

And the LORD shut him in

We must recognise that it was a miracle for such a vast number of animals, birds and insects to be brought into the ark and preserved there. God brought the animals and birds to Adam to be named (2:20) and it is certain that he brought the animals to Noah to be taken into the ark. Noah was six hundred years old when he took his household into the ark at the command of God (1-9). You will have noticed that the civilisation that lived before the flood enjoyed a very long life-span; this was greatly reduced in the civilisation to follow.

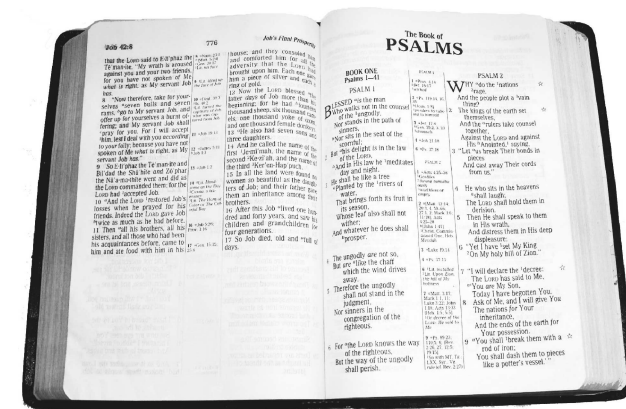
A massive earthquake below the depths of the ocean triggered the tsunami in Asia in December 2004. Huge waves destroyed the coast, towns and villages of several countries, killing many, many thousands. That catastrophe was nothing compared with the terrifying flood described here. *The fountains of the great deep were broken up* (11). There were great tidal waves and the earth was totally submerged after forty days and nights of torrential rain (11-12).

The water began to recede after one hundred and fifty days (24), but Noah was in the ark for more than a year (11; 8:13-14). Why did God send the flood? It was his judgment on wicked people (6:13) who had rejected the preaching of Noah (1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5). The Lord Jesus said that before he comes again, the same godless conditions will prevail in the world as they did in the time of Noah. His second coming will be a wonderful event for those who belong to him, but it will be a dreadful day for unbelievers (Matthew 24:36-44).

And the LORD shut him in (16). Noah and his family were safe in the ark but it was too late for those outside because God had shut them out. If your heart is right with God you can look forward to the return of Christ with great joy and longing. You can say in the words of Scripture, *‘Even so, come, Lord Jesus’* (Revelation 22:20). Heaven and endless bliss await you. **You will be shut in and safe with God for ever. If you are not a true Christian, you will be shut out for ever.** The Lord Jesus warns, *‘Be ready’* (Matthew 24:44). Are you?

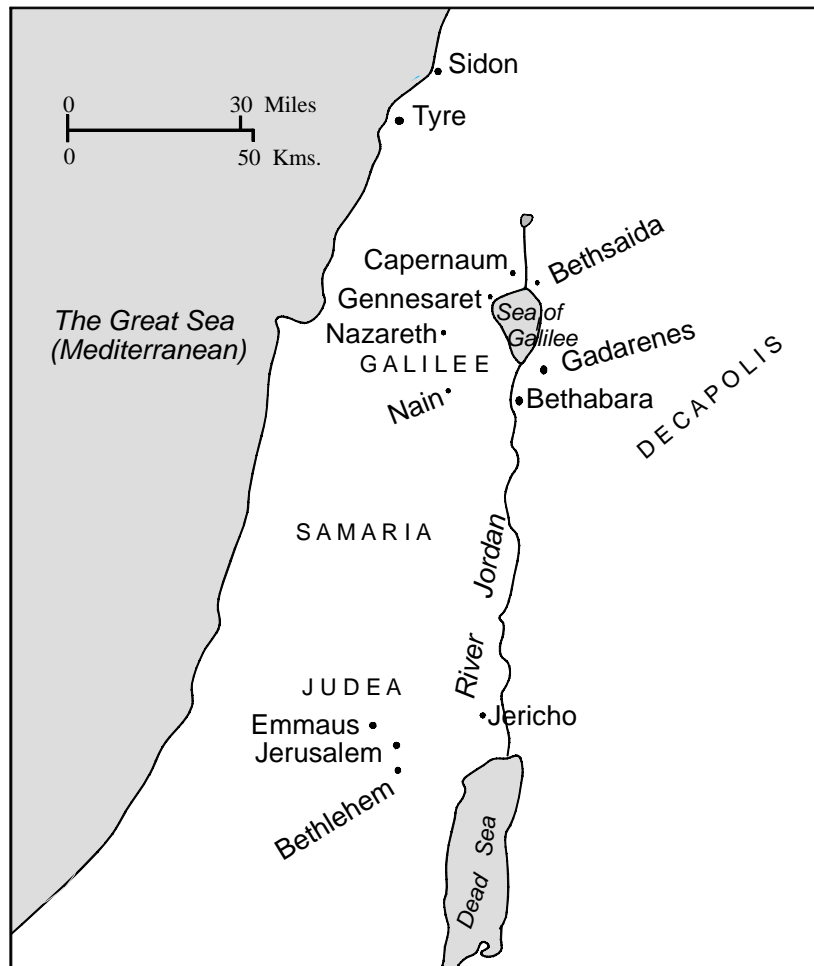
PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



March 2021

Bible readings from the Gospel of Luke chapters 8 to 10
Genesis chapters 1 to 7



According to all that God commanded him, so he did

God told Noah to make an ark of gopher wood (14). Scholars cannot identify the tree from which this wood is obtained, but John Currid suggests that it may be cypress (COMMENTARY ON GENESIS, pages 187–188). The basket in which Moses was placed to be hidden in the reeds of the River Nile was also described as an ‘ark’ (Exodus 2:3). Noah’s ark and Moses’ ark were both designed to save their occupants from being destroyed by water and both were coated with pitch. Noah’s ark measured 300 cubits in length, 50 cubits wide and thirty cubits high. A cubit is approximately eighteen inches. This makes the ark 450 feet (140 metres) long, 75 feet (23 metres) wide and 45 feet (13.5 metres) high. There were three decks inside the ark (15–16).

God revealed to Noah that he would destroy the world by a flood and that all life on earth would die. He promised Noah, ‘I will establish my covenant with you’ (17–18). This is the first time that the word ‘covenant’ is found in the Bible. God was graciously committing himself to rescue Noah and his family from judgment, to preserve a line from which the promised Saviour would come (cp. 3:15).

The Lord told Noah that he was to take his wife, sons and daughters-in-law into the ark once it was built. He was also to take two of each kind of animal, one male and one female and to keep them alive. He was also to gather sufficient food for himself and all the creatures in the ark (19–22). The diet was vegetarian as no flesh was eaten up to this time (cp. 1:29–30).

Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did (22). John Currid observes, ‘**Noah was obedient, no matter that he was at odds with the world. Instead of conforming to the world, he was obedient to God’s word.**’ The building of a ship must have seemed ludicrous to Noah’s neighbours, who had never seen a flood, or even any rain (see 2:5). But Noah was not swayed, and he remained faithful to God’ (COMMENTARY ON GENESIS, Volume 1, page 191).

