utterly opposed to sin and evil, characteristics which are the very opposite of His character. God is holy and righteous in everything He does, and because He knows how dangerous and deadly it is for us to stray into that sort of harmful behaviour, He does everything He can to make sure that we can escape from danger and find safety and security with Him.

5: How God Treats Mankind

What would you do if you had spent a really long time telling a group of people what they should and shouldn't do, and then they took little if any notice and just did their own thing? Would you just be annoyed, but shrug your shoulders and say "Well, what do you expect?" Or, would you be really cross; withdraw privileges, impose punishments, and even call the whole thing off?

What if you had known from the beginning that things would go badly wrong and that nobody would take any notice of what you said? Would you have even considered going ahead with it? Probably not!

Yet God, who knows the end from the beginning, and who foretells and controls the future, must have known from the outset that mankind would ignore what He said and live selfishly. So what did He do? He both created the world and devised a plan to save mankind from sin and death. What a wonderful God! He is consistently good to all His creatures, whether they deserve it or not, because that's the sort of God He is.

Daily Bread

Every day God provides for the needs of all His creation. It was the Lord Jesus who once said that God: *"makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust"* (Matthew 5:45); and his apostle who said that God did this for a reason:

"... (He is) the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he did not leave himself without witness, in that he did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:15-17).

Notice the significant point. God provides for all people in all nations, giving us both the means to keep alive and the means to become happy and contented – *"filling our hearts with food and gladness"* – and that continuous provision is itself a testimony to God's unfailing love towards His creation. Day by day God provides; day by day we should remember that it is He who gives us everything; and every day we should be thankful and appreciative.

Divine Law

The Psalmist once knelt to praise God for the natural world and afterwards wrote some lovely words about what God has created and the way those things communicated to him what God was like. Here's an extract:



“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows his handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard” (Psalm 19:1-3).



Then immediately he began to think about another Law that should regulate and control human behaviour – not the ‘laws of Nature’ but the Law of God. It seems that he was thinking that as God controls the natural order of things by principles like the law of gravity, or the laws of cause and effect, in just the same way He wants to help us find stability and safety in the spiritual order of things. Here’s an extract from that part of his prayer:

“The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether” (Psalm 19:7-9).

This law is not oppressive or unwelcome; far from it! The writer of the Psalm sees it as the best thing that could possibly have happened to him – God taking an interest in humankind by offering guidance and structure in life. Imagine that you were stranded in a desert and could not work out which way to go; then someone taught you to navigate by the stars. Instead of going round in circles and ending up dead, you could now plot a course and stick to it. It’s like that with God’s law. Once we understand what God is saying to us, His Word gives us direction and guidance, and a way of escape from otherwise inevitable death. For, says the Psalmist, it can

- ❖ make us perfect;
- ❖ convert us, from being useless to useful;
- ❖ give us wisdom and understanding;
- ❖ teach us what is right with God;
- ❖ purify our minds and deeds;
- ❖ help us to respect and reverence Almighty God; and
- ❖ lead us into truth.



No wonder he then says of these things:

“More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward” (Psalm 19:10,11).

God the Saviour

The trouble has been that, wonderful though the Law of God is, nobody could keep it

perfectly, try as some people might. We are not naturally inclined to obey; much better at exercising our own freedom of thought and deed, and that's what we have all done for generations. And because God's Law is an expression of His character – He is Himself just, holy and true, and the Law is God's character translated into action – God cannot lightly set that Law aside, much as He might want to. To do so would be to deny Himself, and God could never do that!

He knew from the beginning that we would not succeed and, mercifully, God also planned a way whereby all those who want to can be rescued from the mess their failure to obey is bound to cause. God the Creator and Sustainer of life is also a Saviour of all those who want to be saved. That was why He offered Noah and his contemporaries a lifeline, which only eight people accepted. That was why He rescued a nation of slaves out of Egypt. Time and again in Bible history God is seen helping people who are in desperate trouble and finding them a safe way out.

It's a fundamental of God's very existence that, because He loves people, He wants to help them and the deeper in trouble they get, the further He is prepared to go to rescue and recover them. God is the Saviour of all those who:

- ❖ want to be saved; and
- ❖ are willing to respond to God's offer in the way He expects.

