

## Week 1

## Introduction

For this first week, seven chapters from different parts of the Bible introduce major concepts which help us to understand God's purpose; guide us on how to read and understand the scriptures; and help us appreciate the value of God's Word. All quotations are from the King James Authorized Version.

## Week 1

## Genesis 1

## Sunday

For this first week, seven chapters from different parts of the Bible introduce major concepts which help us to understand God's purpose; guide us on how to read and understand the scriptures; and help us appreciate the value of God's Word. All quotations are from the King James Version.

This is the first chapter in the Bible and tells us what happened "in the beginning". The first verse states that at some moment in the past, billions of years ago, the Universe came into existence. Here the Lord declares that this was his work: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth".

The rest of the chapter, however, is not about the creation of the Universe, but about the transformation of our planet from a dark water-covered world into a suitable habitation for living creatures, especially for mankind. We are not told what happened to the Earth during the millions of years from creation to this point in time because it is not relevant to God's scheme of salvation described in the Bible. But we are told,<sup>v.2</sup> about the condition of the Earth before this work began: it was empty, shapeless, dark and completely covered in water. During the next six days a complete transformation was brought about by the power of God, in the hands of angels - the word translated "God" is plural and means "mighty ones".

Firstly, light was brought to bear on the planet and this was most probably the light of God's glory, as will be the case in the end: "no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it".<sup>Rev.21:23</sup> Secondly, the watery mists were dissipated so that space was made between the surface of the water and the clouds in which birds would fly. This space was called "heaven", and later it was seen that space extended far out into the Universe. Thirdly, dry land was brought above the water, probably by locking up great volumes of water in crystalline form as oceans of water have recently been discovered in the Earth's mantle in *ringwoodite*. The result was a mass of dry land upon which vegetation was caused to grow.

On the fourth day further dissipation of the clouds occurred, revealing the sun, moon and stars to enlighten the earth and to regulate light and darkness, and times and seasons. On the fifth day sea creatures and birds were created, and on the sixth day animals to live on the land. Finally, man was created in the image of the angels who said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness"<sup>v.26</sup> and man was given dominion over all the other creatures and instructed to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it".<sup>v.28</sup>

This chapter is commonly misread and misunderstood, and many people also often reject this record on supposedly scientific grounds but there is nothing in the Scriptures inconsistent with scientific discoveries, as opposed to theories. For

example, if fossils are discovered which are of creatures that lived millions of years ago, then clearly this was before the transformation of the earth described in this chapter. A myriad of events must have taken place since the beginning of the Universe but God does not recount them because he is concerned only to inform us of his purpose, beginning with the first man and ending with a world inhabited by righteous and immortal people from among his descendants. Our wisdom is to accept his word and do what he requires so he will count us worthy of being among these people.

## **Week 1**

## **1 Corinthians 15**

## **Monday**

This chapter, in the Apostle Paul's letter, shows us where the purpose of God is leading - the removal of death from the earth: "Death is swallowed up in victory".<sup>v.54</sup> This is one of the great messages of the Bible: death will be overcome so that men and women live for ever. This will be achieved by raising people from the grave and making them immortal, and this process has already begun. An essential element of the gospel is the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead to eternal life: "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel... for I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures".<sup>vs.1,3-4</sup>

Many witnesses saw Jesus after he came out of the sepulchre: they met with him, touched him, talked with him and ate with him. Therefore Paul affirms: "Now is Christ risen from the dead" <sup>v.20</sup> and as Jesus is only the first of many he adds: "and become the firstfruits of them that slept". Just as so many die as a result of Adam's disobedience, so many will be made eternally alive through Christ's obedience: "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive".<sup>vs.21-22</sup>

However, God has set times in his purpose for the granting of immortality, one being when Jesus himself was raised and another when he returns from heaven: "But every man (will be made alive) in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterwards they that are Christ's at his coming".<sup>v.23</sup> These immortal men and women will reign with Jesus in the kingdom of God on earth until "the end" when others also will be raised: "Then the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father: when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power, for he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" <sup>vs.24-26</sup>. When this is accomplished, God's purpose will be finished and the earth will be inhabited only by righteous and immortal people.

Knowledge of God's purpose gives us a glorious hope for the future. If we die we will be raised to eternal life; if we are alive when Jesus returns we will not die but be changed to be immortal: "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall

be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory”.<sup>vs.51-54</sup> With this wonderful prospect before Christ’s disciples, Paul exhorted them: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord”.<sup>v.58</sup>

## **Week 1**

## **Mark 4**

## **Tuesday**

Jesus emphasises the importance of receiving his teaching in the right attitude of mind. He likens his preaching to a sower sowing seed. The seed falls on different kinds of ground, representing different kinds of people: the hard hearted in which the word cannot take root; people preoccupied with the cares of this life and pleasures, preventing the word from flourishing; and others who receive the word with joy, keep it, and become fruitful in God’s service.

Jesus, furthermore, says he taught in parables to cater for these different characteristics. His disciples were like fertile soil and believed his teaching of the gospel of the kingdom of God, while the majority were unreceptive of the word: “Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables, that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them”.<sup>v.11-12</sup> Hence, we should ensure that we ourselves adopt the right attitude of mind to the word of God, so that in hearing the teaching of Jesus and all God’s prophets we may be like good ground which brings forth fruit in abundance.