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Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD

God is never without a witness, even when the world is full of darkness and wickedness. God's man for the hour was Noah. Our reading tells us several things about him:

- *Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD* (8). Grace is the undeserved favour of God and this that made Noah different from those around him. He had the privilege of coming from a godly line but that did not save him. We are saved because of the grace of God, not through our own family connections nor by works (Ephesians 2:8–9).
- *Noah was a just ('righteous') man* (9); this means that he was holy. Christian, God has chosen you in Christ and called you that you might be holy (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:15–16). If you have no interest in holiness, you should question whether you are a true believer.
- He was *perfect in his generations* (9). This does not mean that he was sinless, but that he had a blameless testimony among those who were wicked. Noah was a man who dared to stand alone and be different. He resisted the pressures to fit in with the wicked and corrupt world in which he lived.
- Like his great-grandfather Enoch, *Noah walked with God* (9; see notes for 27 March).
- He enjoyed fellowship with God and the Lord revealed to him that he would judge the world, and afterwards make a covenant with him (13,18).
- He was obedient to God's word (22; 7:5). We read in the New Testament that Noah was motivated by reverence and godly fear (Hebrews 11:7).

Is it obvious to your relatives and to those around that you are walking with God?

*So shall my walk be close with God,
Calm and serene my frame;
So purer light shall mark the road
That leads me to the Lamb.* (William Cowper)

What have I to do with you, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?

The Gadarenes on the east of the Sea of Galilee had a predominantly Gentile population (cp. *Galilee of the Gentiles*– Matthew 4:15). This explains *a herd of many swine* (32) as these were 'unclean' animals which would not have been kept by Jews. When Jesus and his disciples left the boat they were met by a demon-possessed man. This poor wretch lived among the tombs and ran around wild, naked, shrieking and cutting himself with stones. He had superhuman strength through demonic power and chains could not hold him (26–29; cp. Mark 5:5). The encounter of Jesus with the demons teaches us three vital truths:

- That Jesus is God. The disciples had asked a short time earlier, *'Who can this be? For he commands even the winds and water, and they obey him!'* (25). The man fell down before the Lord Jesus and the demon, speaking for the evil spirits within him supplied the answer. *'What have I to do with you, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?'* (28). This title of Jesus shows that he is God. The Jews recognised that this title is one of deity and their religious leaders hated the Lord Jesus for calling God his *Father* (John 5:18).
- That demons are subject to the Lord Jesus. They begged Jesus not to torment them (28). The lovely presence of Jesus was a source of torment to these foul, unclean spirits. They gladly serve their master, the devil, but when confronted with Jesus, they met One who is greater than the devil. They had to answer to Jesus and knew that they could only go where he permitted (30–32).
- That demons believed in God's judgment and in the eternal punishment of the wicked. They asked Jesus not to send them *into the abyss* but to allow them to enter the herd of pigs (31–32). The *abyss* is the dreadful place prepared for the devil and his angels to which those who are lost will also be banished (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10). Christians have no need to dread the day of judgment or condemnation (Romans 8:1). **Are you a real Christian?**

Tell what great things God has done for you

The demons left the man at the command of Jesus and entered a herd of pigs which ran over the cliffs to perish in the sea. The terrified swineherds fled to the city to tell their story and the people went to see what had happened. They saw the man who had been previously possessed *sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind*. (32–35). Dale Ralph Davis observes, ‘They looked at that wholeness, that quietness, that submission, that sanity — *and they were afraid*’ (LUKE 1–13 – THE YEAR OF THE LORD’S FAVOUR, page 145). We read of two requests in verses 37 and 38 which show two contrasting attitudes towards the Lord Jesus:

- The people of the region did not welcome Jesus, nor did they bring their sick for healing, but *asked him to depart from them* (37). He granted their request *and he got into the boat and returned*. Are you shocked by the attitude of those people? The demons knew that they had no hope of forgiveness. Their doom was already set; they knew that everlasting torment awaited them. The people of that region could have heard a message of glorious hope. They had no need to fear the Lord Jesus if only they had received him and repented of their sin. Many people say that they are too busy to think about God or the Christian message. They are more concerned for their hobbies and pleasure than for the eternal well-being of their soul. They scoff when told of coming judgment. It is tragic that men and women, deceived by Satan and enslaved in their sins refuse God’s offer of mercy. Jesus once said to others who had rejected him, ‘*You are not willing to come to me that you may have life*’ (John 5:40).

- The man who had been delivered from the demons was different. He begged the Lord Jesus that he might remain with him but he was to be more useful at home, witnessing to his family (38). Jesus said to him, ‘*Tell what great things God has done for you.*’ He needed no persuasion but went proclaiming what great things Jesus had done for him throughout the city (39). **When did you last tell someone what the Lord Jesus has done for you?**

The LORD was sorry ... and he was grieved in his heart

The population of the world greatly increased and the men * from the godly line of Seth intermarried with women from the godless line of Cain being attracted by their physical beauty (1–2). *The wickedness of man was great in the earth ... every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually* (5). We also read that the earth was corrupt and filled with violence (11–12). Why did wickedness increase? The women from Cain’s line did not have the inner beauty of a godly heart and it is significant that after the deaths of Lamech and Methuselah, the only godly people left on earth were Noah and his family. Satan still uses the same tactics! Many Christians have sinned by marrying unbelievers and have suffered great spiritual loss.

God is patient, but he is not indifferent to human wickedness. He said, ‘*My Spirit shall not strive with man forever*’ and he gave the people 120 years to repent before he sent the flood (3). Noah was a preacher of righteousness, but the people refused to repent of their sin and the Lord destroyed them (1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5).

The LORD was sorry ... and he was grieved in his heart (6). Does this mean that God has disappointment or regrets over thwarted plans? Does it mean that he had made a mistake in creating man? No, not at all! God’s purposes can never be frustrated (Isaiah 14:24,27). Before he created Adam, he knew that Adam would sin. He also decreed before he made the world that Christ would die for sinners (Acts 2:23). When we sorrow and grieve, it is with a sense of helplessness, but not so with God. John Currid points out that ‘Moses is employing expressions of human pain and sorrow to demonstrate God’s attitude towards mankind’s sin’ (COMMENTARY ON GENESIS, page 179).

* Some commentators believe that ‘*the sons of God*’ in verse 2 refer to fallen angels who married into the human race and produced offspring who were *giants* (4). I cannot agree with such speculation. It is true that angels are called ‘*sons of God*’ (eg. Job 1:6; 2:1) but they are incapable of reproduction (Matthew 22:30). See John Currid’s COMMENTARY ON GENESIS, volume 1, pages 173–175.

And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him

Genealogies do not appear to be very interesting at first glance but they are important! Adam *begot a son in his own likeness, after his image* (3), not in the image of God but in the spoiled image of sinful man. Seth was born with a sinful nature and so is every child born since the fall of Adam (cp. Psalm 51:5). Notice the repetition of the statement, ‘*and he died*’ throughout the chapter (5,8,11, etc.). Satan had assured Eve, ‘*You will not surely die*’ (3:4), but these words expose his lie.

There is a man mentioned in this chapter who did escape death: *And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him* (24). What is involved in walking with God?

