

# Q & A on Biblical Doctrines

TOPICAL STUDIES



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## **TRUE JESUS CHURCH**

Department of Literary Ministry  
21217 Bloomfield Avenue  
Lakewood, CA 90715, USA  
[www.tjc.org](http://www.tjc.org)

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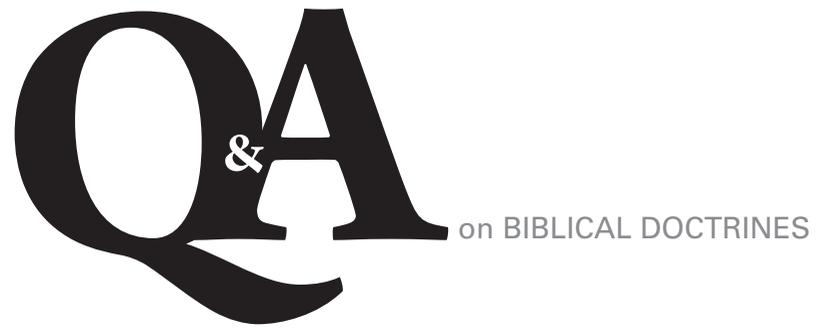
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The International Assembly of the True Jesus Church was formed in 1975, although the church itself was well established long before then. Up until that time, the truth of salvation had been preached predominantly to Chinese people. Accordingly, publications on biblical doctrines, including the flagship periodical, *Holy Spirit Times*, were in Chinese. And when believers took the gospel to countries such as India and Thailand, they imparted it solely through the spoken word.

In the early 80s, as the gospel took root in Africa, Central and South America, and the Philippines, missionary workers were sent out regularly to preach, pastor and train up local workers. During this period, the Holy Spirit worked powerfully through signs and miracles, leading to high attendance at evangelistic services and to many people receiving the Holy Spirit and water baptism. However, the lack of written resources in English and other languages proved to be a problem: the new believers had nothing to read to nurture their faith, and the workers could not provide the “solid food” that the congregations needed (Heb 5:12–6:1).

In 1998, the Department of Literary Ministry made a proposal to the IA to translate twelve books into the native languages of the pioneering areas. They included *Questions and Answers on the Truth* by Elder Tze Yuen Kuo, which was first published in Chinese by the Taiwan General Assembly in 1954. Through the use of guided questions, the book offered answers to a number of important biblical questions. After being revised by Elder Shun Tao Hsieh and re-launched in 1988, it was later incorporated into a series of books used for the training of

sermonizers. Thank God, this year, we are able to present an English revised version entitled *Q & A on Biblical Doctrines*.

As humans, we often try to grasp the matters of God through our own reasoning. However, when we do this, we are in danger of misrepresenting Him and His message. It is with good reason, then, that the Bible reminds us that no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. If we wish to speak of spiritual things, we have to leave man’s wisdom behind and search for the words that are taught by the Spirit, even if at times they seem foolish on account of our limited understanding (1 Cor 1:21–25).

*For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.*

1 Corinthians 2:11–13

As we read through *Q & A on Biblical Doctrines*, we will note that questions are answered with Bible quotes, which is a good approach when we consider that all Scripture has been given through God’s inspiration (2 Tim 3:16) and that He is the one who can answer everything concerning the truth.

We thank God for all the workers who have been involved in the production of this book: members of the Malaysian General Assembly who undertook the translation; the editor and proof-readers; the graphic designers; and the IA Review Board. It is hoped that the book will be the first in a series of multi-lingual versions.

May God continue to guide the English literary ministry and to bless the workers. We also pray that readers will be enlightened by His truth. Amen.

**KC Tsai**

**Department of Literary Ministry  
International Assembly of the True Jesus Church**

## One True God

### Q1 Does God exist?

Yes, He does. The Bible speaks of a true and living God who is responsible for creating the universe, mankind and all living things (Gen 1; Jer 10:10; 1 Thess 1:9; 1 Jn 5:20). Two thousand years ago, He manifested in the flesh as Jesus Christ to preach the gospel and to die for us on the cross (1 Tim 3:16; Heb 1:3).

### Q2 When did He begin to exist?

God has no beginning and no end. He declares, “I AM WHO I AM” (Ex 3:14), the one “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Rev 1:8; cf. 4:8). He is immortal (1 Tim 6:16) and remains the same forever (Heb 1:12; 13:8). Hence, the Bible calls Him the “eternal God” (Deut 33:27), “Everlasting Father” (Isa 9:6) and “living God” (Heb 10:31), who is “from everlasting to everlasting” (Ps 90:2).

### Q3 How many gods are there?

There is only one true God. The Bible says, “The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deut 6:4; cf. Mk 12:29). He is “God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other” (Deut 4:39).

### Q4 What is God like?

God is Spirit (Jn 4:24), who fills “all in all” (Eph 1:23). However, this biblical truth should be differentiated from the pantheistic

concept of some faiths which profess that “god is all” and “all is god”. The Bible says that the true God is unique (Isa 40:18, 25); He is not synonymous with nature or anything else.

God’s character has been revealed to us by Jesus Christ. The Bible describes it for our benefit, to enable us to become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4). It tells us that God is perfect (Mt 5:48); holy (Lev 19:2; 1 Pet 1:16); light (1 Jn 1:5); love (1 Jn 4:8); compassionate (Ps 145:9; 2 Cor 1:3); faithful (Ps 36:5; 1 Cor 1:9); righteous (Job 35:2; 1 Jn 2:29); peace (Isa 9:6; 2 Cor 13:11); patient (Neh 9:30; 2 Pet 3:9); merciful (Joel 2:13; Rom 9:15); jealous (Deut 4:24; Heb 12:29); majestic (Ps 93:1; Isa 26:10); hateful of sin (Prov 6:16–19; Heb 1:9).

### Q5 Where does He live?

God dwells in “unapproachable light. No man has seen or can see Him” (1 Tim 6:16; cf. Ex 33:20; Job 9:11; 23:3, 8–9; Jn 1:18; Heb 11:27). He resides in “heaven” (Ps 123:1; Mt 6:9; Heb 9:24), “the third heaven” (2 Cor 12:2), “above the stars” (Isa 14:13) and in “the highest” (Lk 2:14). As God is Spirit (Jn 4:24), He transcends time and space: He can be everywhere at the same time (Ps 139:7–8)—filling heaven and earth with His almighty presence (Jer 23:23–24).

### Q6 We cannot see God, so how do we know He exists?

God is invisible, but He has given us ample evidence of His existence:

#### A. CREATION

Many scientists believe that the universe materialized out of a primordial explosion of unimaginable energy—the so-called “Big Bang Theory”. Yet, they cannot explain the source of the energy, nor how the process began. However, there is no such ambiguity in the Bible, for it reveals that God created the universe. Indeed, the whole of creation testifies to His existence:

- “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” (Rom 1:20).
- “The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein” (Ps 24:1).
- “For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be the glory forever. Amen” (Rom 11:36).
- “...I am the Lord, who makes all things, who stretches out the heavens all alone, who spreads abroad the earth by Myself” (Isa 44:24).
- “He stretches out the north over empty space; He hangs the earth on nothing” (Job 26:7).
- “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth” (Ps 33:6).
- “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible” (Heb 11:3).
- “Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17).
- “...He gives to all life, breath, and all things” (Acts 17:25).

## **B. NATURAL ORDER WITHIN THE UNIVERSE**

We witness order all around us—in the movement of the stars and planets, the passing of day and night, the changing of the seasons, and the cycle of life and death. From these things, we realize there must be a Master of the universe who created such order, and who continues to sustain everything by His power (Neh 9:6; Heb 1:3; 2 Pet 3:7).

## **C. GOODNESS**

The source of all goodness is God, for Jesus says, “No one is good but One, that is, God” (Mt 19:17). Because His nature is intrinsically good, He has provided us with moral values to help

us discern right from wrong (Rom 2:14–16). In addition, He has given us an innate desire to seek Him and to worship Him. Hence, the Bible says, “Because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them” (Rom 1:19).