Jesus also likens the kingdom of God to a mustard seed which is the smallest of all the seeds in the land of Israel, but which ultimately becomes a great plant covering the earth <sup>v.30-32</sup>. Thus the teaching of the kingdom of God is a very small inconsequential matter now in the minds of most people, but soon the kingdom itself will be established in Israel to rule all the nations of the earth.

## **Week 1**

## **1 Corinthians 13**

## **Wednesday**

God is love and he requires us to love. His first commandment is that we love him with all our being, and the second is that we love our neighbour as ourselves. This love, defined in our reading today and translated “charity”, is not the love of popular song but selfless devotion to others, seeking their welfare, free from evil and iniquity, rejoicing in the truth, and motivated by faith and hope in God’s promises: “Charity (love) suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth”.<sup>vs.4-8</sup> It is only by learning God’s truth from his word that we may manifest this love in our lives.

The first disciples of Christ were commanded to love but they were also given

spiritual gifts enabling them to perform extraordinary works such as healing and speaking in foreign languages they had never learned to preach the gospel to strangers. These powers, however, would in due course be withdrawn: “But whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away”, v.8 so today no-one has any of these spiritual gifts. Nevertheless, we can all have those which still remain: “Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity”.v.13 Faith is belief that God will perform his promises; hope is the eager anticipation of their fulfilment; and love is the virtue which will cover a multitude of sins and which God has shown to us in the sacrifice of his beloved Son (John 3:16).

## **Week 1**

## **Ecclesiastes 3**

## **Thursday**

This chapter by Solomon teaches that all time and times are in God’s control: “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven”.v.1 For us individually also there is: “A time to be born, and a time to die”.v.2 Therefore, the scriptures exhort us to use our time wisely, because we only have a short period of existence, and only during this brief time can we take the opportunity to bring our lives into conformity with God’s purpose.

Unfortunately, people throughout the ages have been drawn away from God’s truth by false hopes of natural immortality. They believed they were immortal and would continue in existence after death: but God has never taught such a thing. Therefore Solomon wrote: “I said in my heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and they might see that they themselves are beasts. For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again”.vs.18-20

All animals, including men, have the same breath which leaves them when they expire, but people naturally believe we have a higher destiny than the animals, even suggesting that our breath (spirit) goes upwards, while theirs goes downwards, but “Who knoweth?”.v.21 God knows and tells us plainly that at death we all turn to dust and unconsciousness: “The living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun” (chapter 9:5-6).

Our case, however, is not hopeless because the purpose of God is to raise all his righteous servants from the dead and give them eternal life, after the example of Jesus his Son. This will be on the Day of Judgment when: “God shall judge the righteous and the wicked; for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work” v.17.

## **Week 1**

## **2 Timothy 3**

## **Friday**

God's truth, though revealed in the Bible, is known by few today, and this is precisely the state of affairs predicted by the Apostles. For example, in this letter Paul foretold how perilous times would come for Christ's disciples when love of his truth would be replaced by self-love and when commendable qualities among them such as love, joy, peace, meekness, goodness, faith, and truth would be replaced by the evil characteristics listed in the first few verses. This would lead to a corrupt form of religion: "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof".<sup>v.5</sup> In view of this development the command is: "from such turn away" because "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived".<sup>v.13</sup>

Looking back on ecclesiastical history we can see this apostasy progressing through the centuries with people, "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth".<sup>v.7</sup> The antidote to this, says the Apostle, is to keep strictly to the teaching of the word of God in the "holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus".<sup>v.15</sup> We have the assurance that, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God",<sup>v.16</sup> and we profit exceedingly by reading and learning therefrom because it instructs us how to live our lives according to God's will: "All scripture... is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect throughly furnished unto all good works".<sup>vs 16-17</sup>

## **Week 1**

## **Psalm 22**

## **Saturday**

This Psalm is one of the most remarkable prophecies in the scriptures for it expresses the thoughts of Jesus, a thousand years beforehand, as he was crucified. The first verse expresses the very words of Jesus on the cross *Mat.27:46* after the LORD had withdrawn his Holy Spirit from him. In this terrifying experience of crucifixion Jesus expressed his trust in God.<sup>vs.2-5</sup> As he hung upon the cross he was taunted by the crowd,<sup>vs.6-8</sup> but he trusted in God, as he had done from infancy.<sup>vs.9-10</sup> His enemies were like strong bulls and lions who gnashed at him,<sup>vs.12-14</sup> an assembly of the wicked who pierced his hands and his feet when they nailed him to the stake.<sup>v.16</sup> The weight of his body put all his bones out of joint <sup>v.14</sup> so that in great pain he could count them.<sup>v.17</sup> Jesus' clothes were removed when he was crucified and the soldiers divided these among themselves <sup>v.18</sup> but because his robe was seamless they gambled to decide who should have it.<sup>v.18; Jn.19:23-24</sup>