- The Bible tells us very little about Enoch, but *he had this testimony, that he pleased God* (Hebrews 11:5) To walk with God is to please him by obeying his Word (Colossians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:1). Enoch lived in a godless society, but he was determined to please God rather than men. **What kind of testimony do you have?**
- To walk with God is to love him. Love lies at the heart of our desire to please him (cp. John 14:23).
- To walk with God is to trust in him and put our faith in him. *Without faith it is impossible to please him* (Hebrews 11:6).
- To walk with God is to agree with him. *Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?* (Amos 3:3). Do you agree with what God says in his Word and accept the teaching of the Bible? If you do not, you cannot walk with God.

Enoch prophesied of Christ’s second coming (Jude 14–15). He may also have prophesied of the judgment to come through the flood which came the very year that his son Methuselah died. Lamech the son of Methuselah, and father of Noah, was a man who acknowledged God in his life (29).

*When we walk with the Lord, in the light of his Word,
What a glory he sheds on our way!
While we do his good will, he abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey!* (John H. Sammis)

Do not be afraid; only believe

A multitude welcomed Jesus after he arrived in Galilee from the boat. Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, came to Jesus and falling at his feet, begged him to come to his house to heal his twelve year old daughter who was dying (40–42). As Jesus was going to the home of Jairus, a woman came behind him and touched the fringe of his garment. She had suffered twelve years of misery through continuous haemorrhages and had spent all that she had in search of a cure but without success (43). Her condition would have rendered her ceremonially unclean. and anyone touching her would also be unclean (Leviticus 15:19–27). This probably explains why she did not want the Lord Jesus to know that she had touched his garment (47). Many people had touched Jesus as they crowded upon him but he knew that she had touched his garment expecting to be healed (45–46). He said to her, ‘*Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace*’ (48).

While Jesus was still speaking to the woman, someone came to Jairus to tell him that his daughter had died. In his sudden grief and sorrow, Jairus heard the wonderful words of Jesus, ‘*Do not be afraid; only believe, and she will be made well*’ (49–50). The Lord Jesus wanted Jairus to trust him, even in this dark hour.

In Bible times professional mourners were called in when someone died. They were experts in the art of weeping and wailing, moaning and groaning (cp. Jeremiah 9:17–18). Their performance turned to scornful laughter when Jesus told them that the girl was not dead but sleeping. He only permitted Jairus and his wife, Peter, James and John to go into the house. Her grieving parents were astonished when they saw the Lord Jesus raise their daughter from the dead. She may not have eaten for some time because of her illness and Jesus told her parents to give her something to eat (51–56). Hendriksen writes, ‘His power cannot be fathomed, nor his compassion measured’ (page 463). Can you imagine the impact of these miracles on the congregation of the synagogue ruled by Jairus? **Are you distraught and fearful? Oh, trust in our precious Saviour who says, ‘Do not be afraid; only believe.’**

He sent them to preach

The ministry of the Lord Jesus in Galilee was soon to finish (see verse 51) and he gave the twelve disciples *power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases*. He sent them two by two *to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick* (1–2; Mark 6:7). They were to have a simple lifestyle and not take money or food with them but look to traditional eastern hospitality for their provision (3–4). Jesus had said earlier, *‘I must preach the kingdom of God’* (4:43) and he now tells his disciples that they must do the same (2). We enter *the kingdom of God* by repentance from our sins and trusting in the gospel (Mark 1:15). In this kingdom, we gladly submit to the reign of God in our lives.

They went *preaching the gospel ... everywhere* (6). J.C. Ryle comments, ‘The importance of preaching, as a means of grace, might easily be gathered from this passage, even if it stood alone. But it is but one instance, among many, of the high value which the Bible everywhere sets upon preaching. It is, in fact, God’s chosen instrument for doing good to souls. By it sinners are converted, inquirers led on, and saints built up. A preaching ministry is absolutely essential to the health and prosperity of a visible church. The pulpit is the place where the chief victories of the gospel have always been won, and no church has ever done much for the advancement of true religion in which the pulpit has been neglected’ (EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON LUKE, volume 1, page 292).

The Lord Jesus told his disciples that when a house or city rejected them and their message, they should shake off the dust from their feet (5). This refers to the Jewish custom of shaking the dust from their sandals and clothes before re-entering the Holy Land after passing through Gentile territory; this was to avoid ritual uncleanness. By shaking the dust from their feet, the disciples were giving a symbolic warning that God would surely punish those Jews who rejected the gospel. They were unclean and were no better than Gentiles (cp. Acts 13:49–51). **If we reject Christ, we are in great danger!**

Then men began to call on the name of the LORD

Cain may have been able to hide his sin from humans, but he could not hide it from God. The question, *‘Where is Abel your brother?’* (9) was not asked because God did not know what had happened to Abel, but to obtain a confession of sin from Cain. God cursed him and he feared for his own life (11, 14). He said to the Lord, *‘My punishment is greater than I can bear! Surely you have driven me out ... I shall be hidden from your face’* (13–14). He was much wiser than most people today. He realised that to be hidden from the smile and protection of God made life too dreadful to bear. *Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD and dwelt in the land of Nod* (which means ‘wandering’, 16).

We are often asked, ‘From where did Cain obtain his wife?’ We must remember that Adam and Eve had many other sons and daughters (5:4). They were told by God to be fruitful, to multiply and to populate the earth (1:28). Lists of family names in the Bible only record those who are significant and we are only told the names of three of the children of Adam and Eve. There were many others living on earth by the time God banished Cain.

We are given a glimpse of two civilisations in this chapter – those descended from Cain and those descended from his brother Seth. Lamech who descended from Cain was the first polygamist to be named in Scripture and he was also a murderer. One of his sons led a nomadic existence keeping livestock, one was a musician, and another a skilled metal-worker, but God had no place in their lives (19–24).

The chapter ends with the words, *Then men began to call on the name of the LORD* (26). They sought God in prayer. What a contrast to the words, *Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD* (16)! From the godly line of Seth we can trace Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Christ. Christians are those who *call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord* (1 Corinthians 1:2). **It is a great privilege to be able to call upon the name of the LORD in prayer.**

Blood cries out

Sin brought a bitter harvest into the lives of Adam and Eve. Cain, their first son, became a murderer, slaying his younger brother. Both sons had been taught about the Lord and they brought offerings to him. God requires blood sacrifice to atone for sin (Hebrews 9:22). He accepted Abel's offering which fulfilled his requirements but he rejected Cain's offering of the fruit of the ground. An angry Cain refused to do as God required and in his jealous rage he shed blood by the murder of his brother rather than by animal sacrifice (1–7).

John Currid comments, 'Although both children are physically descended from Eve, spiritually they are descendants of differing lines. 1 John 3:12 tells us that Cain was 'of the evil one', and so he is the first in a long line of the seed of the serpent. Abel, on the contrary, was truly a righteous man (see Hebrews 11:4; Matthew 23:35). – COMMENTARY ON GENESIS, volume 1, pages 143–144.