## **D. MIRACLES**

The Bible highlights the power of God to perform miraculous deeds in the lives of His people. Today, He continues to perform miracles in the true church. They enable people to know that He is God (1 Kgs 18:38–39) and prove that what is impossible with man is possible with Him (Mt 19:26).

## **E. GOD’S MANIFESTATION IN THE FLESH**

Two thousand years ago, God manifested in the flesh as Jesus Christ—a miracle without precedent (1 Tim 3:16). The Bible says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn 1:1). Jesus came to the world to seek and to save those who were lost (Lk 19:10) and to bear witness to what He had received from God (Jn 8:26). In doing so, Jesus revealed God who had never been seen by man (Jn 1:18). Hence, He says, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9).

## **F. THE BIBLE**

The Bible is the inspiration of God: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). It speaks of His work from the beginning of time, His relationship with man, His will and His truth. It contains many prophecies that continue to be fulfilled to this day. The whole book testifies to the power of God (Mk 12:24).

## **G. THE HOLY SPIRIT**

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God (Jn 4:24), who was poured out on believers for the first time on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4). Today, God gives the Holy Spirit to those in the true church. It is an experience we can see and hear (Acts 2:33). When this “power from on high” enters believers’ hearts

(Lk 24:49), it enables them to speak in spiritual tongues (Mk 16:17; Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6). In this way, the Spirit testifies that God is real, and that He is the one who bestows this grace (Lk 24:49; Jn 15:26).

## H. THE CHURCH

The church is the body of Christ, “the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph 1:23). It is through the church that God’s will, wisdom, power, glory, truth and blessings are revealed (Eph 1:19; 3:9–10). It comprises God’s chosen people who have been brought forth by the word of truth, and for this reason, they are called the “firstfruits of His creatures” (Jas 1:18).

## I. JUSTICE

God’s nature is just, and His justice governs our lives and fate. The Bible says, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Gal 6:7). On earth, God’s justice is administered by the authorities He has ordained (Rom 13:1–2), but it will be administered a final time by Jesus at His second coming (Rev 20:11–15). The Lord says, “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work” (Rev 22:12).

## J. THE EXISTENCE OF THE DEVIL

The Bible reveals the existence of the devil and the work of demons. Mark 5:1–20, for example, records the story of a demon-possessed man from Gadara who lived among the tombs and was delivered by Jesus (Mk 5:1–20).

Today, there are people who continue to suffer on account of evil spirits. Within the True Jesus Church, ministers are able to cast them out in the name of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. From these experiences, we understand that demon-possession is real, and that it is a spiritual affliction that only God can resolve.

## Q7 Is it possible to know everything about God?

As human beings, we have limitations, meaning that God will transcend our complete understanding in this lifetime (Job 36:26; 1 Cor 13:12). Nevertheless, He has given us sufficient evidence to enable us to find Him and to reach out to Him (Acts 17:27). Moreover, in our faith journey, we can grow to know Him better by relying on His wisdom and revelation (Hos 6:3; Eph 1:17).

## Q8 What do we know about His wisdom and knowledge?

We know that God is omniscient. The Bible declares, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (Rom 11:33). He knows the thoughts and motives of man: “For He knows deceitful men; He sees wickedness also. Will He not then consider it?” (Job 11:11; cf. Ps 44:21; Ezek 11:5; Jn 2:24–25; 1 Cor 4:5). Also, He knows every word we speak (Ps 139:4). In short, everything is laid bare before His eyes (Heb 4:13).

## Q9 What do we know about His power?

We know that God is omnipotent. The Bible says, “With God all things are possible” (Mt 19:26), meaning that nothing is too difficult for Him (Gen 18:14; Jer 32:17). Therefore, in the Bible, He is called the “Almighty God” (Gen 17:1), “the Almighty” (Job 37:23), and the “Lord God Almighty” (Rev 11:17). The Hebrew word for “God”, *el*,<sup>1</sup> carries the meaning of “strength” or “mighty”.

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<sup>1</sup> Strong’s reference no. H410.

## Jesus

### Q1 Who is Jesus?

Jesus is God Himself: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn 1:1). The Word became flesh when He came to the world as the “Son of Man” (Mt 16:13) and the Saviour of mankind (Lk 2:11). In Jesus, we see God’s divine authority (Mt 28:18; Jn 5:27), glory (Jn 17:5), honour (Jn 5:23), righteousness (2 Pet 1:1) and holiness (Lk 1:35; Rev 15:4).

### Q2 What does the name “Jesus Christ” mean?

The name “Jesus” is from the Greek *Iesous*,<sup>1</sup> a transliteration of the Hebrew *Joshua*, meaning “Jehovah is salvation”. The title “Christ” comes from the Greek *Christos*,<sup>2</sup> meaning “anointed”, the equivalent of the Hebrew *Masiah*<sup>3</sup> (Eng., “Messiah”). In ancient Israel, kings, prophets and priests were anointed for service. In the same way, Jesus Christ came to the world as God’s anointed one, the King of kings and Lord of lords (Jn 18:37; Rev 19:16). Jesus is the name of God (Jn 17:6, 11; Isa 9:6)—the only name by which we can be saved (Acts 4:12).

### Q3 Why did He come to the world?

Man became separated from God because of sin. Therefore, God had to come in person to the world to bring salvation and

to show His love. He did this by manifesting in the flesh as Jesus Christ, the Son of God (1 Tim 3:16). The Bible states, “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (Jn 1:18). Jesus became our Mediator (1 Tim 2:5; 1 Jn 2:1), reconciling us to God (Rom 5:10; 1 Pet 3:18) and enabling us to become His children (Gal 4:4–7; Eph 1:5). Today, everyone can be saved when they believe in Jesus Christ and obey His gospel (Mk 16:15–16; Acts 2:38).

### Q4 How did He come to the world?

Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born through the virgin Mary (Mt 1:18–25; Lk 1:26–35; 2:6–7). This event was prophesied by Isaiah some 700 years earlier. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the prophet proclaimed, “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isa 7:14; cf. 9:6). The meaning of *Immanuel* is “God with us”.<sup>4</sup>

### Q5 When was He born?

The Gregorian calendar, which uses the designations AD (Lat., *anno domini*, meaning “In the year of our Lord”) and BC (“Before Christ”), is based on an estimated calculation of the year of Jesus’ birth. However, we are unable to pinpoint the exact date—even though people have long attempted to do so—simply because there is no record in the Bible.

### Q6 How did December 25 come to be associated with His birth?

December 25 came to be associated with the birth of Jesus through the writings of Sextus Julius Africanus as early as AD 221. However, a popular theory is that it originated from the Christianizing of the *dies solis invicti nati* (“day of the birth of the unconquered sun”), a festival celebrated in the Roman Empire.<sup>5</sup> It was when pagans honoured the sun and celebrated the end

1 Strong’s reference no. G2424.

2 Strong’s reference no. G5547.

3 Strong’s reference no. H8432.

4 Strong’s reference no. H6005.

5 “Christmas”, *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, 2009.  
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/115686/Christmas>

of winter. Early writers such as Cyprian made a connection between the birth of the sun and the birth of Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup>

**Q7 Is it acceptable to appoint a day on which to celebrate His birth?**

The absence of any biblical record of Jesus' date of birth leads us to understand that God never wished us to celebrate this event. Moreover, we need to be mindful that Jesus was God manifested in the flesh (Jn 1:1; 1 Tim 3:16): He has no beginning and no end. Indeed, Jesus Himself declares, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM" (Jn 8:58). In light of this, it is inappropriate for us to take it upon ourselves to designate a day on which to commemorate His birth.