No man could describe so accurately beforehand, and in such detail, the suffering of Christ on the cross. Only God could do this. Crucifixion was not a known method of capital punishment in the days of David. The scriptures, however, prophesied that the Messiah would be crucified and the Romans introduced crucifixion hundreds of years after David's time. It is also evident from this Psalm that Jesus, as he suffered on the cross, did not think of his own predicament only, but also of his brethren and sisters who would be saved from death through his sacrifice.<sup>v.22</sup> He was able to endure the cross and despise the shame because of the joy set before him *Heb.12:2*

which included the prospect of sitting at God's right hand and after that returning to Israel to sit upon the throne of the LORD in glory. A particular element of this will be putting the Father's name on a great multitude of his brethren in making them partakers of the divine nature and members of God's family for ever.<sup>v.22</sup> The apostle cited this verse to encourage the disciples to behave as Jesus' brothers and sisters so that he will not be ashamed to call them "brethren" when he returns.<sup>Heb.2:11-12</sup> A great multitude of men and women will then be made immortal to reign with Jesus. The kingdom of God will be established and the people of all nations will worship the LORD <sup>v.28</sup> for "all the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee".<sup>v.27</sup> Then the immortal saints will serve Jesus and proclaim to all people, including those born afterwards, the great salvation achieved by Christ.<sup>vs.30-31</sup>

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## **Week 2**

## **Introduction**

This week we read seven chapters from the beginning of Genesis which, written by Moses under inspiration, describe the beginnings of God's dealings with mankind and explain the causes of our condition upon the earth. They trace the history of mankind, describing momentous events, during the first thousand years after Adam, and also prefiguring God's scheme of salvation centred in Jesus.

People are inclined to treat this record as myth but this is not a view which true disciples of Christ may entertain because he requires them to believe Moses' writings, as he declared to unbelievers: "Had ye believed Moses ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall believe my words?" John 5:46-47.

## **Week 2**

## **Genesis 2**

## **Sunday**

Following the six days of creation, the angels rested and were refreshed on the seventh day <sup>vs.1-3</sup>. This became the basis of a great blessing for God's people. While the rulers of ancient kingdoms made their people toil ceaselessly, God commanded Israel to rest from their labours each seventh day of the week and on that day to delight in worshipping him. He also commanded them to let their land rest each seventh year.

These provisions foreshadow a thousand year period during which the world will be refreshed under the benevolent rulership of the son of God, after six thousand years of human government, as the Apostle wrote: "For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works... There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God... Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest". <sup>Heb.4:4,9,11</sup> The first disciples looked for this time of refreshing, as Peter had exhorted them: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you". <sup>Act.3:19-20</sup>

This chapter also describes in more detail the creation of the first man: "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" <sup>v.7</sup>. Thus Adam was constituted a "living soul": not an "immortal soul". The scriptures are totally consistent in teaching that we are mortal and that when we die, and our breath leaves us, we return to the material elements of which we, like our first parents, are made. Indeed, Adam himself was informed that he would die if he disobeyed God's commandment: "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die". <sup>vs.16-17</sup> The original Hebrew says: "dying thou shalt die", a process which began in Adam following his disobedience.

The creation of the first woman vs.21-24 seems fabulous to many people, but none would deny the ability of an all-powerful God to create a woman in this way, and the scriptures tell us his perfectly good reason for doing so. Paul revealed this reason when commanding husbands to love their wives as Christ loves the church: “For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this

cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church”. Eph.5:29-32 So the provision of a suitable companion for Adam expressly pointed forward to the development of suitable companions for Christ; he being the bridegroom and they, in the aggregate, his bride!

## **Week 2**

## **Genesis 3**

## **Monday**

The purpose of God is to populate the earth with righteous immortal people, and to this end Adam and Eve were given the opportunity to obey in the hope of immortality. But they failed. They ate the forbidden fruit and then suffered the forewarned consequences: “And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life: thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return”. vs.17-19

This is the explanation of mankind’s current condition upon earth, including our suffering and common destiny of the grave. But the record also identifies the means by which God will save men and women from sin and death and restore paradise lost. The serpent, given the faculty of speech to express the mind of the flesh, put Adam and Eve’s faithfulness and obedience to the test. He declared: “Ye shall not surely die” v.4 and they believed this lie, as so many millions have done ever since, being convinced that when they die they do not really do so but continue to exist somehow, somewhere.

The serpent thereafter became the symbol of sin and, using this figure, God said to it: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel”. v.15 This seems enigmatic but nevertheless points forward to the Lord Jesus Christ, the seed of the woman (born of a virgin) who was wounded by sin in the Jews and Romans but who recovered by resurrection from the dead. He is the one promised here who would totally destroy sin (fatally wounding it in the head) and thereby also destroy death.

**Week 2****Genesis 4****Tuesday**

The evil introduced by Adam and Eve's disobedience very soon bore further fruit in their own family for their eldest son became a murderer. God had covered their nakedness with animal skins, signifying that sin could be covered by the shedding of blood in sacrifice. This, in due course, would involve the shedding of blood in the death of Jesus. The requirement on them to make animal sacrifices is implied in the record of Cain and Abel's worship. Abel brought the firstling of his flock and God respected this because it was according to his commandment.<sup>v.4</sup> Cain, however, brought the fruit of the land and was rejected by God.<sup>vs.3,5</sup> He was therefore instructed that if he did well he would be accepted,<sup>vs.6-7</sup> but instead of doing what God required he murdered his more righteous brother. This scenario is re-enacted repeatedly throughout the historical record in the Bible, with the wicked slaying the righteous for envy, and the principal example of this is the murder of Jesus by the religious leaders of the Jews. Thus the shedding of Abel's blood typified the shedding of Jesus' blood, as the Apostle wrote: "And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel" Heb.12:24.