Cain pleaded ignorance when he was challenged by God. The Lord then said to him, '*What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground*' (10). Abel's blood cried out for justice and revenge but the blood of the Lord Jesus *speaks better things than that of Abel* (Hebrews 12:24). The message of the cross may seem foolish (1 Corinthians 1:18) but it is only through the shed blood of Jesus that there is forgiveness and cleansing from sin (Ephesians 1:7; 1 John 1:7). **Let us lift up our hearts in praise to God because the blood of Jesus speaks mercy, forgiveness, peace and eternal life.**

*Glory be to Jesus,
Who in bitter pains,
Poured for me the life-blood
From his sacred veins.*

*Abel's blood for vengeance
Pleaded to the skies;
But the blood of Jesus
For our pardon cries.*

(Edward Caswall)

He sought to see him

Herod the Great, the tyrant who had sought to kill the infant Jesus, had ten wives. He bequeathed his kingdom to three of his sons. Herod Antipas ruled over Galilee and Perea. Another son, Philip, ruled over the north-eastern territories of the kingdom, and Archelaus over Judea and Samaria. The Romans deposed Archelaus in AD 6 and imposed direct rule over Judea and Samaria (Pontius Pilate became governor of these territories in AD 26).

John the Baptist had fearlessly denounced Herod Antipas for his adultery with Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. Herod had imprisoned John but was fascinated by the message of the bold preacher and heard him gladly (Mark 6:17–29). He did not repent of his sin however, and later he had John beheaded. He had silenced John but he could not silence his own conscience. When he heard about Jesus, he was perplexed because some claimed that John had risen from the dead. Others were saying that Jesus was Elijah or one of the prophets who had risen again (7–8). Herod *sought to see him* but when the opportunity came, the Lord Jesus had nothing to say to him (23:8–9). He had squandered his opportunities to repent. **It is not enough to hear God's Word or to have an interest in religion. We must repent of our sin, turn to the Lord and trust in him!**

When the disciples returned from their preaching mission, they gave Jesus an account of all that they had done (10). At this time Jesus heard the dreadful news of the murder of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:12–13). They needed rest and Jesus took them to a deserted place belonging to the city of Bethsaida (10). J.C. Ryle comments, 'Those who do public work for the souls of others, must be careful to make time for being alone with God. The lesson is one which many Christians would do well to remember. Occasional retirement, self-enquiry, meditation, and secret communion with God, are absolutely essential to spiritual health. The man who neglects them is in great danger of a fall' (EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON LUKE, volume 1, page 297).

You give them something to eat

Jesus took the disciples to a deserted place belonging to Bethsaida in order to rest. They went by boat along the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee but there was no escape from the huge crowds, who went by foot around the shore to await his arrival (10–11; cp. Mark 6:30–33). Though Jesus and his disciples needed to rest, he received the people and *spoke to them about the kingdom of God* and healed those who were sick. .

As the day progressed, the weary disciples wanted Jesus to send away the multitude, but he said to them, ‘*You give them something to eat.*’ They protested that they had only five barley loaves and two fish which a lad had taken with him (John 6:9). These ‘loaves’ were each the size of a small cake. Their suggestion of going to buy food for the multitude was not possible (12–13). The Lord Jesus told the disciples to sit the people in groups of fifty and then he blessed the loaves and fish. He miraculously fed them from just five loaves and two fish. Five thousand men, besides women and children ate and were filled and twelve baskets were filled with the remains of the meal (14–17; Matthew 14:21). The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle of Jesus which is recorded in each of the Gospels.

Those of us who are Christians know the answer to the desperate plight of men, women, boys and girls around us. We know that this world can never satisfy them and that if they are not fed with spiritual ‘bread’, they will be lost for ever and perish in hell. Is the Lord Jesus saying to you, ‘*You give them something to eat*’? **What greater satisfaction is there than seeing a hungry soul satisfied with the food of the gospel?**

*O lead me, Lord, that I may lead
The wandering and the wavering feet!
O feed me, Lord, that I may feed
Thy hungering ones with manna sweet!*

(Frances R. Havergal)

Where are you?

Adam and Eve soon discovered the dreadful consequences of their rebellion against God. They were gripped with a sense of guilt, shame and fear as soon they ate the forbidden fruit. They were ashamed of their nakedness and made garments of fig leaves to cover themselves. Their peace and fellowship with God gave way to alienation and fear, and they tried to hide themselves from the Lord (7–8).

The grace of God is wonderful! He sought the rebels and called to Adam, ‘*Where are you?*’ (9). Adam and Eve tried to shift the blame for their sin. Adam blamed Eve and she blamed the serpent (12–13). We must not make excuses when we sin. God still calls, ‘*Where are you?*’ **We will never know real satisfaction unless we are right with God and are enjoying fellowship with him and with his people.**

Adam’s disobedience brought ruin and misery on mankind and on all creation (16–19; Romans 5:12; 8:20–23):

- For the woman. She was sentenced to pain in childbearing and she would be in subjection to her husband. The harmony, joy and intimacy of the marriage relationship was spoiled by sin.
- For the man. The ground became cursed so that he would know hard toil and frustration in cultivating the earth.
- For all creation. Death came into the world (Romans 5:12). God made man from the dust of the ground (2:7) and men and women return to dust through death.

God promised a coming deliverer, the Lord Jesus Christ, who would bruise Satan’s head (15). This is the first of many promises in the Old Testament which speak of the coming of Christ into the world to destroy the works of the devil (Romans 16:20; 1 John 3:8). Everyone should know the three R’s of the gospel, the first of which is found in this chapter: Ruin (Genesis chapter 3); Redemption (Romans chapter 3) and Regeneration (John chapter 3). **Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden, but let us thank God that he has provided the way of reconciliation to himself through the blood of the cross.**

Has God indeed said ... ?

If God's creation was very good (1:31) why is the world in such a mess? We have the answer in these verses. We are not told here that the serpent is Satan, but the New Testament confirms that this is so (2 Corinthians 11:3,14; Revelation 12:9; 20:2). Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44). How does he tempt us to sin?

- He casts doubt on God's Word. '*Has God indeed said ... ?*' He may even contradict what God has plainly declared. He told Eve, '*You will not surely die*' (1,4). He still attacks the Word of God and seeks to make us doubt it. He also blinds unbelievers so that they scorn the warnings of judgment and hell found in the Bible.
- He makes us doubt the goodness of God. His question to Eve in verse 1 made it appear that God was denying access to every tree in the garden. That was not true (2:16–17).
- He makes sin appear attractive. The devil made the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil appear to be more desirable than the fruit of any other tree, though they were all *pleasant to the sight and good for food* (2:9). *So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took its fruit and ate* (5–6). **Sin is always more attractive in the imagination than in reality.** Satan promised them so much but they soon proved him to be a liar. He enticed Eve by promising, '*You will be like God, knowing good and evil*' (5). Adam and Eve did not know evil before they fell, but afterward they experienced the dreadful effects of sin and the suffering that it brings.

It is not sin to be tempted. Satan tempted the Lord Jesus. We sin when we yield to temptation but we do not have to give in to sin's seduction (Romans 6:14)! God is faithful and will help us when we are tempted if we look to him (1 Corinthians 10:13). Have you been allowing your thoughts to feed on forbidden things? **Sin always begins in the heart and mind before it has its outward manifestation.** Satan aims to ruin us just as he ruined Adam and Eve. Let us be on our guard and may God give us grace to stand firm.

But who do you say that I am?

After travelling north to Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:13), Jesus asked his disciples, '*Who do the crowds say that I am?*' They answered by saying that opinions varied, some thinking that he was John the Baptist, others that he was Elijah or one of the prophets who had risen again (18–19; cp. verses 7–8). People continue to have different opinions about the Lord Jesus. They say that he is the founder of Christianity, a great religious teacher, a wonderful example to follow or a prophet. All these answers are inadequate.