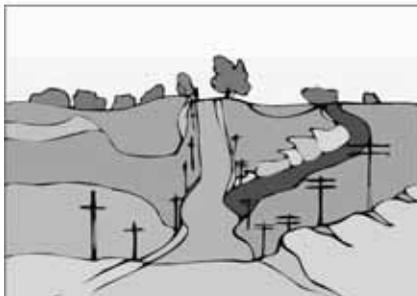
This is what the Bible says about this vital aspect of God's character:

"There is no other God besides me, a just God and a Saviour; there is none besides me. Look to me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:21,22);

"This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Timothy 2:3-6);

"We trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, especially of those who believe" (1 Timothy 4:10);

Notice that God wants to save, but he is *"a just God and a Saviour"*, for He will never do anything unjust or improper; and whilst He wants all to come to salvation, people must *"believe"* and *"come to the knowledge of the truth"*. There is no other way. God has sent His only begotten Son – the Lord Jesus Christ – to be a *"Mediator between God and men"*, and if we come to God, we must come to God through Him. He is *"the way, the truth and the life"* – the way, through truth, to life.



Summary

- ☑ God provides for all His creatures, whether they deserve it or not. He has given us the priceless gift of life, in a beautiful world, and wants us to be happy. And He has also given us the means of finding eternal fulfilment – His gracious and marvellous Law, which can guide us through life.
 - ☑ God’s Word – the Bible – is the wonderful way that God has chosen to teach us what He is like and spiritually-minded people through the ages have been much enriched by that. (We looked at just one of those people – the writer of Psalm 19.)
 - ☑ God wants to save His people from sin and death and goes to great lengths to make that salvation possible. But it must always be on His terms. God does not save people who don’t believe in Him; nor does He save those who cannot be bothered to find out what He has to offer. Salvation is a two-way thing. If you want it, you can have it; if you don’t want it, you won’t get it. Serious stuff!
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6: God’s Many Names & Titles

Our parents choose our names and, whether we like them or not, we are stuck with them! They pick the names they like and if those names have any meaning that is incidental.

It was different in Bible times, when names were sometimes given by prophets or seers – names which carried a meaning and significance which was meant to be expressive of the sort of person the baby would become. “Jacob”, for example, was so named because he was destined to be “a supplanter”; though God later named him “Israel”, because he was to become “a prince with God”. God named His Son “Jesus” – which means “God is Saviour” – because, as the angel said of his birth: “*He will save His people from their sins*” (Matthew 1:21).

We have already seen that there are many aspects to God’s character and purpose and if those were to be captured within God’s name, it would be an immensely long name! As the Bible opens, God is introduced simply as “God” who created the world by uttering words of command – the Hebrew word used being one that describes a Being of power and might, who makes things happen by a word of command and by the direction of His angels. But it’s not long before other aspects of God’s purpose are

disclosed by a whole range of titles that people use when worshipping the God who made them and who involves them in His gracious purpose.

God's Many Titles

Some of those titles describe God's power. He is Almighty God, or just "the Almighty"; sometimes "*The Mighty One*", or the "*Rock*". This aspect of God's existence must never be forgotten; for He is the ever-living One, who has neither beginning nor end. He is "*from everlasting to everlasting*" (*Psalm 90:2*), the Eternal One. These are expressive of the source and origin of God our Maker, and of His abiding power and might.

The prophet Isaiah once meditated on the God he worshipped and realised His supremacy over all, and our utter insignificance and impotence by comparison. Here's a sample of what he concluded:

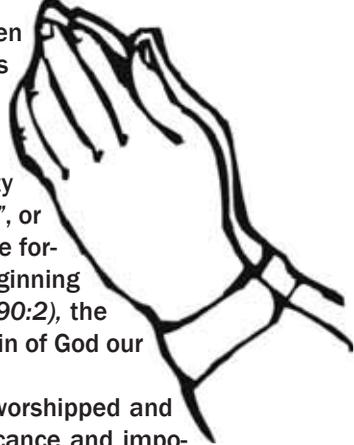
"Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. He brings the princes to nothing; he makes the judges of the earth useless. Scarcely shall they be planted, scarcely shall they be sown, scarcely shall their stock take root in the earth, when he will also blow on them, and they will wither, and the whirlwind will take them away like stubble" (*Isaiah 40:21-24*).