**Q8 Where was Jesus born and raised?**

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Judea, the city of David and the native home of Joseph the carpenter (Lk 2:4). Later, Joseph and Mary took Him to Nazareth, their place of residence, where they raised Him (Mt 2:23). The village was situated in a high valley among the southern hills of the Lebanon range. To the south was the great plain of Esdraelon, and to the east was the Sea of Galilee. It had a mild climate and a beautiful landscape.<sup>7</sup>

**Q9 What was Palestine like?**

During the time of Jesus, Palestine was under the control of the Romans. However, they adopted a largely tolerant approach towards the Jews. In some territories, they permitted autonomous rule, as well as the continuation of the Jewish way of life. The Romans maintained control by stationing armies and requiring the people to pay taxes to the emperor (Lk 20:25).

Herod the Great was King of Judea from 37 BC until he died in 4 BC. He bequeathed the kingdom to his three sons: Judea and Samaria to Archelaus (Mt 2:22); Galilee and Perea to

Antipas; and the north-eastern lands to Philip (Lk 3:1).<sup>8</sup> The Jews had their own council, the Sanhedrin, which had extensive jurisdiction. It could order arrests, judge civil cases according to Jewish law, and also judge some criminal cases that did not involve capital punishment (Jn 18:31); the latter required the consent of a Roman procurator (Mt 27:1-2).<sup>9</sup>

**Q10 When was the Roman Empire founded, and how did it become so powerful?**

Rome rose to power in the third century BC, taking control of the whole of Italy and the Mediterranean. Pompey then proceeded to conquer Asia Minor and Syria, while Caesar conquered Gaul. During the middle republic (264-133 BC), Rome subdued Carthage, Macedonia, Greece and Spain. Under Emperor Trajan (AD 98-117), the Roman Empire reached its greatest extent, taking control of Dacia, Armenia, Assyria and Mesopotamia. In the time of Emperor Augustus (27-14 BC), the population of the empire was an estimated 85 million.<sup>10 11</sup>

The Roman Empire was a vast melting pot of languages, cultures and knowledge. While Latin was the official language, Greek was the lingua franca of the east—a legacy from the time of Alexander the Great. Greek was used for commerce, as well as for literature and philosophy. For Christianity, the diverse environment had both positive and negative outcomes: on the one hand, it meant that the New Testament Bible came to be written in Greek to reach a wide readership; on the other hand, the church had to struggle against the infiltration of secular philosophies. The latter accounts for Paul's words to the Corinthian church: "For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:22-24).

6 Martindale, C. C., "Christmas," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol 3 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908). New Advent: <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03724b.htm>>

7 *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Part 2 (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994).

8 *Ibid.*

9 *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Part 3 (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994).

10 Unger, Merrill F., *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (USA: The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1988).

11 *Encyclopaedia Britannica, Macropaedia*, vol 15 (USA: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1980).

## Q11 What was the religious and social situation like?

In the time of Jesus, the Jewish nation was under Roman rule, having previously endured years of wars and turmoil. The more radical Jews longed for revolution and the restoration of Israel (Acts 1:6), while others were happy to accept the status quo. The outcome was inevitable tension between the different groups.

However, Jesus found evidence of a more insidious problem—religious hypocrisy and superficiality. He once lamented, “When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” (Lk 18:8). He also castigated the people for their hardness of heart, lack of moral standards and unrighteousness, making His point with parables, such as that of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25–37). Furthermore, Jesus witnessed profound indifference, where people responded neither to John’s sombre message of repentance, nor to His good news of the kingdom. It prompted Him to remark, “We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we mourned to you, and you did not lament” (Mt 11:17).

## Q12 What religious groups were there?

There were four main religious groups:

### A. THE PHARISEES

This group comprised teachers of the law and scribes. In terms of beliefs, they upheld the Torah<sup>12</sup> (the five books of Moses), the Prophets and the Writings. Alongside the written law—the Law of Moses—they also had a continually expanding set of oral laws and traditions that they enforced rigidly.<sup>13</sup> It was against this background that Jesus accused many of the Pharisees of legalism, self-righteousness and hypocrisy (Mt 23; Lk 11:37–54). The outcome was that they opposed Jesus vehemently and looked for reasons to accuse Him and to kill Him (e.g. Mt 21:45–46; 22:15; Mk 3:6; 12:13; Lk 11:53–54; Jn 11:47, 53).

### B. THE SADDUCEES

This group comprised the high priest and his associates (Acts 5:17). They were aristocrats and were therefore people of wealth and rank.<sup>14</sup> Like the Pharisees, they acknowledged the supremacy of the Torah, but unlike them, they rejected all the additional interpretations of the law.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, eternal life, angels, or spirits (Mt 22:23; Mk 12:18; Acts 23:8). They conspired with the Pharisees to oppose Jesus (Mt 16:1).

### C. THE HERODIANS

It is likely that the Herodian party was formed out of allegiance to Herod the Great when he became King of Judea in 37 BC.<sup>16</sup> It was active during the time of Jesus, when Herod Antipas was tetrarch over Galilee (Lk 23:6–7). There is little to glean, either from the Bible or from other historical sources, concerning the views of its adherents, other than the fact that they opposed Jesus and joined forces with the other parties to do so (Mt 22:16; Mk 3:6).

### D. THE ZEALOTS

This radical party was active from about AD 6, when Judah the Galilean called for Jewish resistance against the Romans after they had ordered a census in Judah. The Zealots advocated non-payment of taxes, opposition to the emperor and sole allegiance to God. For many of its members, violence was a justifiable means of securing the release of the nation from foreign domination. Simon, one of Jesus’ twelve disciples, belonged to this party (Acts 1:13). In AD 66, the Zealots took control of Jerusalem, leading to a fierce struggle with the Romans and the eventual downfall of Judah and Jerusalem in AD 70.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Also called the “Pentateuch”

<sup>13</sup> *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, eds. Charles F. Pfeiffer, Howard F. Vos & John Rea (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983).

<sup>14</sup> Unger, Merrill F., *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, eds. Charles F. Pfeiffer, Howard F. Vos & John Rea (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983).

**Q13 What was Jesus’ attitude towards these groups?**

Jesus told His disciples, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees” (Mt 16:6); “Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod” (Mk 8:15). From His words, we detect a lack of support for the parties. Furthermore, His reaction to those people who tried to make Him king by force—those who wanted Him to lead them to revolution and to restore the kingdom of Israel—was to distance Himself (Jn 6:15). He pointed out, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here” (Jn 18:36).

**Q14 When did He start His ministry? Was anyone doing the work before Him?**

Jesus did not start His work until about the age of thirty (Lk 3:23). God sent John the Baptist ahead of Him, to prepare the way by preaching a message of repentance (Mt 3:1–3). John told the people, “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Mt 3:11).

**Q15 Why did He have to be baptized?**

Jesus was baptized, not for repentance, because He was without sin (2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 Jn 3:5), but to “fulfill all righteousness” (Mt 3:15)—that is, to do what God required of Him, as well as to set an example for us. The Bible records: “Then Jesus, when He had been baptized, came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mt 3:16–17). John the Baptist witnessed this event and testified, saying, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him ... And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God” (Jn 1:32, 34). He also proclaimed, “Behold!

The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn 1:29).

**Q16 What happened after His baptism?**

Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the desert where He fasted for forty days and nights (Mt 4:1–2) and was tempted by the devil (Mt 4:3–11). However, He was able to emerge victorious. Hence, the Bible offers these words of encouragement: “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15).

**Q17 What message did Jesus preach?**

Jesus began His ministry, proclaiming, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mk 1:15). His work was the fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Lk 4:18–19; cf. Isa 61:1, 2). Importantly, He told people to find salvation through Him, and Him alone: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (Jn 14:6).

**Q18 What is the gospel?**

The gospel is the good news that concerns everyone in the world. It tells the story of Jesus Christ:

- *His birth*: “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Lk 2:11).
- *His death*: “For I [i.e. Paul] delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried ...” (1 Cor 15:3–4; cf. Rom 5:8).

- *His resurrection*: “... who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification” (Rom 4:25).
- *His ascension to heaven*: “Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9).
- *His promise to come again*: “So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation” (Heb 9:28).