The Lord Jesus knows our thoughts (11:17), so why would he ask the disciples about the opinion of others concerning himself? The answer is that it matters little what others think about Jesus. He was using the first question that he put to the disciples to make way for his next question, '*But who do you say that I am?*' (20). **What we think about Jesus is most important!**

Peter's confession, '*the Christ of God*' (20) acknowledged Jesus as:

- The Christ, the Messiah promised through the prophets of the Old Testament (24:27; 44–45; Acts 28:23).
- The Son of God (see Matthew 16:16). This is a title of deity (John 5:18). He is God (John 1:1–3; Romans 9:5); any religion that denies that Jesus is God is a false religion.

We are not told why Jesus commanded the disciples that they should not reveal his identity as the Messiah (21). It was probably to prevent the people acclaiming him as a political leader who would free the nation from Roman servitude and restore Israel's greatness. Jesus had a far greater mission! From this point in his ministry, he began to teach his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem where he would be killed and be raised the third day (22). The disciples had not realised that Jesus would suffer, die and conquer death in order to save sinners (cp. Matthew 16:22). They were unable to take in what he was saying to them (see verse 44–45; 18:31–34).

Who do you say that I am?

What think you of Christ? is the test
To try both your state and your scheme;
You cannot be right in the rest,
Unless you think rightly of him.
As Jesus appears in your view,
As he is beloved or not;
So God is disposed to you,
And mercy or wrath are your lot.

Some take him a creature to be,
A man or an angel at most;
Sure these have not feelings like me,
Nor know themselves wretched and lost.
So guilty, so helpless am I,
I durst not confide in his blood,
Nor on his protection rely,
Unless I am sure he is God.

Some style him the pearl of great price,
And say he's the fountain of joys;
Yet feed upon folly and vice,
And cling to the world and its joys;
Like Judas, the Saviour they kiss,
And while they salute him, betray;
Ah! what will profession like this
Avail in his terrible day?

If ask'd, what of Jesus I think?
Though still my best thoughts are but poor,
I say, He's my meat and my drink,
My life, and my strength, and my store;
My Shepherd, my Husband, my Friend,
My Saviour from sin and from thrall;
My hope from beginning to end,
My portion, my Lord, and my All

(John Newton)

22 MARCH

Genesis 2:4–25

It is not good that man should be alone

Adam is not a mythical person but a real man who is spoken of throughout the New Testament (eg. Romans 5:12–19; 1 Corinthians 15:45; 1 Timothy 2:13–14). This chapter gives us more details of the creation of man. Adam was different from animals (7):

- *The LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground; he was fashioned from an already existing material. Adam was from the dust, but he was made in the image of God (1:26).*
- *God breathed into him the breath of life; and man became a living being.'*

God planted the garden of Eden and placed Adam in this perfect environment to cultivate the garden and to care for it (8,15). Two specific trees are mentioned by name (9).

- *The tree of life which was also ; this indicates that it was in the very heart of the garden.*
- *The tree of the knowledge of good and evil* Eve said that it was also *in the midst of the garden* (3:3). God warned Adam that he would surely die if he ate its fruit (17).

Adam lacked just one thing and God said, '*It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him*' (18–23). Matthew Henry comments on these verses, 'The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to top him, not out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.' **Let those of us who are married prayerfully seek at all times to work for a marriage and home where the Lord is always loved, honoured and obeyed.**

Verse 24 shows that marriage was instituted by God before the fall of Adam; it is monogamous, each person having only one mate. Polygamy came with Lamech, the wicked descendant of Cain (4:19). Marriage is also heterosexual; there is no place for homosexuality or bisexuality; this is affirmed throughout the Bible.

Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it

God's work of creation was a completed work: *The heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished* (1). God did not rest on the seventh day because he was weary after his work of creation (2). He never grows weary (Isaiah 40:28). God's rest was a rest of accomplishment, of satisfaction and of joy.

Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it (3); He set apart the Sabbath as a special day. The fourth commandment is the longest of the ten, and we must not despise it (Exodus 20:8–11). The Lord Jesus has not abolished the Sabbath; he is '*Lord of the Sabbath*' (Mark 2:28). He was criticised for healing the sick on the Sabbath, but in those instances he offended man-made rules not the fourth commandment. The first day of the week, the Lord's Day, has become the Christian Sabbath (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10).

Evangelicals have generally become very careless with regard to keeping the Lord's Day, claiming that we have been released from such 'legalism' because we are not under law but under grace (Romans 6:14–15). The New Testament endorses the keeping of the ten commandments (eg. Ephesians 6:1–3). Is it legalism to have a day specially sanctified for worship when we can draw aside from the daily pressures of work? **Is it legalism to observe a day which testifies of creation (God resting on the seventh day)? Is it legalism to observe the Lord's Day which testifies to the rising of Christ from the dead?**

How should we keep the Lord's Day? There is necessary work which has to be undertaken. Hospitals and power stations, for example, must be kept functioning seven days a week. The Sabbath is 'sanctified' (set apart) for God's people to meet together for worship. It is a day of rest which must not be confused with a day for sport or other leisure pursuits. When we rest from our own everyday work, we are also able to give ourselves to help those in need. Many Christians are proving that 'a Sabbath well spent brings a week of content'.

If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself

Jesus spoke of his own suffering (22) but he also taught that all who follow him must be prepared to suffer. He said, '*If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me*' (23). Taking up the cross means making difficult choices which may lead to suffering shame and persecution for Christ and his kingdom. It means letting go of pride so that we are not ashamed of Jesus (26). It means submitting to the lordship of Christ; if Jesus is not Lord of all in your life, he is not your Lord at all. It may appear that we are 'losing our life' with all its freedom and joys, but this is not true (24). Self-denial does not bring misery, but great liberation and joy as we follow the Lord. J.C. Ryle observes, 'A crucified Saviour will never be content to have a self-pleasing, self-indulging, worldly-minded people. No self-denial — no real grace! No cross — no crown!' (EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON LUKE, volume 1, page 310).

Discipleship is costly but the alternative to following Christ is too dreadful to contemplate. '*For what advantage is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?*' (25). To prefer the world and its passing pleasures to Christ is the height of folly. To be lost is to be alienated from God; it is to lose all hope of eternal life in heaven and everlasting joy. It is to be on the road to hell and everlasting misery!

What does it mean to be ashamed of Jesus (26)? It means feeling embarrassed about being a Christian, it means being afraid of what people think of us. The worldling is not ashamed of his sin or of any superstitious behaviour he may have. **Why should we be ashamed of our perfect, all-powerful Saviour who has done so much for us?**

Jesus promised that some of those present would not *taste death till they see the kingdom of God* (27; '*present with power*' – Mark 9:1). This probably refers to his resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The gospel had a tremendous impact upon the Roman world which the apostles were accused of turning upside down (Acts 17:6).

This is my beloved Son. Hear him!

The Lord Jesus took Peter, James and John up to a mountain to pray where he shone in dazzling splendour (28–29). He was joined by Moses and Elijah who appeared in heavenly glory and they *spoke of his decease* (Greek = ‘departure’; 30–31). Moses represented the law and Elijah the prophets, which were fulfilled in the Lord Jesus (24:25–27). Moses had seen the glory of God on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:9–10), and on another occasion his face had shone, reflecting the glory of God (Exodus 34:29–35). The Lord Jesus does not merely reflect the glory of God, he is God! The brilliance and the majesty seen by the three disciples was that of God himself.