Make no mistake about it. The God of the Bible stands supreme above all; there is nobody or nothing like Him. In Bible times there was a lot of idolatry about – people carving and smelting images to represent the gods they worshipped. That was strictly forbidden in Israel, for no likeness of God can ever be produced which can adequately represent Him, and many times God challenged people to match Him in power or understanding. At the end of Isaiah's contemplation of God, the Almighty adds the challenge:

"To whom then will you liken me, or to whom shall I be equal?" says the Holy One (*Isaiah 40:25*).

Holy, Holy, Holy

Notice that God, when making that challenge, describes Himself as "the Holy One". This opens up another aspect of the Divine character. God is not just power and might. He is a holy God who cannot have anything to do with evil, sin or wickedness in any form. In our terms, this is rather like someone who is allergic to something that would harm them; they become totally opposed to it, and can never compromise about it. The Bible says of God that He is: "*of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness*" (*Habakkuk 1:13*).



The prophet Isaiah, that we were thinking about earlier, was commissioned as a prophet by a vision of heavenly beings in a temple situation. As they worshipped, they declared: *“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!”* (Isaiah 6:3). They were anticipating a time when the holiness and glory of God will fill the earth. That has not yet happened. But you will notice that as they praised God, who is to be worshipped in *“the beauty of holiness”*, they called Him *“the LORD of hosts”*.

God is *“the judge of all the earth”* (Genesis 18:25) and He is intent upon establishing the rule of Divine Law on earth, for He wants a world in which the principles of holiness, justice and righteousness rule supreme. That’s a vital part of His gracious purpose. But if God applied the rule of law, and set about judging us by His standards, we would all fail and perish; then the world would become uninhabited by mankind. Yet He is *“the LORD of hosts”*. God means to fulfil His purpose by filling the earth with His glory, and that means rescuing people from sin and wickedness and making them moral inhabitants, fit for His new world

Holy One of Israel

God started the process of assembling a people for Himself when He challenged a man called Abram to believe in His purpose and to come with Him, which Abram did. From that faithful man grew the nation of Israel, and God was destined to become known as the *“Holy One of Israel”* (Psalm 71:22). Through that nation God revealed Himself to mankind in a very special way. He gave them a Law, showed them how to worship Him acceptably, established a priesthood, provided them with prophets and leaders, and made with the nation a very solemn and binding covenant agreement.

On the eve of all that, when God was about to rescue and redeem the people from slavery in Egypt, He declared His name to the prophet Moses who had, not unreasonably, asked God how he should describe Him to the slaves who were to be brought out. It was then that God declared the meaning of His covenant or memorial name. God told him that His name is *“Yahweh”*. In most Bibles this Hebrew word is indicated by the capital letters ‘LORD’, although in some versions it is translated as ‘Jehovah’.

Then, on two separate occasions, God explained what that name means. First, He said that he was a God with a purpose – He is the God who was, is, and will be (Exodus 3:14-15). Then, He declared that His name expresses His intention to reach an agreement, or make a covenant, with those who are His people. For, God said:

“I am the LORD; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you into the land



which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you as a heritage: I am the LORD" (Exodus 6:6-8).

It was with Israel that God first made that covenant. They were the people He had redeemed and rescued and God worked with them for many generations. He brought them through the wilderness into the land, giving them judges, kings, priests and prophets, and revealed to them His unfolding purpose. Their failure to achieve what God intended was to result in the most remarkable of all God's acts for mankind.

Father

Because there was no other way, and because He loves mankind so much, God rescued the situation as only He could. When it was obvious to everyone that the people could not keep their side of the agreement – to be wholly obedient to God – God caused His Son to be born, of the virgin Mary by the exercise of His Holy Spirit power.

So far in this booklet we have deliberately concentrated on the Father's role in the process of salvation and have said comparatively little about the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We will remedy that soon, but first we need to note that the initiative whereby Jesus came to rescue the situation of failed mankind was wholly of the Father's making. It required the Son's co-operation, of course, but without the Father's decision and commitment there would have been no Son, and no salvation.

Any parent knows that their children reveal things about them they would rather not disclose. School teachers know that only too well, especially when they are talking to young children, who have no developed sense of what can be disclosed and what is best kept within the family! By contrast, the wonderful thing that Jesus revealed about God, which had not been fully appreciated before, was the extent of His love for us. In causing a Son to be born, who would live a faultless life, die as a sacrifice for sins, then be raised from the dead, God showed there are no limits to what He will do to rescue and redeem for Himself a people who are to be His own people. As Scripture says:



"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:16,17);

"In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:9-11).