Importantly, the gospel tells us the way of salvation through Jesus. The apostle Peter sums it up in this way: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Whoever believes in the gospel and obeys its message will be saved (Mk 16:16; 1 Cor 15:1–2).

#### **Q19 How many disciples did Jesus choose, and who were they?**

Jesus chose twelve disciples: Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James, Thaddaeus, Simon and Judas (Mt 10:2–4). Besides them, He had other disciples, including the seventy whom He sent out two by two to various cities, where they cast out demons, healed the sick and preached the gospel of the kingdom (Lk 10:1).

#### **Q20 What was His attitude towards the people, and how did He help them?**

Jesus’ mission was to seek out and save lost souls (Lk 19:10). To them, He was gentle, kind and compassionate. But to the religious leaders who were proud, self-righteous and legalistic, He was severe (Mt 23; Mk 12:38–40; Lk 11:37–54).

Jesus took pity on the people and performed countless miracles to alleviate their physical and spiritual afflictions: He healed the sick, cast out demons and brought the dead back to life. Because of these miracles, many believed in Him.

During His ministry, Jesus brought countless blessings to the people:

- Peace (Mk 5:34; Lk 7:50; Jn 14:27; 16:33)
- Freedom (Lk 13:16; Jn 8:36)
- Light (Mt 9:29–30; Jn 8:12; 9:5, 11; 12:46)
- Life (Lk 8:49–56; Jn 5:40; 10:10, 28; 11:17–44)
- Satisfaction (Mt 5:6; 14:20; Jn 6:27–28, 35)
- Joy (Lk 10:17; 19:37; Jn 20:20)

Today, we can take heart for Jesus also cares for us: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28).

#### **Q21 How long did His ministry last, and how did He die?**

He preached for three years. At the end of this period, He was betrayed by one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, who delivered Him up to the authorities. He was subsequently mocked, spat upon, flogged and made to wear a crown of thorns. Finally, He was nailed to a cross. He suffered in this way, not because He lacked the power to resist (Mt 26:53–54), but because He was willing to lay down His life for us. In doing so, He became our sin offering and ransom (Isa 53:10; Mk 10:45; Jn 18:11; 1 Tim 2:5–6; 1 Jn 4:10).

#### **Q22 Did Jesus die only for the Jews?**

Jesus died not only for the Jews, but for everyone in the world (1 Jn 2:2), bearing our sins on the cross (1 Pet 2:24) and becoming a curse for our sake (Gal 3:13–14). The prophet Isaiah says, “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed” (Isa 53:4–5). From these words, we understand that Jesus’ death is relevant to the whole of mankind, and we must acknowledge Him as our Saviour.

### Q23 What did His death accomplish?

Through His death on the cross, Jesus removed our sins: “...To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood” (Rev 1:5). This was the righteous requirement of God (Heb 9:22). The outcome is that we have been brought near to God (Eph 2:13): we have entered the Holy of Holies to have a direct relationship with Him (Heb 10:19). Moreover, we have been justified and delivered from His wrath (Rom 5:9).

### Q24 What impact did His death have on the devil?

The impact of Jesus’ death on the devil is highlighted by the prophetic words spoken by God to the serpent in the garden of Eden: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Gen 3:15). These words indicated the future struggle between the devil and Jesus: Jesus would be captured and handed over to the power of darkness (Lk 22:47–53), but He would strike a fatal blow at Satan through His death. Hence, the writer of Hebrews says, “...Through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb 2:14–15). By submitting to the cross, Jesus triumphed over the devil and redeemed mankind.

### Q25 What do we know of Jesus’ final moments?

The Book of John records, “So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, ‘It is finished!’ And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit” (Jn 19:30). A soldier then pierced His side with a spear, causing a flow of blood and water (Jn 19:34).

### Q26 What happened after He died?

Three days after Jesus died and was buried, He resurrected and emerged from the tomb (Mt 28). This happened in fulfillment of His own words: “The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day” (Lk 9:22; cf. Mt 16:21; 17:22–23; Mk 8:31; Lk 18:31–33).

Upon His resurrection, Jesus took on a spiritual body, meaning He was no longer constrained by time and space. However, He could still be touched and was able to eat and converse with the disciples (Lk 24:39–43). The Gospels record:

- “Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them ‘Peace be with you’” (Jn 20:19).
- “And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, ‘Peace to you!’” (Jn 20:26).
- “Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight” (Lk 24:31).

### Q27 How did He resurrect?

Jesus resurrected because God raised Him up (Acts 2:32; 3:15; 1 Cor 6:14). Jesus had earlier said, “No one takes it [i.e. His life] from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again...” (Jn 10:18). He also said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live” (Jn 11:25). So, we see that even death could not keep its grip on Jesus (Acts 2:24); rather, He abolished it and revealed eternal life (2 Tim 1:10).

### Q28 What significance does His resurrection have?

Jesus’ resurrection was a crucial part of God’s salvation plan and is a key element of the gospel. It is therefore a truth that all Christians should uphold (1 Cor 15:1–4). If He had not resurrected, our faith would be in vain, and we would be destined to perish without hope (1 Cor 15:17–19). As it is, we have been blessed with a double hope: the confidence of our spiritual resurrection through water baptism (Rom 6:4) and the anticipation of the resurrection of our bodies when Jesus comes again (Jn 6:40).

On account of Jesus’ resurrection, God has “begotten us again to a living hope” (1 Pet 1:3); we are justified (Rom 4:25); we are

raised with Jesus and given spiritual life (Rom 8:10–11; Col 2:12–13); we “sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6); God “will also raise us up by His power” (1 Cor 6:14).

### Q29 Where did Jesus go after His resurrection?

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples and many other believers (1 Cor 15:4–8). He used the Scriptures to explain the things concerning Himself and the kingdom of God (Lk 24:27, 45; Acts 1:3). After forty days, He was taken up to heaven to be seated at the right hand of God (Acts 1:9; Rom 8:34; Heb 9:24). The Book of Hebrews says, “But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:24–25). Jesus is now our High Priest in heaven (Heb 4:14).

### Q30 Will He come again?

Jesus promises, “Behold, I am coming quickly!” (Rev 22:7; cf. 22:12, 20). When He arrives in the clouds, every eye will see Him (Rev 1:7). The writer of Hebrews says, “...To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation” (Heb 9:28). This is the wonderful hope of every believer (1 Pet 1:13).

## The Holy Spirit

### Q1 Who or what is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is God Himself, for “God is Spirit” (Jn 4:24). In the Old Testament, God spoke of a time when He would give His Spirit to man: “And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh...” (Joel 2:28). These words were fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, when 120 disciples received the promised Holy Spirit for the first time (Acts 2). Today, this same promise is being fulfilled in the true church.

### Q2 How does the Bible refer to the Holy Spirit?

It refers to the Holy Spirit by various titles:

- “Spirit of God” (Gen 1:2; 1 Cor 3:16)
- “Spirit of the Lord” (Isa 11:2; Lk 4:18)
- “Spirit of the living God” (2 Cor 3:3)
- “Spirit of [the] Father” (Mt 10:20)
- “Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9)
- “Spirit of Jesus” (Acts 16:7)<sup>1</sup>
- “Spirit of His Son” (Gal 4:6)
- “Spirit of truth” (Jn 16:13)
- “Spirit of glory and of God” (1 Pet 4:14)
- “Spirit of holiness” (Rom 1:4)

<sup>1</sup> NUText.

- “[God’s] good Spirit” (Neh 9:20)
- “Helper” or “Comforter” (Jn 14:16)<sup>2</sup>
- “eternal Spirit” (Heb 9:14)
- “spirit of judgment” and “spirit of burning” (Isa 4:4)
- “seven Spirits” (Rev 1:4)

The Holy Spirit has many titles, but He is one Spirit (Eph 4:4).

### Q3 When did the Holy Spirit’s work begin?

The Book of Genesis records the Holy Spirit’s work from the time of creation (Gen 1:2). Hence, a psalmist writes, “You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the earth” (Ps 104:30). Also, Job testifies, “By His Spirit He adorned the heavens...” (Job 26:13); “The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life” (Job 33:4).