The transfiguration of Jesus made a lasting impression upon them. John wrote, ‘*We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*’ (John 1:14). Peter records, ‘*We ... were eye-witnesses of his majesty*’ (2 Peter 1:16–17). We too will see the glory of Christ at his second coming (Mark 13:26; 2 Thessalonians 1:9–10).

The three disciples had been sleeping but awoke before Moses and Elijah departed. Peter, as often, spoke first and thought afterwards. He said, ‘*Master, it is good for us to be here*’ and he suggested making three shelters, one each for Jesus, Moses and Elijah (33). While he was uttering these words, a cloud overshadowed them and God the Father spoke from the cloud, saying, ‘*This is my beloved Son. Hear him!*’ (35). Jesus had spoken to them about the cross (21–22) and the cost of following him (23–26). They would have found it difficult to believe that the Messiah had come to suffer and to die. **Let us take time to listen to what the Lord Jesus has to say to us through his Word.**

*Master, speak! and make me ready,
When thy voice is truly heard,
With obedience glad and steady
Still to follow every word.
I am listening, Lord, for thee;
Master, speak, O speak to me!*

(Frances R. Havergal)

Let us make man in our image

Man is not an advanced animal, he is a unique being! God said, ‘*Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness*’ (26). Adam’s sin has defaced that glorious image, but we are still able to see God’s image in men and women:

- In knowledge. God is all-knowing and we seek to advance in knowledge. Humans are capable of reason; they write books and compile dictionaries. Animals are incapable of such achievements.
- In morality. *God made man upright* (Ecclesiastes 7:29). Adam was not created with a sinful nature. Man has a conscience and is able to distinguish between right and wrong.
- In creativity. We are able to create masterpieces of art and music. We appreciate beauty and order.
- In freedom. Animals are driven by instinct but man has a will with which he makes reasoned choices.
- In dignity. Man is special and he was made to have dominion over all other creatures (26; cp. Psalm 8:5–8).
- In our capacity to enjoy fellowship with God, to know him, to worship him and to obey him (cp. Colossians 3:10).

We are now seeing the appalling consequences of Charles Darwin’s evolutionary teaching which regards man as little more than an animal. Life is now regarded as a cheap thing and millions of babies are destroyed by abortion. God’s image in us has been defaced since the fall of Adam and violence and wickedness are seen in man’s inhumanity to man. Racial hatred is a denial of our common origin from God.

Our sin separates us from God, but that is not the end of man’s story. **Let us thank God that he has made a way for us to have forgiveness and peace with him through our Lord Jesus Christ. We can be reconciled to God and enjoy fellowship with him. Hallelujah!**

Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light

Creation is the work of the Trinity; notice the plural, ‘*Let us make*’ (26). The activity of the Holy Spirit is seen in verse 2 and we know that all things were made through the Son of God (John 1:1–3; Colossians 1:16–17).

There are some questions that arise concerning creation but lack of space only permits a brief answer:

- ‘Did God really create everything in six days?’ Some understand a day in Genesis 1 to represent a long period of time but I cannot agree with them. The almighty God spoke and things were created, eg. *Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light* (3). After each day of creation we read of ‘*the evening and the morning*’ (5,8, etc.). In the fourth commandment there is no distinction between the length of the days; the same Hebrew word is used for the six days in which we should work as well as the six days of creation (Exodus 20:8–11).
- ‘How could there be light on the first day, before the creation of the sun on the fourth day?’ God is light and he gave the light. The light of the Creator is far greater than that of the sun. We know that in the new Jerusalem there will be no need for sun or moon because light will come from the Lamb of God (Revelation 21:22–23; 22:2–5).
- ‘Do not the ages of the rocks prove the world to be millions of years old rather than a few thousand?’ God created a mature man and also a world with mature rocks.

The Christian sees the world differently from the unbeliever because he knows that God created all things. Creation displays:

- The sure purpose of God – *And it was so* (7,9,11,15,24,30). God’s plans cannot be thwarted (Isaiah 14:27).
- The satisfaction of God. *And God saw that it was good* (10,12,18,21,25,31). There is no room here for the theory of evolution. Creation is God’s work but it was spoiled by man’s sin.
- The infinite power of God. *By the word of the LORD the heavens were made* (Psalm 33:6). As we think of the vastness of the universe, let us worship the almighty, sovereign God (Psalm 95:3–7).

But they did not understand this saying

When Jesus came down from the mountain with Peter, James and John, he found the other disciples disputing with the scribes after failing to exorcise a demon from a boy (a more detailed account is found in Mark 9:14–29). This failure must have brought much scorn from the enemies of Jesus. The distraught father pleaded with Jesus to deliver his only son from the demon which had rendered him deaf and dumb and caused him to throw fits (37–40; cp. Mark 9:25).

Jesus rebuked those around him as a ‘*faithless and perverse generation*’ (41). He was speaking of all those around him in the crowd, including the scribes, the boy’s father, and the disciples (Mark 9:14, 24); Matthew 17:19–20, Jesus told the man to bring his son to him and as he came, the demon threw the boy down in a convulsion. Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and the boy was healed (41–42).

While the astonished crowd was still marvelling at the mighty works of Jesus, he told his disciples for the second time of his death and resurrection: ‘*The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.*’ *But they did not understand this saying, and it was hidden from them so that they did not perceive it* (44–45; see verses 21–22). They could not understand how their Master who had such mighty power over demons and diseases, could be taken by men and they were afraid to ask him for an explanation. **Some people may be weak in their understanding of spiritual things while their hearts are right with God.** The Lord Jesus was so patient with the disciples. Are we patient with those who are slow to learn or who are babes in Christ?

*O Master, let me walk with thee
In lowly paths of service free;
Tell me thy secret; help me bear
The strain of toil, the fret of care.*

*Help me the slow of heart to move
By some clear winning word of love;
Teach me the wayward feet to stay
And guide them in the homeward way.*

(Washington Gladden)

For he who is least among you all will be great

When the Lord Jesus told his disciples that he was about to be betrayed, he added, *‘Let these words sink down into your ears’* but they had not understood him (44–45). Their fear to ask their Master for an explanation soon turned to self-assertiveness. These verses warn us against sins which may lurk in the hearts of all Christians:

- Pride and power-seeking (46–48). Jesus had spoken of the need for self-denial (23), but the disciples were more concerned for personal greatness. He took a little child and pointed to him as a pattern of the humility and childlike trust that he requires in us. If we deny ourselves and take up our cross daily (23), selfish ambition will be kept in check. *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself* (Philippians 2:3). J.C. Ryle comments, ‘Of all sins there is none against which we have such need to watch and pray, as pride ... No sin is so deeply rooted in our nature. It cleaves to us like our skin. Its roots never entirely die. They are ready, at any moment, to spring up, and exhibit a most pernicious vitality’ (EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON LUKE, volume 1, page 327). Jesus said, *‘For he who is least among you all will be great’* (48). If we confess our sinfulness and dependence upon God each day and pray for the grace of humility, it will help drive pride far away from us.
- Intolerance towards other believers (49–50). John may have felt that he and the others should be congratulated for their zeal. They had forbidden the man to cast out demons in the name of Jesus who reminded them that the man was not against them. **We must be intolerant of error, but not of other Christians who love the Word of God and its infallible truths.** They may differ from us in their understanding of certain doctrines such as baptism or church government, but we should be glad when God blesses them in their gospel ministry and uses them to bring men and women to Christ (cp. Philippians 1:18). We should be encouraged by their success to persevere in our work for the Lord.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth

The opening words of the Bible are the key to understanding life; if we leave God out of our thinking, we will certainly go wrong. *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* Godless men who want an explanation for the origin of life have promoted the theory of evolution to explain beginnings without reference to God. Our universe did not come about by accident or by chance. It is the handiwork of God who is absolutely sovereign, powerful and wise (Psalm 19:1). John Currid points out that the opening words of Genesis ‘deny evolution, because man did not develop from the primordial soup, but he was specially created by the one true God. And, frankly, that is why there is meaning to life. That is why those who believe in God can say that our chief reason for existence is to glorify him and enjoy him for ever. If this God is the Creator, then we are to live for his glory!’ (COMMENTARY ON GENESIS, volume 1, page 64).

All that God made was *‘very good’* (31). Life does have purpose and meaning! Man was made in the image of God (26–27) to worship, love and serve him. To be without God is to be without true hope and purpose (Ephesians 2:12). To know that our almighty Creator loves us and delights in us is a great comfort for every Christian (Psalm 121; Isaiah 40:25–31).

Let us now worship God with reverence and with awe! *When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have ordained, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you visit him?...O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is your name in all the earth* (Psalm 8:3–4, 9). **You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for you created all things, and by your will they exist and were created** (Revelation 4:11).

Note:– For those who are interested in the scientific issues concerning creation and evolution, I recommend the literature and DVDs of ‘Creation Ministries International’ (UK) and their beautifully produced colour magazine ‘Creation’. Their address is 15 Station Street, Whetstone, Leicestershire, LE8 6JS 1DG (Website: creation.com).

A recommended Commentary on the Book of Genesis

For further study of the Book of Genesis I warmly recommend John Currid's commentary on Genesis, published by Evangelical Press in two volumes.

John Currid clearly states his position when he comments on the Evangelical Press Study Commentary Series. He writes, 'One reviewer criticised the series for being "too Reformed". Hallelujah! Am I so glad that he noticed! Our theological perspective is unashamedly Reformed. For this we do not apologise. The heart of this commentary series is the belief in a sovereign God who is Creator, Maintainer and Sustainer of the universe. Nothing happens in heaven or on earth apart from his sovereign will. History is "his story", and the Bible relates that history truthfully and accurately. The Scriptures are thus the inerrant words of the sovereign Lord. The ultimate purpose of this commentary series is to glorify this sovereign God by reflecting the majesty of his character as it appears in the Bible. If we have not done that, then we have failed miserably' (Volume 1, page 14).

The commentary is divided into sections, each section containing several short chapters. Each of these chapters closes with application. John Currid is a scholar who loves his Lord and this shines through his commentaries. He does not avoid dealing with the problems raised by unbelieving Bible teachers and he gives a clear and biblical response.

Another useful book is 'Faith of our Father – Expositions of Genesis 12 – 25, by Dale Ralph Davis, published by Christian Focus.

12 MARCH

Luke 9:51–56

The Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save

The time had now come for the Lord Jesus *to be received up* (this refers to his ascension into heaven). He had to die and rise from the dead before he would ascend into heaven and he was determined to complete the work that the Father had given him to do (John 17:4). *He steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem* (51).

Jesus and his disciples were passing through Samaria where a village refused to give them hospitality. The Samaritans bitterly resented the Jews, who had destroyed their temple on Mount Gerizim about 128 BC. They generally turned away those Jews who were travelling through their country to worship at Jerusalem. James and John wanted the Samaritans to be taught a lesson. They asked, '*Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and to consume them, just as Elijah did?*' (54; cp. 2 Kings, chapter 1).

The Lord Jesus rebuked them for their harsh spirit, reminding them, '*The Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them*' (56). James and John would have destroyed a whole village because of its rejection of them. We must contend earnestly for truth, but we must also be humble and gracious toward those who oppose us (2 Timothy 2:24–26). J.C. Ryle observes, 'It is possible to have much zeal for Christ, and yet to exhibit it in most unholy and unchristian ways. It is possible to mean well and have good intentions, and yet to make most grievous mistakes in our actions. It is possible to fancy that we have Scripture on our side, and to support our conduct by Scriptural quotations, and yet to commit serious errors' (EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON LUKE, pages 333–334).

John visited Samaria later in his life when he was wiser and more gracious. The Samaritans had received the Word of God and he was sent with Peter by the Jerusalem church to pray for the Samaritan believers. He then preached the gospel in many Samaritan villages (Acts 8: 4–8; 14–25). **It is much better to seek the salvation of sinners rather than their destruction!**

Lord, I will follow you wherever you go

We are now told of three would-be followers of the Lord Jesus. The first said, *‘Lord, I will follow you wherever you go’* (57). Would he really have followed Jesus to the cross? He had probably been moved by the wonderful teaching of Jesus and had seen some of his miracles and wanted to be part of the success story. The Lord Jesus cautioned the man, saying that following him involved hardship (58). We are not told how he responded to this challenge.

Many are still attracted to the idea of following Christ, but they do not understand that the way of the cross is tough (see notes on verses 23 to 26 for 8 March). They find it easy to say to Jesus, *‘Lord, I will follow you wherever you go’*, but their interest is just a temporary phase that does not last.

Jesus called the second man saying, *‘Follow me’* (59–60) but the man wanted to first go and bury his father before giving himself to Christ in full commitment. This may have been an excuse because if his father had died, he would have been making funeral arrangements (people in Israel were buried almost immediately after they died). Jesus would not allow such excuses and demanded that the man follow him now

A third man said that he would follow Christ but made what seemed a reasonable request to bid his family farewell (61). The Lord Jesus knew his heart and detected a lack of commitment. We have God-given family responsibilities and we must honour our parents, but it is possible to make them an excuse for opting out of the Lord’s work. The man who looks over his shoulder cannot possibly plough a straight furrow in a field. If we attempt to look in two directions, we are not *fit for the kingdom of God* (62).

How is it with you? Is any person or any thing coming between you and the Lord? Or are you following Christ and enjoying his peace in your life? If you are putting off a commitment to follow him, do not delay any longer. *Now is the day of salvation* (2 Corinthians 6:2).

GENESIS

God used Moses to write the first five books of the Bible which are known as the Pentateuch (cp. Luke 24:27). We need to know and to understand the contents of Genesis, the first of these books, if we are to understand the rest of the Bible, especially the New Testament.

The title ‘Genesis’ means ‘origin’ or ‘beginning’ and was given to the book by the translators of the Septuagint (or LXX). * Genesis is a book of beginnings – the beginning of the universe, of life, of man, of human sin, of death, of families, of cities, of nations, of languages, of covenants and of redemption. There is one beginning that we do not read of – God never had a beginning. He planned and made ours.