It was the secret that had been waiting to be disclosed – that in the fullness of time God would reveal the full extent of His love. He was going to be a Father to His people, and would make this possible through the birth of His beloved Son.

Summary

- ☑ There are many sides to God’s character and purpose, as we would expect. He is the source of all power and might – without beginning or end – the Eternal one. He created and sustains the world, and did so for a purpose. He means to fill the Earth with people who share His values and express His characteristics. In short, he wants us to become godly people.
- ☑ God is completely good; His character is wholly free from sin or evil; He can have no dealings with that at all. Indeed, God is committed to the destruction of all evil, so that His righteousness will be supreme – and that will be for everyone’s eternal good. He is purposeful and determined, as His memorial name “Yahweh” indicates. He is a redeemer and rescuer of people with whom He will make a covenant agreement.
- ☑ God first made a covenant with His chosen people Israel but, being human and fallible, the people of Israel failed as have men and women from all nations in all ages. Something else was needed if God’s purpose was to succeed, and God initiated that too. He caused a Son to be born of the virgin Mary, the whole purpose of the Lord Jesus being to “*save his people from their sins*”. That breakthrough event revealed God as never before, as a Father who so loves the world He has created that He will go to extreme lengths, together with the Lord Jesus, to give others a chance of finding salvation.

7: God the Father of the Lord Jesus

Both Almighty God and His Son are unique. We have already seen that God made it clear to Israel from the very beginning of their spiritual adventure as His people that He was not to be compared to any of the gods being worshipped by any other nation. He was, is, and always will be Supreme above all, and that message is found all through the Bible, loud and clear. Here are just a few examples:

“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself any carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them” (Exodus 20:3-5; one of the ‘10 Commandments’);

“The LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing ... You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve him, and to him you shall hold fast, and take oaths in his name. He is your praise, and he is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things which your eyes have seen” (Deuteronomy 10:17-21);

“Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head over all. Both riches and honour come from you, and you reign over all. In your hand is power and might; in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all” (1 Chronicles 29:11,12; just like the ‘Lord’s Prayer’);

“... One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:6);

“The blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honour and everlasting power” (1 Timothy 6:15,16).

God is One

The unique and unchallengeable position of Almighty God is a dominant theme in both Testaments – Old and New. On one occasion the Lord Jesus was asked which was the greatest com-



mandment in the Law and his answer was:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment” (Matthew 22:37,38)

That endorsed what the Jews had long regarded as a vital element of God’s character and person – that there is but One God and that He must be loved with all our faculties. It’s the great declaration of the Book of Deuteronomy:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:4,5).

And here’s the paradox! Jesus taught that God was to be worshipped as unique and supreme above all, something He often stressed. Any father is greater than his son, in that he was there first, brought his son into being, cares for him as he is able, and loves him as his own. So Almighty God is greater than His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet because Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, his Jewish contemporaries claimed that he was making himself equal with God! Much as Jesus protested and tried to set the record straight, they were intent upon pursuing a charge of blasphemy, because of those very statements. Here’s an example:

“My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one.” Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, “Many good works I have shown you from my Father. For which of those works do you stone me?” The Jews answered him, saying, “For a good work we do not stone you, but for blasphemy, and because you, being a Man, make yourself God” (John 10:29-33).



God and Jesus are ‘One’

Try as he might, Jesus did not seem to be able to get the Jewish religious establishment to understand that he believed, as they did, in the supremacy and sovereignty of God. The fact that he was claiming to be of one mind and purpose with his Father seemed to pass them by. But it is perfectly clear that this was the Unity that both Father and Son shared – they wanted the same things, held to the same hope and had the same love one for another.

Strangely, the church in the third and fourth centuries after Christ made exactly the same mistake about the relationship of Father and Son. Scripture teaches that Jesus is unique, as the only Son that God has ever begotten:

“We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth ... No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him” (John 1:14,18);



“When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Galatians 4:4,5).

But, long ago, church leaders decided that was not sufficient for them and an ecclesiastical formula was devised which makes the Lord Jesus co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. This declared him to be of the same substance. Anathemas, or curses, are directed towards all who think otherwise – the writer of this booklet included!