In the Old Testament, the work of the Holy Spirit was to inspire prophets and righteous men to speak God’s words, perform miracles and predict future events (e.g. Judg 15:14; 1 Sam 16:13). In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit made possible the conception of Jesus (Lk 1:31, 34–35) and empowered Him for God’s work (Lk 4:18; Jn 3:34). After Jesus ascended to heaven, the Spirit came down upon the believers from the day of Pentecost and began working mightily with the early church (Acts 2).

### Q4 Has the Holy Spirit remained with Christians ever since Pentecost?

No, He has not. The Holy Spirit came down at two different times, for the Bible speaks prophetically and symbolically about two distinct dispensations: the early (autumn) rain and the latter (spring) rain (Deut 11:14). The early rain refers to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the early church, beginning at Pentecost (Acts 2), while the latter rain refers to the outpouring of the Spirit on God’s church in this end time. In between the two dispensations was a winter period when the skies withheld

their rain—signifying the withdrawal of the Holy Spirit from the post-apostolic church. This was due to the infiltration of heresies, causing the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of truth—to depart. It was not until the early 1900s that the Holy Spirit came down once again, in tandem with the revelation of the truth of salvation.

### Q5 Where in the Bible is it prophesied that the skies would withhold their rain?

The prophecies are in the following passages:

- “Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest the Lord’s anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the Lord is giving you” (Deut 11:16–17).
- “They do not say in their heart, ‘Let us now fear the Lord our God, who gives rain, both the former and the latter, in its season. He reserves for us the appointed weeks of the harvest.’ Your iniquities have turned these things away, and your sins have withheld good from you” (Jer 5:24–25).
- “... And you have polluted the land with your harlotries and your wickedness. Therefore the showers have been withheld, and there has been no latter rain...” (Jer 3:2–3).

These words were originally directed at the ancient Israelites and describe the conditions under which God would withhold the rain in a literal sense. They came true, for example, during the time of King Ahab, after he led the nation to commit idolatry. The consequence was the stoppage of rain for three and a half years (1 Kgs 16:32–33; 17:1). However, these words were also fulfilled much later in a spiritual sense, during the time of the post-apostolic church. This time, God withdrew the rain—His Holy Spirit—when the church departed from the truth.

<sup>2</sup> Counsellor (RSV).

## Q6 How can we receive the Holy Spirit today?

The Bible teaches the following:

- To receive the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth (Jn 14:17), we need to believe and obey God through the perfect gospel of salvation (Acts 5:32). Prophet Hosea says, “Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord. His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth” (Hos 6:3). Here, the prophet assures us that God will come to us as surely as the dawn and the rain. All that He requires is that we pursue to know Him through His word and to obey it.
- We need to ask God for His Spirit (Lk 11:9–13). Zechariah says, “Ask the Lord for rain in the time of the latter rain. The Lord will make flashing clouds; He will give them showers of rain, grass in the field for everyone” (Zech 10:1). The Bible also encourages us with the example of Elijah who prayed for rain during a time of spiritual and physical drought and was answered by God (1 Kgs 18:41–45; Jas 5:17–18). Elder James reinforces the importance of asking by saying, “...Yet you do not have because you do not ask” (Jas 4:2).
- To receive the Holy Spirit, we need to remove any impurities from our hearts, such as indifference, complacency and pride. This is because they will act as obstacles in our communication with God (see Lk 18:9–14). The Book of Proverbs exhorts, “Turn at my reproof; surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you” (Prov 1:23).

## Q7 Why did the Holy Spirit not come down until after Jesus ascended to heaven?

The Holy Spirit did not come down until then because Jesus had yet to be glorified (Jn 7:39; Acts 2:32–33). Jesus told the disciples, “Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you” (Jn 16:7).

## Q8 What work did the Holy Spirit accomplish for Jesus?

After Jesus’ ascension, the Holy Spirit continued His work in different ways. For example, He testified for Jesus (Jn 15:26; Acts 5:32), glorified Him (Jn 16:14), taught the disciples and reminded them of His words (Jn 14:26; Jn 16:15). The Holy Spirit was Jesus Himself, now living in the hearts of the believers (Jn 14:16–23).

## Q9 What similarities exist between the work of the Holy Spirit and the work of Jesus?

From the Bible, we see the following similarities:

- During His ministry, Jesus called the people to repent (Mk 1:15). Likewise, the Holy Spirit now convicts people of sin and brings them to repentance (Jn 16:8; Acts 11:15–18).
- Jesus preached the truth (Jn 8:45–46). In the same way, the Holy Spirit now guides believers into all truth (Jn 16:13).
- Jesus came to give life to those willing to obey Him (Jn 10:10). The Holy Spirit now gives life to whoever repents and believes in Jesus (see Acts 11:18) and enables them to live and walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:25).
- Jesus says, “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture” (Jn 10:9). Today, we enter into Jesus by the Holy Spirit (Gal 3:2–3), for Paul says, “...No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3).
- When we believe in Jesus, He grants us the right to become the children of God (Jn 1:12). Likewise, the Holy Spirit lives within our hearts and enables us to call God, “Abba, Father” (Rom 8:15–16; Gal 4:6).
- God revealed His love to us through Jesus (Jn 3:16; Rom 5:8). Also, by sending His Holy Spirit, God has poured out His love into our hearts (Rom 5:5).
- Jesus is our Advocate who intercedes for us in heaven (1 Jn 2:1; Heb 7:25), while the Holy Spirit is our Counsellor who intercedes for us on earth (Jn 14:16 RSV; Rom 8:26–27).

- When Jesus was ministering on earth, He sent His disciples out to preach (Mt 10:1–42). Today, the Holy Spirit sends out workers to do His work (e.g. Acts 13:2–3). On the last day, Jesus will come again to take us with Him (Jn 14:3). At that time, the Holy Spirit will lift us into the clouds so that we “meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess 4:17).

#### **Q10 How does believing in Jesus relate to our receiving the Holy Spirit?**

The purpose of believing in Jesus is to belong to Him; and the mark of belonging is baptism in the Spirit. Paul explains that the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God and joint heirs with Christ (Rom 8:16–17). He describes the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a “sealing” from God (Eph 4:30)—a sign that “the Lord knows those who are His” (2 Tim 2:19). Those without this seal can be likened to the foolish virgins who had lamps that were devoid of oil. On the last day, Jesus will say to them, “Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you” (Mt 25:12).

#### **Q11 How does the baptism of the Holy Spirit benefit us?**

The baptism of the Holy Spirit benefits us in a number of ways:

- *The Holy Spirit effects our spiritual rebirth.* Jesus says, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (Jn 3:5–6; see also Ezek 37:14).
- *The Holy Spirit seals us for salvation.* Paul says, “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory” (Eph 1:13–14).
- *The Holy Spirit sets us free.* Paul says, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin

and death” (Rom 8:2); “Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Cor 3:17).

- *The Holy Spirit teaches us the truth.* Jesus says, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (Jn 14:26). Elder John says, “But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him” (1 Jn 2:27). Also, Paul tells us, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God” (1 Cor 2:12).
- *The Holy Spirit strengthens us.* Paul’s prayer for the church was that the members “be strengthened with might through [God’s] Spirit in the inner man” (Eph 3:16). And, should we experience persecution for the sake of our faith, we can take heart from Peter’s words: “If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you...” (1 Pet 4:14).
- *The Holy Spirit empowers us to witness for Jesus.* The Lord has promised, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). According to Paul, our testimony for Jesus is not “with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor 2:4).
- *The Holy Spirit helps us to bear fruit.* The Book of Galatians says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...” (Gal 5:22–23).
- *The Holy Spirit helps us to pray.* The Bible encourages us to “[pray] in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 20), and to “[pray] always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit” (Eph 6:18). The benefit is that “the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom 8:26).