Outline of GenesisThe Beginning of History (chapters 1 to 11)

Creation	1:1 to 2:25
The coming of sin into the world	3:1–24
The progress of sin	4:1 to 5:32
The wickedness of men and the flood	6:1 to 8:22
A new beginning with Noah	9:1 to 10:32
The rebellion at Babel	11:1 to 32

The Beginning of the Hebrew Race (chapters 12 to 50)

The life of Abraham	12:1 to 25:18
The life of Isaac	25:19 to 26:35
The life of Jacob	27:1 to 37:1
The life of Joseph	37:2 to 50:26

* The Septuagint is the earliest version of the Old Testament in the Greek language; the translation was sponsored by Ptolemy II of Egypt towards the end of the third century BC for use by Greek-speaking Jews in Alexandria. The word ‘Septuagint’ comes from the Latin for seventy, ‘septuaginta’. 70 Jewish scholars who were fluent in the Greek language undertook this work.

17 MARCH

Luke 10:38–42

*You are worried and troubled about many things.
But one thing is needed*

Jesus was always a welcome guest at the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary in the village of Bethany which was almost two miles (3 kilometres) to the east of Jerusalem. Jesus loved Lazarus and the two sisters (John 11:1–5). Martha became very stressed as she busied herself serving Jesus and the disciples, while Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus eagerly taking in all that he said (39–40). Jewish rabbis did not teach women, but the Lord Jesus was different. He honoured women and was happy to teach Mary. Martha was surprised that the Lord Jesus allowed Mary to relax at his feet while she was so busy, and she asked him to tell Mary to help her. She wondered if Jesus cared and she resented Mary for leaving her to serve alone.

Jesus replied, *‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part’* (41–42). Mary had chosen the good and necessary thing which was to have close fellowship with the Lord Jesus. Martha must have learned the lesson because she was later to make two wonderful professions of faith in Christ (John 11:21–22, 27). Those who ‘sit at the feet of Jesus’ are humble before him and they hear his precious words.

Have you been leading such a hectic life, that keeping up with your work and all the ‘*many things*’ are worrying and troubling you? **Have you been neglecting the ‘one thing’ that is needed – to enjoy real, unhurried fellowship with your precious Lord?** Do get your priorities sorted out and you will find daily help and strength from God and his peace will then rule in your heart.

*O that I could for ever sit
With Mary at the Master’s feet!
Be this my happy choice;
My only care, delight and bliss,
My joy, my heaven on earth, be this,
To hear the Bridegroom’s voice.*

(Charles Wesley)

14 MARCH

Luke 10:1–16

The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few

The Lord Jesus commissioned seventy others to preach and to heal the sick (some manuscripts have seventy-two). They were to go ahead of him in pairs to every city and place through which he was to pass on his journey to Jerusalem. Jesus said to them, *‘The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest’* (2). We often grow discouraged when there is so little response to the preaching of the gospel from our materialistic, indifferent generation. Remember that God is the Lord of the harvest and pray that he will send out workers, and be yourself prepared to go at his bidding.

The labourers in God’s harvest face dangers and difficulties. Jesus told the seventy that they were going out as *lamb among wolves*. Their task was dangerous and their lifestyle had to be simple, carrying no purse, knapsack or spare pair of sandals (cp. 9:1–6). They were on an urgent mission and were not to allow themselves to be delayed by time-consuming eastern greetings with passers-by (3–4) He gave them power to heal those who were sick, saying that *‘the kingdom of God has come near to you’* (9).

There is a solemn warning to those who reject the gospel message. It is a dreadful thing to refuse to enter the kingdom of God when it comes near to us (through hearing the gospel); the judgment upon us will be all the more severe (11–12). He told these disciples that those who reject them were rejecting him and God the Father (16). **The consequences of such rejection are too dreadful to contemplate!**

Jesus then reproached the cities which had been privileged to witness many of his mighty works. Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum had seen many of Christ’s miracles but had refused to repent. They would face greater punishment on the day of judgment than the wicked cities of Tyre and Sidon whose people would have repented had they seen such mighty works (13–15).

Rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven

The mission of the seventy was a great success and they joyfully told the Lord Jesus that even the demons were subject to them in his name. Jesus spoke of the master of demons, Satan, being cast out of heaven (17–18; cp. John 12:31–32; 1 John 3:8). Many Bible commentators believe that this refers to the fall of Satan and his angels when they rebelled against God before the world was made.

We do not generally enjoy such results from our witness as the disciples experienced. We may feel that there is little cause for rejoicing when there is very little response to the gospel. We may not be able to work miracles like the seventy but Jesus told them that they had greater reason to rejoice than this: *‘Rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven’* (19–20). Having authority over demons does not guarantee salvation (see Matthew 7:21–23). Those whose names are written in heaven will go to heaven, and while here on earth they have the privilege of knowing God as their heavenly Father. This should be a constant source of thankfulness and rejoicing!

Jesus then rejoiced, addressing the Father as the *Lord of heaven and earth* (21). God is absolutely sovereign over the universe. He cannot be toppled from his throne. Jesus thanked the Father for his sovereignty in revealing the gospel to sinners. He hides gospel truth from those who consider themselves to be wise and prudent and reveals it to babes (those who have a childlike trust in him). The Father has given his Son all authority and Jesus is sovereign in revealing him (22).

Jesus told the twelve disciples and the seventy that they were blessed in seeing these things and in hearing his teaching. None of the godly kings and prophets of the Old Testament saw the prophecies of the incarnate Messiah fulfilled or understand things which were hidden from them (22–24). We also should not only rejoice because our names are written in heaven, but also because God has opened our eyes to see the truths of the gospel. **If you are a Christian without a rejoicing heart, is there something wrong in your life (cp. Philippians 4:4)?**

What shall I do to inherit eternal life?

An expert in Jewish religious law asked Jesus a most important question, *‘What shall I do to inherit eternal life?’* This *‘eternal life’* is a never-ending life which has a priceless quality. William Hendriksen comments, ‘It embraces such treasures as “the love of God shed abroad in our hearts” (Romans 5:5), “the peace of God that surpasses all understanding” (Philippians 4:7), “joy inexpressible and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8), and “fellowship with God the Father and with his Son” (John 17:3)’ – COMMENTARY OF GOSPEL OF LUKE, page 591.

The man asking the question was not a sincere seeker but was testing Jesus, no doubt wishing to embarrass him (25). The Lord Jesus replied by going to the lawyer’s specialist subject, asking him, *‘What is written in the law?’* and the man quoted two scriptures (27; Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18). Jesus told him that he had replied correctly and that if he kept these great commandments, he would live. No one has perfectly kept the law and we have all failed to love God with all our heart or loved our neighbour as we love ourselves. The Jews felt no obligation to love those of other races and generally they despised them. The lawyer realised the implication of this answer and was uncomfortable. He sought *to justify himself* asking, *‘And who is my neighbour?’* (29).

The parable of the good Samaritan (30–35) would have gone home with great force because the Jews only considered fellow-Jews to be their neighbours. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was steep and rocky with many caves where criminals would hide waiting for someone to attack. The lawyer grudgingly admitted that the neighbour to the man (presumably a Jew) who had been beaten up and robbed was *‘he who showed mercy on him’* rather than the priest or Levite who had both ignored his plight. Jesus told him, *‘Go and do likewise’* (37). **Everyone is our ‘neighbour’ and we must have compassion on them in their need, regardless of race or colour. We must also address their greatest need which is to be saved, and seek to win them to Christ, who alone can give eternal life.**