**Week 2****Genesis 6****Wednesday**

This chapter describes how, after about one thousand five hundred years, the behaviour of mankind seriously deteriorated so that: "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually".<sup>v.5</sup> "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth".<sup>vs.11-12</sup> Only "Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD".<sup>v.8</sup>

Therefore God determined to bring punishment upon that wicked world, but first warned Noah of the impending judgment. There then followed a period of God's longsuffering, giving Noah the opportunity, as a preacher of righteousness, to warn his contemporaries to turn from their wickedness and for him to build an ark to save his family.

Christ's disciples are keenly interested in this record because Jesus not only confirmed the occurrence of this event but also warned them that the same indifference would prevail at his coming in judgment: "And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all".<sup>Lu.17:26-27</sup>

Thus there are important lessons in Genesis for us to learn while appreciating the elements in the record which indicate its divine characteristics. For example, the proportions of the ark correspond to those of the first iron ship, the S.S. Great Britain, built in 1844 by Brunel, although the ark was bigger. This is remarkable because, whereas Brunel could draw on a thousand years of British

maritime and shipbuilding experience, Noah had absolutely no seafaring experience. But he did have God's guidance.

## **Week 2**

## **Genesis 7**

## **Thursday**

This chapter describes the overwhelming flood which destroyed the antediluvian world and, despite general disbelief of this record, the earth contains many extraordinary phenomena which can only be explained by a catastrophic global flood. At many sites worldwide there are billions of fossils of marine creatures which died violent deaths all at the same time under enormous pressure. Only a great flood would effect this. There are also mountain ranges and hills throughout the world which contain millions of fossilised animals, many of them extinct, including fossilised whales far above sea level. Furthermore, three-quarters of the earth's land mass is covered by successive layers of sedimentary rocks laid down under water, often enclosing fossils.

In many places on the earth there are "erratics", large rocks which are geologically out of place. For example, those strewn over the Russian plains are very large in the north but become progressively smaller as one goes further south, pointing to turbulent flood conditions and water action on a huge scale.

Geologists who say there is no evidence of the flood, even though there are so many phenomena they cannot explain, are misled because they leave God out of account. If God, by his great power, produced in a few days reactions which geologists attribute to natural developments over millions of years their calculations and conclusions are bound to be distorted. For example, the continents were formed by land being pushed apart from a central single land mass, and this is generally attributed to gradual continental drift, but it may have been done quickly and catastrophically during the flood. The Bible and geological records are consistent with this.

The account in Genesis is remarkable and if people gave it the attention it deserves they might be convinced of its truth, not only by the consistency of the scriptural record but also by the confirmatory evidence left in the earth.

## **Week 2**

## **Genesis 8**

## **Friday**

The deluge continued for forty days but Noah remained in the ark for over a year before the waters subsided sufficiently for himself, his family, and the animals to leave the ark. It is popularly thought that Noah took a single pair of each species, male and female, into the ark, whereas in fact clean (farm) animals were preserved by sevens. This enabled him to sacrifice some of these without destroying the species, and his offerings were acceptable to God who promised that he would never again destroy the world by a flood.<sup>vs.20-22</sup>

Nevertheless we should heed God's warning, often repeated in the Bible, that he will one day bring his judgments upon the world for its wickedness, motivating us to lead lives pleasing to him, after the example of Noah. He promises to preserve all his faithful and righteous servants: "Come, my people, enter thou

into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain". Isa.26:20-21

## **Week 2**

## **Genesis 9**

## **Saturday**

Leaving the ark, Noah was blessed by God <sup>v.1</sup> and was told that a change would then take place in the animal population. Whereas previously these creatures had all eaten "the herb of the field" as their food, and Noah provided these herbs for all of them in the ark, now many species, including man, would become carnivorous <sup>v.2-3</sup>. Interestingly, God also says he will reverse this change among the animals when Christ reigns on the earth: "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock". Isa.65:25

As a token of his covenant with Noah, God produced a rainbow in the sky. This event suggests that no rainbow had been seen previously and therefore there had been no rain before the flood. This is consistent with the detail given in the beginning: "But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground". Gen.2:6 The rainbow was thereafter used by God as a symbol of the fulfilment of his covenant, e.g. in vision Jesus was seen sitting on his future throne with a rainbow encircling it. We know the conditions that produce a rainbow, requiring both sunshine and rain, and figuratively these conditions will prevail when Jesus rises as the sun and reigns: "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth after rain... This is all my salvation, and all my desire". 2Sam.23:3-5

You will have noticed in these chapters that people lived much longer in those days, with lives shortening until God established life expectancy at three score years and ten. Nevertheless, he has declared that during the reign of his Son people will again live longer. Then someone dying at a hundred will be considered a child: "There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed". Isa.65:20

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## **Week 3**

## **Introduction**

There are four biographies of Jesus in the New Testament, through Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, each looking at his life from a different point of view and therefore emphasising, and including or omitting, events according to this viewpoint. Matthew, addressing especially the first Jewish Christians, wrote of Jesus as the promised King of Israel giving more prominence than the other biographers to this aspect of Christ's role in the purpose of God. For instance, Matthew's first sentence declares Jesus is the son of David, because it was to that king of Israel that God promised, a thousand years earlier, that a descendant of his would sit on his throne and reign over Israel for ever.