- *The Holy Spirit bestows spiritual gifts.* Paul says, “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit” (1 Cor 12:4); “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills” (1 Cor 12:11).
- *The Holy Spirit comforts us.* The early Christians were comforted by the Holy Spirit during trials: “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied” (Acts 9:31). Also, Paul’s earnest prayer for the church was that she “abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom 15:13).
- *The Holy Spirit sanctifies us.* Paul says, “...But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11; cf. Rom 15:16; 1 Pet 1:2).
- *The Holy Spirit gives us spiritual life.* Paul says, “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (Rom 8:11).

## Q12 What is the nature of the Holy Spirit?

Some people regard the Holy Spirit as merely the power of God, failing to grasp that He is God Himself, with all His divine attributes and personality. The Bible states that the Spirit searches all things (1 Cor 2:10); has His own will (Rom 8:27; 1 Cor 12:11); loves (Rom 15:30); is gracious (Heb 10:29); can be grieved (Eph 4:30); instructs (Neh 9:20); speaks (Acts 8:29); forbids (Acts 16:6–7); appoints and sends out workers (Isa 48:16; Acts 13:2, 4; 20:28); witnesses (1 Jn 5:7); gives revelations (Eph 3:5). The Bible therefore warns us against offending or blaspheming the Holy Spirit (Mt 12:31–32).

## Q13 How can we experience the Holy Spirit?

Jesus says that we cannot see the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:17), for He is without shape or form. However, like the wind, we can perceive Him: “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (Jn 3:8). Jesus’ words aptly describe the experience of the disciples on the day of Pentecost: they received the baptism of the Holy Spirit in a way that could be seen and heard (Acts 2:33; 8:18). The primary sign was the speaking of spiritual tongues (Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6). In their particular case, they also saw tongues of fire and heard the sound of rushing wind (Acts 2:1–4).

The promise of the Holy Spirit continues to hold true for believers today (Acts 2:38–39). The only condition is that we accept the complete gospel of salvation and obey it (Acts 5:32). When we receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, we, too, will speak in tongues, like the early Christians (Acts 2:1–4; 10:44–46; 19:6).

## Q14 What symbols does the Bible use for the Holy Spirit, and what do they signify?

The Bible uses a variety of symbols or descriptions to highlight the nature of the Holy Spirit and His work:

- *Wind*—dynamism and renewal (Ezek 37:9–10; Jn 3:8; Acts 2:2)
- *Fire*—warmth and refining power (Isa 4:4; Acts 2:3)
- *Water*—abundance and life (Jn 4:14; 7:38–39)
- *Oil*—light and joy (Mt 25:4; Heb 1:9)
- *Rain*—mercy and grace (Hos 6:3; 10:12; Zech 10:1; Mt 5:45)
- *Dove*—goodness and peace (Mt 3:16; 10:16)
- *Seal*—promise (Eph 1:13; 4:30; 2 Tim 2:19)
- *Guarantee*—assurance (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:14)
- *Sword*—discernment and severity (Gen 3:24; Eph 6:17; Heb 4:12)

### Q15 Can anyone receive the Holy Spirit?

God promises the Holy Spirit to every person He calls through the gospel (Acts 2:38–39; 15:7–8; Gal 3:5). However, Jesus says that some people will not be able to receive Him: “...The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him...” (Jn 14:17). Specifically, God will not give His precious Spirit to those who refuse to believe or obey Him (Acts 5:32).

### Q16 What attitude should we have towards the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is vital for salvation, and we should:

- open our hearts to let Him in (Gal 4:6; Rev 3:20).
- pray to God for His Spirit (Lk 11:13; Acts 1:4).
- be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18).
- not grieve Him (Eph 4:30).
- not quench Him (1 Thess 5:19).
- endeavour to walk and live by the Spirit (Gal 5:16, 25).
- earnestly desire the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor 14:1).

### Q17 How might a person offend the Holy Spirit, and what are the consequences?

It is a serious matter to offend the Holy Spirit, and we risk doing this if we:

- *Resist Him*. This means hardening our heart and refusing to believe in Jesus Christ, or persecuting those who preach His gospel (Acts 7:51–60).
- *Deceive Him*. The Book of Acts warns against lying to the Holy Spirit by recording the incident of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11).
- *Sin wilfully*. The Bible warns against sinning deliberately after we have received God’s salvation: “Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood

of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?” (Heb 10:29).

- *Blaspheme*. Jesus warns us about the gravest of sins, which is to attribute the work, manifestation, or gifts of the Holy Spirit to the devil (e.g. Mk 3:20–22). This constitutes a mortal sin—one that can never be forgiven (Mt 12:31–32; Mk 3:28–29).

## The Bible

### Q1 Does everyone have access to the Bible?

The Bible is reaching more and more people in the world year on year. According to the United Bible Societies (a community of 146 international Bible societies serving over 200 countries), the complete book has been translated into 469 languages, the New Testament into 1,231 languages, and parts of Scripture into 2,527 of the world's estimated 6,500 languages.<sup>1</sup>

### Q2 Why is it so important?

The Bible reveals God's will and His work, and answers important questions about life, the universe and the fate of mankind. Crucially, it highlights the intimate link between God and ourselves and directs us to the way of salvation. For these reasons, no one can afford to ignore its message.

### Q3 Has it always been received positively?

For countless generations, the Bible has served to inspire people and to lead them into God's light. However, history tells us that it has not always been received positively: some people have tried to destroy it or halt its circulation. Fortunately, God has preserved it, proving that His word is eternal and stands firm in heaven (Ps 119:89). Hence, the Bible states, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever"

(Isa 40:8); "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Mk 13:31).

### Q4 How long did it take to write?

The time span between the writing of Genesis by Moses and the writing of Revelation by John is about 1,500 years. The Bible's sixty-six books were penned by forty people who lived in different times and places. As we consider these facts, we cannot help but be amazed at how systematic and consistent its message is. They prove that the Bible is the outcome of God's divine will and revelation.

### Q5 What language was it written in?

The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and Aramaic, while the New Testament was written in Greek. The Greek version of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, was translated in stages between 250 BC and 100 BC in Alexandria, Egypt. A Latin translation—Jerome's Vulgate—was produced around AD 400. An English version was available in part by AD 700, and the first full translation was completed by John Wycliffe in 1383.<sup>2</sup>

### Q6 What is in the Bible?

There are thirty-nine books in the Old Testament and twenty-seven books in the New Testament. The OT was written from the time of Moses<sup>3</sup> onwards. It contains God's law, the history of His chosen people and numerous prophecies—including those relating to the birth of Jesus. The NT contains four Gospels detailing the ministry of Jesus, a historical account of the early church, letters to local churches and named recipients, and a book of prophecy.

The central theme of both Testaments is Jesus Christ, the Saviour. Jesus says, "You search the Scriptures, for in them you

<sup>1</sup> Source: United Bible Societies <[www.unitedbiblesocieties.org](http://www.unitedbiblesocieties.org)>

<sup>2</sup> *The Origin of the Bible*, ed. Philip Wesley Comfort (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Born approximately 1520 bc.

think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me” (Jn 5:39); “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me” (Lk 24:44).

The OT comprises:

- Five books by Moses, also known as the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. They recount the early history of God’s people, starting from the time of creation, and detail the laws that God gave to Moses.
- Twelve books of history: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther.
- Five books of poetry: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs.
- Seventeen books of prophecy: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

The NT comprises:

- Four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, which record the ministry and teachings of Jesus.
- One book of history (in the form of a letter): Acts, which records the work of the Holy Spirit in the early church.
- Twenty-one letters: Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2 & 3 John and Jude.
- One book of prophecy: Revelation.

### Q7 What is the purpose of the Bible?

The Bible is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Ps 119:105). Paul says, “...The Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,

and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:15–16).