The church doctrine of the Trinity is not Scriptural. It may have been devised with the best of intentions, though even that is doubtful – a lot of church politics affected the work of the church Councils that hammered out the statement of beliefs now called Creeds. But the teaching they promoted does a severe disservice to both the Father and His Son. For, in truth, the Father remains supreme over all, including over His Son:

The apostle Paul wrote: *“I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (1 Corinthians 11:3);*

Jesus said, *“I am ascending to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God” (John 20:17).*

Willing Sacrifice

The doctrine of the Trinity also does a disservice to the Lord Jesus, because it makes him out to be someone other than who he really is. He is the “only begotten Son of God”, born of the power of God – the Holy Spirit – and thus uniquely placed. From his mother Mary he inherited all the characteristics we have, including all those tendencies that direct us away from the path of obedience and faithfulness. From his Father he inherited the characteristics of God.

Nobody forced Jesus to give his life as a sacrifice to overcome the sins of the world; he accepted that calling voluntarily. He once said:

“Therefore my Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from my Father” (John 10:17,18).

Any suggestion that Jesus was not a willing partner, but that he was somehow pre-programmed to succeed, detracts very significantly from what the Lord achieved, as Scripture is quick to recognise. Even heaven itself is pictured as acclaiming him as the

One who is worthy to sit with his Father, on His throne, and to reign with Him because of what he achieved.

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honour and glory and blessing!” And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: “Blessing and honour and glory and power be to him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!” (Revelation 5:12,13).

Thus even heaven itself is depicted as being grateful for the faithful and obedient work of the Lord Jesus Christ, here remembered as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world – one of the many titles of the Lord Jesus, whose work was both wide-ranging and having widespread effect.

Here, then, was combined love in action – the love of God in providing His Son and then being willing for him to die; the love of the Son in being willing to co-operate fully with His Father.

Summary

- ☑ There is no-one who can compare with God. He is, and always will be supreme above all. There is only One God, the Father; and one Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only begotten Son of God; born to Mary when God’s Holy Spirit ‘overshadowed’ her. The child who was born was himself ‘holy’ (Luke 1:35), for Jesus had no human father; he was born of God.
- ☑ The Lord Jesus Christ is also unique, as befits someone who is called “only-begotten”. There has never been, and there never will be, another Son of God. Jesus came for the express purpose of rescuing Mankind from certain destruction. He was tempted in just the same way we are tempted to disobey God, but all through his life he resisted; consistently he chose the path of obedience. It could be said of him, as of nobody else, that he was “without sin”; and that he was “holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners” (Hebrews 4:15; 7:26).
- ☑ That God should send His Son, and that Jesus should co-operate fully with his Father, gives us great hope. They worked together to achieve the possibility of salvation for us, and we should understand their joint activity as the Scripture describes it, not as it was wrongly formulated long after Bible times, when the formula now known as “The Trinity” was devised by church leaders. It really matters that we exalt both Father and Son for the great Hope that has now been given to us, if we want to take advantage of it.

8: The God of the Bible and You

This might be of passing interest, if you are curious about religion and like to know what other people believe. But the situation is much more serious than this. Imagine that you dropped in for a health check, because you hadn't been to the surgery for years and fancied meeting the new doctor – only to be told that you had an illness so serious that, without urgent treatment, you would be dead before the end of the year. That would be a shock, wouldn't it!

Someone who is casually leafing through the Bible, out of curiosity, will be in for a greater shock even than that. For the Bible tells us, over and over again that our situation as members of the human race is desperate. We are going to die, every one of us. Without God's help none of us reading this will be here, or anywhere, in 100 years time.

Notwithstanding the popular belief that there is something inside us which lives on forever, the Bible tells it as it is. Without God's plan of salvation our situation is hopeless. But it doesn't need to be!

Gospel Hope

God has gone to great lengths to reveal what He is like – and that turns out to be the very best of news. He is gracious, merciful, long-suffering, loving, caring, purposeful, powerful, able to solve our deepest problems and willing to give us life. God offers us something we don't deserve and can't achieve for ourselves – everlasting life in a perfect world. God intends to establish His Kingdom on earth, with the Lord Jesus Christ as King. And because He is *“the LORD of hosts”*, God means to populate that world with people who love Him, are like Him, and want to be godly for evermore.