The first chapter of this account proves that Jesus was legally the son of David, and the first seven chapters describe his birth and introduction to Israel at the age of thirty, and record some detailed teaching of Jesus to his disciples.

## **Week 3**

## **Matthew 1**

## **Sunday**

Jesus was born to Mary, a virgin, when the power of God acted on her to produce a child who was not her son only but also God's "...for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit".<sup>v.20</sup>

Her betrothed, Joseph, accepted this development and, even though he had no blood relationship with him, became Jesus' legal father. Therefore Joseph's genealogy is given <sup>v.16</sup> to prove that under the law Jesus was related to both Abraham and David, a vital relationship because it was to these two men that God made promises concerning their seed. Joseph was instructed to give Mary's baby the name Jesus, meaning "Yah saves", because through him God would save his people from their sins.<sup>v.21</sup> This was declared to be God's purpose from the very beginning. For example, in Genesis 3:15, concerning the "seed of the woman" and also through the prophet Isaiah that a virgin would bear this great deliverer: "Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us".<sup>vs.22-23; Isa.7:14</sup>

## **Week 3**

## **Matthew 2**

## **Monday**

It was certainly appropriate that the newborn king should receive gifts from great men, and wise men did come from the east to pay homage. No doubt these men anticipated the birth of the king of Israel from the writings of the prophet Daniel who wrote in their country concerning the time of the Messiah's coming. They also interpreted an unusual star as a sign that the time had arrived. Naturally, seeking the king of Israel, they went to the palace of King Herod who, at that time under the Romans, reigned in Jerusalem over the Jews.

Herod was troubled by the prospect of this rival to his dynasty for the scriptures plainly state that the Messiah will reign in Jerusalem over Israel as literally as

he did himself. From the scribes he learned that Bethlehem was to be the birthplace of the Messiah v.5-6 according to the prophecy through Micah concerning the one “to be ruler in Israel”. Mic.5:2

Matthew freely quoted the Old Testament to show the literal development of God’s purpose in Christ, exemplifying how we should apply the prophecies, written hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, so that we too can see the outworking of that purpose. Certainly Herod responded practically to this potential threat to his regime, by killing young children in Bethlehem in an attempt to destroy the Messiah. He was unsuccessful, however, because Joseph and Mary were warned by God and took Jesus with them into Egypt. Upon their return they settled in Nazareth where Jesus was brought up, to the consternation of many Jews three decades later when they found it difficult to accept that the Messiah came from such a despised place.

### **Week 3**

### **Matthew 3**

### **Tuesday**

It was also appropriate that the King should be introduced to his people by a suitable forerunner who would also prepare his way before him. v.3,8 as prophesied through Isaiah (Isa.40:3). John the Baptist made the people ready to welcome the Messiah by turning them to repentance unto righteousness v.2. Also, by baptizing those who came to him confessing their sins, v.6 he provided the means by which Jesus could be publicly introduced to the people.

At about the age of thirty, Jesus came to John to be baptized but, unlike everyone else, he had no sins to confess and so John demurred. But Jesus insisted that John baptize him “to fulfil all righteousness”. v.15 This was the motivating principle of Jesus’ life: to do always those things which are right in God’s eyes, including submission to total immersion in water before commencing his allotted work among the people. God openly acknowledged Jesus’ obedience as he came out of the water by anointing him with the Spirit v.16 and by a loud declaration from heaven: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”. v.17

“Messiah” in Hebrew and “Christ” in Greek both mean “anointed”, and Jesus became the anointed one when the Holy Spirit came upon him at his baptism. “Christ” is not a surname such as we have, but a title which announces that he is the one chosen to rule God’s people of Israel.

### **Week 3**

### **Matthew 4**

### **Wednesday**

Jesus, possessing God’s power, was able to perform extraordinary deeds, but this magnified the temptation on him to depart from doing God’s will. Therefore the Spirit immediately led him into the wilderness to determine “whether he would keep God’s commandments, or no”. This temptation was part of God’s purpose, not that of a supernatural evil being. “Devil” in Greek means “deadly enemy”,

sometimes translated as “false accuser” because this is one of the most malicious kinds, but the worst enemy is sin in our flesh - and Jesus’ mission was to defeat this most deadly enemy of all mankind.

In this chapter we read of these two combatants in conflict: sin in the flesh and the Son of God, and we observe that three influences were brought to bear upon Jesus to tempt him to sin: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. These are the influences which can divert us from the way of righteousness and, referring back to Genesis 3, we see that Adam and Eve were also tempted in these same three ways, but unlike them Jesus resisted these evil influences to overcome sin successfully. It is most instructive to observe that Jesus was able to resist temptation by applying God’s word to the circumstance. In particular, he overcame his intense hunger for food, without using God’s power to provide it miraculously, by the conviction expressed in the book of Deuteronomy that such food only keeps us alive for a short while, whereas feeding on God’s word results in everlasting life: “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God”.<sup>v.4</sup> Jesus was given the Spirit without measure so that he could demonstrate that he came from God and that his message also was from God. Therefore he went about the land,<sup>vs.23,2</sup> with specially chosen companions,<sup>vs.18-22</sup> using God’s power to heal people of various diseases,<sup>v.23</sup> of mental illnesses, and of paralysis.<sup>v.24</sup> However his most important work was to preach God’s good news or “gospel” <sup>v.23</sup> for this is the essential message of salvation. It should be noted that this good news was about the Kingdom of God, the grand finale to which world events are leading, in which Jesus, God’s Anointed, will reign on his promised throne as the King of Israel and ruler of the whole world to bring blessings upon all people.