Unlike secular books, which provide for entertainment, academic analysis and philosophical rumination, the Bible is the living word of God whose purposes include:

- *Calling mankind to repentance.* The Bible highlights the fact that everyone has sinned and proclaims a message of repentance (Acts 3:19; 17:30): “Turn at my reproof; surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you” (Prov 1:23); “Thus says the Lord: ‘Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls...’” (Jer 6:16).
- *Leading us to true righteousness.* Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Mt 5:6). The Bible explains how we can obtain this righteousness: “...The righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe...” (Rom 3:22); “And by [Jesus] everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39). Righteousness, then, comes from believing in Jesus Christ, and by keeping the teachings of the Bible so that we become skilled in the “word of righteousness” (Heb 5:13) and “thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:17).
- *Directing us onto the path of salvation.* Jesus says, “Yet I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you may be saved” (Jn 5:34); “Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death” (Jn 8:51). Elder James describes the Scriptures as “the implanted word, which is able to save [our] souls” (Jas 1:21).

### Q8 What do the books of history and prophecy talk about?

The books of history testify of Jesus: “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (Jn 20:31). They also remind and warn us by highlighting the successes and failures of the believers before us: “Now all these things

happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor 10:11); “Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience” (Heb 4:11).

The prophetic books contain God’s messages to His people at different periods in history. In many cases, they also reveal significant events that would transpire after the time of writing. Examples are God’s revelations concerning the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus, which were given to the OT prophets hundreds of years before they happened. The NT also contains prophecies, some of which have already been fulfilled, and others that have yet to take place.

### **Q9 What are the different types of laws in the Old Testament?**

God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, along with civil and religious laws:

- *The Ten Commandments.* These are recorded in Exodus 20:1–17. They are a core set of laws that God personally delivered from Mount Sinai and wrote with His own finger onto tablets of stone (Ex 31:18; Deut 10:2). All the subsequent laws that God gave to Moses were based upon them.
- *Civil laws.* These governed the community life of the Israelites and dealt with specific issues relating to their inter-personal relationships (e.g. Ex 21–23:9).
- *Religious laws.* These governed the religious life of the Israelites—specifically, how they were to serve and worship God. They included instructions about various feasts (e.g. Lev 23:1–44) and offerings (e.g. Lev 1:1–7:38).

Moses compiled all of the above, giving rise to the first five books of the Bible. Later on, the Jewish teachers developed an ever-expanding set of interpretations for this written law, which the Pharisees and scribes in the NT period referred to as the “tradition of the elders” (Mk 7:5), but Jesus, more scathingly, as the “tradition of men” (Mk 7:8).

### **Q10 What are the Ten Commandments?**

The Ten Commandments are God’s enduring moral laws for His people. They are recorded in Exodus 20:1–17 and Deuteronomy 5:6–21:

1. “You shall have no other gods before Me.”
2. “You shall not make for yourself any carved image...you shall not bow down to them nor serve them...”
3. “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain...”
4. “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy...”
5. “Honor your father and your mother....”
6. “You shall not murder.”
7. “You shall not commit adultery.”
8. “You shall not steal.”
9. “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”
10. “You shall not covet...”

### **Q11 Which is the greatest commandment?**

The first four commandments set out our duty to God, while the latter six set out our duty to man. Jesus sums them up in this way: “‘And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mk 12:30–31); “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Mt 22:40). Apostle Paul adds, “Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Rom 13:10).

### **Q12 What is our responsibility with regards to God’s commandments?**

The Bible states that those who believe in Jesus are justified and saved by grace, and not by works of the law (Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8).

However, this does not mean we can do as we please. Paul says, “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!” (Rom 6:15); “Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law” (Rom 3:31).

How do we, as Christians, establish the law? We do it by walking according to the Holy Spirit—that is, living a life that is submissive to the guidance of God: “For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:3–4). Today, we know to keep God’s commandments because they are etched into our hearts by the indwelling Spirit (Jer 31:33; cf. Heb 8:10).

### **Q13 The Bible was written by people, so what role did God have?**

Paul says, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). In truth, the Bible declares the great and wondrous works of God and reveals life, spiritual mysteries and truth—matters transcending human wisdom. Without God’s revelation, no one would have been able to write it, and certainly not with such authority.

God revealed His word to man in different ways—verbally, in writing and through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says that He:

- spoke to Moses “face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings” (Num 12:8).
- wrote the Ten Commandments with His own finger onto tablets of stone (Ex 31:18; Deut 10:1–4).
- gave His oracles to the Israelites (Acts 7:38; Rom 3:1–2; 9:4).
- spoke to the Old Testament prophets (e.g. 1 Sam 3:1–21).
- spoke to people as a voice from heaven (Mt 3:17; Lk 9:35; Jn 12:28–30).

- sent angels to deliver His messages (Dan 9:21–27; Lk 1:11–20).
- gave people dreams and visions (Num 12:6; Mt 1:20–23; 2 Cor 12:1–4; Revelation).
- inspired His faithful workers and apostles through the Holy Spirit (2 Sam 23:2; 2 Pet 1:21).
- sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to speak His words (Jn 3:34; 8:26; 12:49–50).

### **Q14 Can we view the Bible literally as the word of God?**

If we view the Bible literally, we see that it contains more than the spoken word of God—it also contains the words of people (e.g. Lk 1:46–55), angels (e.g. Lk 2:13–14), and even the devil (e.g. Job 2:2, 4–5). These have been recorded for our instruction, encouragement and warning. Taken as a whole, the book is the infallible word of God because He personally inspired its writing (2 Tim 3:16). Hence, we should take care neither to add to it, nor to take anything away (Rev 22:18–19).

### **Q15 How should we interpret the spiritual teachings?**

The Bible is the revelation of God. To understand it, we need spiritual wisdom, as opposed to worldly wisdom. Not surprisingly, many people are unable to fathom its meaning. Paul explains it in this way: “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (1 Cor 1:21). He also says, “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Cor 2:13). The fact is, the Bible contains spiritual truths. Therefore, we need to ask God to give us understanding (Lk 24:45) and to guide us into the truth through His Holy Spirit (Jn 14:17; 16:13).

**Q16 How should we use the Bible to preach?**

When we preach the gospel, we should speak the word of God faithfully and accurately (Isa 8:20; 1 Pet 4:11). Apostle Paul says, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). Importantly, we should use the Bible as the sole basis upon which to preach Jesus (Lk 24:27; Acts 8:35; 17:1–4).

**Q17 How does reading the Bible benefit us?**

The Bible has the power to transform our lives. This is because it:

- reveals our sins (Rom 3:20; Gal 3:22; Jas 1:23–24).
- is like a sharp two-edged sword that penetrates to divide even the soul and spirit, joints and marrow (Heb 4:12).
- has the power to shatter the hardened human heart, like a hammer upon a rock (Jer 23:29).
- is a consuming fire (Jer 5:14; 23:29).
- is an imperishable seed that is sown in our heart, where it grows and bears fruit (1 Pet 1:23; Mt 13:23).
- nourishes us and makes us grow (Jer 15:16; 1 Pet 2:2).
- is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Ps 119:105; cf. 119:130).
- is life and health to our body (Prov 4:20–22).
- cleanses us (Jn 15:3).
- is the sword of the Spirit that subdues Satan (Eph 6:17).

Bible reading should be an integral part of our life. Each day, we should study and meditate on the word of God (Josh 1:8; Ps 1:2–3; Acts 17:11); pray for understanding (Ps 119:125; Eph 1:16–17); listen and ask questions (Lk 2:46; Acts 8:31); quote from it (Lk 4:4, 8, 12); put it into practice (Mt 7:24–25; Jas 1:22, 25).

## Man

**Q1 Where does man come from?**

Man was created by God: “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen 1:27). He granted man special wisdom and authority over the rest of His creation: “For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind” (Jas 3:7; cf. Gen 1:26).

**Q2 How did God make him?**

God made man from the dust of the earth (Gen 2:7) and breathed into him the breath of life which turned him into a living being (Gen 2:7). The Bible indicates that, aside from a physical body, man also has a spirit and a soul (Job 32:8; Zech 12:1; 1 Cor 2:11; 1 Thess 5:23; Heb 4:12).