If you think that sounds boring, then God's offer may not attract you. But if you want a better and more satisfying future then it is available. Really! When the Lord Jesus Christ lived on Earth, people were amazed at the quality of his life. The things that he did, and the words that he spoke, were unlike anything that had been seen or heard before. For Jesus brought a vision of true godliness to human attention. He was like a light shining in darkness, which showed up the darkness for what it was, and became a beacon for us to follow. The apostle John described the impact of the life of Jesus in these terms:

“This is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God” (John 3:19-21).

Light or Darkness?

That's the choice for us, every one of us. Do we want to take up God's offer and be enlightened by what He wants to do for us and with us? Or would we prefer to muddle along by ourselves and make the most of our seventy-year existence, and then 'call it a day'? Nobody will force us to make a decision; it's up to us. But here are the two sides as we have been reviewing them together over the last few pages.

1. God has made Himself known in a variety of ways. Having created the world, He progressively revealed His purpose through patriarchs, priests and prophets. The Bible contains that revelation and we can read it for ourselves, and see what is on offer. The apostle Peter described it as God's "*great and precious promises*", and then said that they can transform us. We do not need to die in our sins; we can be rescued and made godly by God. That is now possible because God has taken the initiative and caused a Son to be born of the Virgin Mary. It was an act of self-revelation – something that told us more about the heart and mind of God than anything else had done.

"God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by his Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things ..." (Hebrews 1:1)

2. Jesus lived according to God's family values. He was made like us, in every respect, but he lived quite unlike us. Where we fail, he triumphed; where we sin, he was sinless; where we disobey, he obeyed, to the letter. In everything he pleased his heavenly Father. Father and Son were one in purpose and intent. Together they showed a perfect unity of love and commitment. Jesus was asked to give his life as a sacrifice for sin, and he did so willingly, accepting death on the cross as the only outcome, believing in this as in everything that God knew best. He was, says the Scripture:

"... obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted him and given him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:8-11).

3. We are in a waiting situation just now. Jesus sits at present at the right hand of God, awaiting the time when he will return to rule over God's Kingdom on Earth. People pray for that every day without appreciating what they are asking for: that God should be their Father (so they must be reborn); that His name should be declared as holy throughout the world (which it will be when Jesus reigns as King); and that His Kingdom should be established on earth, when what he wants (not what mankind in general want) will be accomplished:

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven ...” (Matthew 6:9,10).

Making the Choice

Just as there was only one way for Jesus – the way of the cross – and he took it without complaint, so there is only one way for each of us. If we want God’s offer of everlasting life, we too must go the way of the cross – not that we have to be actually crucified, for Jesus died for us: *“the just for the unjust”*.

God offers to make a solemn agreement with all those who want to take advantage of what Jesus has done by his saving and redeeming death. He is a Redeemer and Deliver and now, without compromising His holiness and righteousness – for God has declared his hatred of sin through what happened on Calvary – we can become right with God. But this salvation is on God’s terms, not ours, and it must conform to what the God of the Bible has declared. It’s no good thinking we can find salvation for ourselves; we can’t.

So what does God want from us? What have we to do if we want to worship the God of the Bible and be part of His great purpose?



Summary

- ➔ God wants us to take some time to read His Word – the Bible – and to get to know Him and his Son, the Lord Jesus. That’s a real pleasure in store, if you are not yet familiar with Bible teaching. We can help with a Bible Planner, which will get you started. There’s no substitute for a disciplined approach to reading and thinking for yourself.
- ➔ You will find that the Bible instructs believers to be baptised – by being dipped under water – into the saving death of Jesus. You may have been christened as an infant, but this is something different. It’s the way God has appointed for us to publicly declare our change of lifestyle, and our desire to follow Jesus. Baptism is the way of stepping out of the dark shadows into the light of God’s truth.
- ➔ Baptised believers are instructed to meet together to worship God, by praising Him for all that He is and thanking Him for all that He does. When you are ready, we can put you in touch with other people who will help you and with congregations where you will be made most welcome.
- ➔ Believers meet together to strengthen and help one another to live according to God’s commandments and to prepare together for the Coming to the Earth of the Lord Jesus Christ. It looks as if his Coming will be soon, when God’s gracious purpose will enter its final phase.
- ➔ God is going to fill the world with His glory. Give Him glory now, by learning about all the wonderful things He has done, is doing, and will do.
- ➔ Choose the Way that leads to eternal life and joy!

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