### **Week 3**

### **Matthew 5**

### **Thursday**

Jesus not only taught the people about the coming kingdom of God but also instructed them how to live lives to qualify them for places in that kingdom. Only those who follow his instructions are the truly blessed, i.e. happy. They are meek, merciful and pure; they hunger after righteousness; and they are blessed because theirs is the kingdom of God and they will inherit the earth.<sup>vs.1-12</sup>

The kingdom of God existed in Israel in the past, as the Old Testament describes, but it was overturned by God because his people turned away from righteousness to wickedness and idolatry. The laws of that kingdom, given through Moses, were still in force in Israel when Jesus lived obediently among them, and he told them that even the minutest element of the law would not fail until all was fulfilled.<sup>vs.17-18</sup>

That law was designed for the regulation of the nation, but more is required of individuals who hope to enjoy eternal life in God’s kingdom when it is established. For example, the law said “Thou shalt not kill” but Jesus

commanded his disciples not even to be angry with fellow believers without a cause.<sup>vs.21-22</sup> The Jews said that it was right not only to love their neighbour but also to hate their enemies,<sup>v.43</sup> but Jesus commanded: "... I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you".<sup>vs.44</sup>

The Jews were also disinclined to express their affirmations and negations with a simple yes or no <sup>v.37</sup> but embellished them with oaths on sacred places, such as swearing by heaven. But Jesus commanded them not to swear at all,<sup>v.34</sup> not for example by Jerusalem "because it is the city of the great King." Here Jesus was quoting from Psalm 48 which provides a vision of Jerusalem when it becomes the capital of the future kingdom of God, confirming the prophecy and identifying himself as the great king who will reign there.

You will note that the commands of Christ have the purpose of developing a Godlike character in his disciples: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect".<sup>v.48</sup>

### **Week 3**

### **Matthew 6**

### **Friday**

In this chapter Jesus teaches us how to give alms, pray, fast and serve God, and he relates these religious practices to the reward God will give to those who worship him faithfully, but which he will withhold from those who fail in this respect.

Jesus gave his disciples an example of acceptable prayer, and we should note that this puts God's reverence first, "Hallowed be thy name",<sup>v.9</sup> the performance of his will second: "Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven",<sup>v.10</sup> and only after these comes the expression of our own desires. The prayer has been, and is still, repeated by millions of people, but how many of these really look forward to the re-establishment of God's kingdom in Israel and to the time when God's will is to be done in earth as it is in heaven?

So many have been misled into looking for a different reward. A common misconception is that God has promised heaven-going to the faithful. He has never made such a promise, but some take passages out of context in support of this idea, fatally "wresting" God's word to force a meaning which is denied in the rest of scripture. An example of this is the wresting of:<sup>vs.19-21</sup> "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." It is assumed that if the reward is stored in heaven then we must go there to enjoy it, whereas it is only "stored" there awaiting the return of Jesus who will bring it with him: "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be".<sup>Rev.22:12</sup>

The promised reward is so exceedingly more desirable than anything we might gain in this life that Jesus counsels us not to seek after the things that mankind naturally seeks,<sup>vs.31-32</sup> but: "... seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you".<sup>v.33</sup>

### **Week 3**

### **Matthew 7**

### **Saturday**

In this chapter Jesus instructs us to examine our own selves and to direct our feet into the path leading to life. It is easy to find faults in others, rather than in ourselves, <sup>vs.3-4</sup> but we are wise to apply self-examination and to rectify our own faults. Jesus warns that the justice we mete out to others will be the same justice applied to us,<sup>v.1</sup> therefore we should exercise the principle underlying God's commandments to Israel as to their treatment of each other: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets".<sup>v.12</sup>

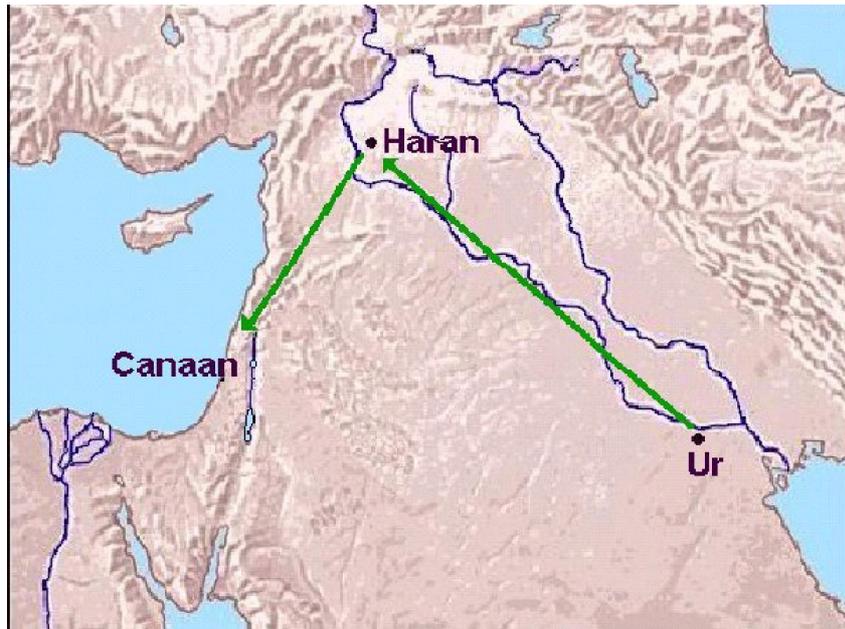
Determined effort is required on our part to direct our steps into the way of life because it is much easier to be carried along with the crowd, not to life, but to death: "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait (narrow) is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." <sup>vs.13-14.</sup>

The real danger is that we may be misled by "false prophets" <sup>v.15</sup> who appear as "sheep" but are really "ravening wolves". The dire consequences of this will become apparent when Jesus returns because many who think they are his disciples will be rejected by him: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity"  
<sup>vs.21-23</sup>

The only sure and certain way to be acceptable to Jesus is to believe his teaching wholeheartedly and to do faithfully what he requires: "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock".<sup>vs.24-25</sup>

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## Abraham's route from Ur, via Haran, to Canaan



### Week 4

### Introduction

Returning to Genesis, the next chapters trace the multiplying populations of the earth, descended from Noah's three sons, for a thousand years down to the time of Abraham. This man, Abraham, has a most prominent place in God's purpose and, so we can know of it and also have an opportunity of being associated with it, his life is recorded in greater detail than that of others. Indeed, because God has established him as the father of the faithful, most of the Bible is about God's relationship to his children, including Gentile Christians who are counted by God as Abraham's offspring.

God made great promises to Abraham and to his seed, which is Christ, and in the fact that all true disciples of Christ will inherit these promises with Abraham there is a very strong incentive for us to study the record of his life and to learn about these divine promises and so be able to anticipate their fulfilment.

### Week 4

### Genesis 11

### Sunday

The instruction of God to Noah's family was to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth", for it was his will that the earth be fully inhabited. However, as the population grew the people developed a determination to resist his will and to remain concentrated in the same area of the earth. To this end they built themselves a city and a tower which also exalted themselves instead of the LORD. Therefore God intervened and, by confounding their language, dispersed them over the face of the earth.

It is also notable that their city in the land of Shinar was called Babel, meaning confusion, because this is the root of the name Babylon which became a great city in the same place and was responsible, in 605 BC, for the overthrow of God's kingdom and people of Israel. It also became the symbol later in the Bible representing confusion of religious thought and apostasy from God's truth.

Before the confusion of tongues all spoke the same language and God intends to restore this arrangement in the future. He will “turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent” Zeph3:9. The original tongue is not identified but it was probably Hebrew as this is the language of his own people, and it is surely significant to those who watch the outworking of God’s purpose in the earth that with the rebirth of Israel as a State among the nations as prophesied, after centuries of being only a dead classical language, Hebrew is once more a living language!

This chapter also gives the genealogy of Noah’s son Shem through the generations to Abraham. Many genealogies are given in the Bible, the most important being those which trace the line from Adam to Jesus, of which this genealogy is a part, because it proves vital relationships which exist between Christ and those to whom God made his promises, especially Abraham.

Abraham, first called Abram, lived with his father and family in the civilised and cultured city of Ur of the Chaldees, near the mouth of the River Euphrates at the head of the Persian Gulf. Here Abram received a call from God to leave his own city and go to another land which God would show him, and Abram obeyed with far reaching results, as the following chapters and the rest of the Bible reveal.

#### **Week 4**

#### **Genesis 12**

#### **Monday**

The details of God’s call are given, <sup>v.1-3</sup> which contained the LORD’s promise to bless Abram and his descendants, and also all the nations of the earth. You should note that God’s promise, “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed”, <sup>v.3</sup> is declared in the New Testament to be the Gospel (Gal.3:7-8).

Abram obeyed God <sup>v.4</sup> and travelled with his father and other members of his family from Ur to Haran in Mesopotamia near the source of the Euphrates. Later, when his father died, he crossed the river with his wife and nephew Lot, and journeyed to the Promised Land which Abram discovered was the land of Canaan. <sup>v.5</sup> The LORD then promised to give this land to Abram’s seed: “Unto thy seed will I give this land” <sup>v.7</sup> and this seed, the New Testament teaches, is Christ.

#### **Week 4**

#### **Genesis 13**

#### **Tuesday**

Abram prospered in the new land together with his nephew Lot until the increase in herds and flocks caused grazing disputes among their servants. To eliminate this problem, Abram invited Lot to choose the pasture land he preferred, with Abram living elsewhere, to effect an amicable separation. Lot chose the fertile Jordan valley, and Abram received a reiteration of God’s promise which detailed the extent of the promised land: “And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make

thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee”.vs.14-17

You should note the precise quotation of this passage by the Apostle Paul to prove that Christ is the promised seed to inherit the land: “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ”.Gal:3:16

#### **Week 4**

#### **Genesis 14**

#### **Wednesday**

Abram became a powerful personage in the land of Canaan and was successful, with armed servants, in rescuing Lot when he was taken captive with the people of Sodom by invaders from the far side of the Euphrates. At this time a most significant event occurred on his return. He was met by Melchizekek who was “the priest of the most high God”.v.18 Melchizedek brought bread and wine and blessed Abram, and Abram honoured Melchizedek with a tenth of the spoils.v.18- 20

The Apostle explains (Hebrews 5:5-10) the importance of this record by connecting it with a prophecy concerning Jesus, in the Psalms, of God’s words to him when he went to heaven after his resurrection: “The LORD (God) said unto my Lord (Jesus). Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek”.Psa.110:1,4 Jesus is therefore now a priest at God’s right hand as a priest of the order of Melchizedek.

The Apostle also identifies some important points in the purpose of God from these scriptures including the fact that, as Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, the priesthood of Christ must be superior to the order of priesthood later occupied by Abram’s descendants in the line of Aaron under the Law of Moses. These priests were required to make sacrifices regularly and continually for the sins of God’s people, which were efficacious only for a short while; whereas Jesus made just one sacrifice, of himself, to give forgiveness of sins for ever. Heb.10:10-14

The name Melchizedek means “king of righteousness” and his title “king of Salem” means “king of peace” and the Apostle points out the significance of the order of these names and titles for in God’s purpose there must first be righteousness and only then can there be peace: “To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace”. Heb.7:2

#### **Week 4**

#### **Genesis 15**

#### **Thursday**

Abram was 75 and his wife 65 and childless when they entered the Promised Land, and with the passage of time it looked more and more impossible that they

would ever have a child. Nevertheless, God reassured him that he would have his own son as his heir,<sup>v.4</sup> and that through this son his descendants would become a great multitude, “as the stars of heaven”.<sup>v.5</sup> And Abram believed God, therefore God counted him righteous. This is a vital lesson, drawn by the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 4, that the only people God will consider righteous are those who have Abram’s faith which is the complete conviction that God will perform his promises.

God again promised Abram the land of Canaan and confirmed it in the way men in those days fixed agreements between themselves - by sacrificing animals, separating them, and then walking between them,<sup>vs.9-13</sup> God himself being represented in this transaction by a burning lamp.<sup>v.17</sup> This, however, was only a typical confirmation of the covenant, the proper confirmation being the sacrifice, not of animals, but of Christ. Consequently, Abram fell asleep into an horror of great darkness to represent the death of Jesus when he was crucified with darkness falling on the whole land at noon for three hours until he sank into the sleep of death.<sup>Lu;23:44-46</sup> The covenant which God made with Abram was to give his seed, which is Christ, the land of Canaan and the extent of this promised land was revealed to Abram at this time: from the river Euphrates in the north to the river of Egypt, running into the Mediterranean between Sinai and the Negev, in the south, being occupied then by the peoples listed.<sup>vs.18-21</sup>

During his sleep, Abram was informed by dream what would happen to his natural descendants over the succeeding four hundred years. They would live in “a land not theirs”, which turned out to be Egypt, where they would be afflicted until they would return to the Promised Land. Thus, during those centuries faithful men and women would be able to look forward, even when under cruel bondage, and anticipate God’s intervention to deliver Israel from Egypt and take them back to Canaan. In the same way to-day we, with the knowledge God’s declared purpose, can anticipate the return of the Jews to the Promised Land not only from Egypt but also from all the countries of the world (Jer.16:14-15).

It is significant that the delay in God’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt was because the iniquity of the Amorites, the inhabitants of the land, was not yet full. This illustrates the LORD’s longsuffering. People are inclined to think when they see great wickedness in the earth that God does not see, or even does not exist, yet he does and in longsuffering is awaiting the time when he will pour out his righteous judgments as he did upon Egypt and the Amorites long ago. And all the signs indicate that this time of judgment is very near at hand.

#### **Week 4**

#### **Genesis 17**

#### **Friday**

Although Abram had a son, Ishmael, by a bondwoman, he reached the age of ninety-nine v.1 without having a son by his wife, Sarai, as God had promised. At such advanced ages it seemed impossible that they would have a son, so God reaffirmed his promise and as an assurance of it changed Abram’s name to

Abraham, meaning “father of a multitude” because out of him would come nations and kings. The New Testament explains the significance of this, that Abraham was not only to be the father of his natural descendants, the Jews, but also the father of all those of whatever nation who become faithful disciples of Christ and who ultimately will reign with Jesus as kings in the earth.

Sarai’s name was also changed, to “Sarah” meaning princess because, through her son Isaac, she would be the mother of these kings. As a token of this covenant in Isaac, God instituted circumcision involving the cutting off of the flesh; to represent the ultimate purpose of God which is to populate the earth, not with people of flesh and blood, but with the seed of Abraham who will all be immortal and incorruptible.

#### **Week 4**

#### **Genesis 19**

#### **Saturday**

God is longsuffering but when man’s iniquity becomes full he executes his righteous judgment upon them. His main purpose, however, is to deliver the righteous. The events recorded in this chapter provide a dramatic illustration of this in the destruction of the inhabitants of wicked cities but the deliverance of the righteous therein. Jesus and his Apostles cite this as a serious warning to others including ourselves today, e.g. “And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; and delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds)”. 2Pet.2:6-8

Because Lot lived in Sodom, Abraham prayed for its inhabitants, and God agreed to spare the city if there were ten righteous persons therein, ch.18:32 but only Lot and his two daughters escaped the destruction of the city. Their salvation and the suddenness of God’s judgment upon the wicked is cited by Jesus in exhortation to his disciples to be righteous, watchful, and prepared: “Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed”. Luke.17:28

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