**Q3 Which is more important: the body or the soul?**

Although we cannot see it, the soul is infinitely more precious than the physical body. Jesus says, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mt 10:28). Apostle Paul adds, “While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor 4:18). Here, the things “which are not seen [and] are eternal” include our soul.

#### Q4 What happens when we die?

The Book of Ecclesiastes says, “For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun” (Eccl 9:5–6). Death marks the end of a person’s physical existence and is when his spirit returns to God (Eccl 12:7). Importantly, the soul of one who is saved is taken by angels to paradise (Lk 16:22; 23:43). In contrast, the soul of the sinner goes to Hades to await judgment (Lk 16:23, 28); in the future, he will undergo a second death (Rev 21:8).

#### Q5 Is the soul conscious after death?

The Bible leads us to understand that the soul is conscious after death. For example, it records:

- the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, where Lazarus was taken by angels to Abraham to be comforted (Lk 16:22, 25), while the rich man went to Hades, where he experienced torment and pain (Lk 16:23–24).
- the souls of martyred saints crying out, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (Rev 6:10).
- Jesus telling the robber before they both died, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Lk 23:43).

#### Q6 What is death?

The word “death” refers to three things:

- *Death of the body.* This occurs when the spirit of a person leaves the physical body—the moment he breathes his last (Gen 35:29; Ps 146:4).
- *Death of the soul.* This refers to the separation of a person from the life of God (Eph 4:18). Hence, a person can be physically alive, but be spiritually dead (Lk 9:60; 1 Tim 5:6). This type of death originated when our ancestors, Adam and Eve, sinned against God in the garden of Eden by eating the

forbidden fruit. God had warned them, saying, “...For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen 2:17). After they sinned, their physical bodies did not perish immediately—for we know that Adam lived up to the age of 930 years (Gen 5:5); however, they lost their spiritual lives there and then. This type of death is more serious because it leads to eternal condemnation.

- *Eternal punishment.* This means being separated from God for eternity. The Bible describes what will happen when Jesus comes again: “In flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thess 1:8–9). This verse talks about the second death, whereby sinners will be thrown into the fiery lake of brimstone (Rev 21:8)—a place that has also been prepared for the devil and his angels (Mt 25:41; Rev 20:10). This lake signifies eternal punishment (Mt 25:46), where the “worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” (Mk 9:48). Hence, the writer of Hebrews remarks, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31).

#### Q7 Why does everyone have to die?

The reason is that Adam and Eve sinned against God when they chose to listen to the devil in the garden of Eden. The consequences for them and for mankind were sin and death.

The Bible speaks of the following:

- *The spread of sin and death:* “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners...” (Rom 5:19); “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Rom 5:12); “For the wages of sin is death...” (Rom 6:23).
- *The outcome for mankind:* “For as in Adam all die...” (1 Cor 15:22); “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Heb 9:27).

- *The end of death:* “Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death” (Rev 20:14).

Sin has permeated the world to affect everyone, meaning that man is ungodly by nature (Rom 4:5) and his “righteousnesses are like filthy rags” (Isa 64:6). No one is inherently good or immune from sin (Eccl 7:20; Rom 3:10–12; 1 Jn 1:8).

## Q8 What is sin?

Jesus describes sin as a spiritual illness (Lk 5:31–32) brought upon mankind through the actions of our first ancestors (Gen 3). Hence, the Bible is filled with lamentations about the fallen nature of man: “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me” (Ps 51:5); “...The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth...” (Gen 8:21); “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jer 17:9); “The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies” (Ps 58:3); “Truly, this only I have found: that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes” (Eccl 7:29).

Apostle Paul describes the manifestation of sin:

*And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.*

*Romans 1:28–32*

Before believing in Christ, many of us would have been guilty of such conduct, living “in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and [being] by nature children of wrath, just as the others” (Eph 2:3).

The Bible also describes sin as a breakdown of man’s relationship with God. It is characterized by his:

- *Separation from God:* “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13); “Having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart” (Eph 4:18).
- *Resistance to God:* “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed...” (Ps 2:2); “Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son” (1 Jn 2:22); “And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works...” (Col 1:21).
- *Testing of God:* “Yet they tested and provoked the Most High God, and did not keep His testimonies” (Ps 78:56); “But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, ‘Why do you test Me, you hypocrites?’” (Mt 22:18).
- *Blasphemy:* “...I [i.e. Paul] was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man...” (1 Tim 1:13); “Then [the beast] opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven” (Rev 13:6).
- *Neglect of God:* “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God” (Ps 9:17).
- *Straying from God:* “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa 53:6).
- *Hate of light and love of darkness:* “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed” (Jn 3:19–20).

- *Gratification of lusts*: “For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another” (Tit 3:3).
- *Conformity to the world*: “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Eph 2:1–2); “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (Jas 4:4).
- *Lack of hope*: “...At that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12); “...If the dead do not rise, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!’” (1 Cor 15:32).
- *Enslavement to sin*: “...Those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb 2:15); “Jesus answered them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin’” (Jn 8:34); “We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 Jn 5:19).
- *Being under the shadow of judgment*: “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Heb 9:27).

Finally, the Bible points out that the failure to believe in Jesus Christ is one of the gravest sins: “He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son” (1 Jn 5:10); “He who believes in Him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (Jn 3:18); “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (Jn 3:36).

The Bible calls Jesus the “true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world” (Jn 1:9). However, mankind is condemned when it chooses to remain in darkness: “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (Jn 3:19); “And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it” (Jn 1:5).

### **Q9 Can a person change his own sinful ways?**

Sin is an inextricable part of human nature; a person cannot free himself from it—at least, not through his own means or effort. Apostle Paul, for example, sums up an internal struggle—a struggle of conscience—that we are all familiar with:

*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.*

*Romans 7:18–20*

The fact is, mankind is under the bondage of sin (Rom 7:14), and the whole world is under the control of the devil (Jn 14:30). Only our merciful God has the power to save us (Mt 1:21), deliver us from the pending wrath (1 Thess 1:10) and bring us safely into His heavenly kingdom (2 Tim 4:18).

### **Q10 Why did God allow man to sin in the first place?**

When God initially created man, he was good (Gen 1:31): he had the image of God (Gen 1:27) and a pure conscience. He also had free will and the responsibility for his own actions. In this way, we see that God never intended man to be a machine compelled to do His bidding. Rather, He showed man what was good and right (Mic 6:8), explained the consequences of disobedience (Gen 2:16–17), and expected the best from him. Sadly, man abused his freedom and, in doing so, fell short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23).

**Q11 Why did He plant the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden of Eden?**

Before God created man, evil already existed in the form of the fallen angel, Satan. The latter's downfall was due to pride and rebellion (Isa 14:12). Wanting Adam to understand the existence of evil and temptation, God planted the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and commanded him not to eat from it. By obeying and resisting, Adam and Eve would have demonstrated their faithfulness and allegiance to God.

Unfortunately, Satan made use of the crafty serpent to tempt Eve. After she succumbed, she led her husband to sin likewise (Gen 3:1–6). From that time, man lost both his glory and spiritual life. Moreover, sin entered into the world, with the consequence that mankind has been inclined towards evil ever since.

**Q12 How can we be saved from sin?**

To be saved, we need to acknowledge that we are sinners (Lk 5:8); have a sinful nature that needs to be renewed (Eph 4:22–24); are spiritually dead (Lk 9:60; Eph 2:5); and need to be reconciled to God (Rom 5:10; 8:7; Col 1:21). When we do this, God will grant us the following through Jesus Christ:

- *Forgiveness*: "...I [i.e. Jesus] now send you [i.e. Paul], to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me" (Acts 26:17–18).
- *Reconciliation*: "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:1).
- *Renewal*: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor 5:17).
- *Life*: "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (Jn 20:31).

**Q13 What is God's will for us?**

"'Vanity of vanities,' says the Preacher; 'vanity of vanities, all is vanity'" (Eccl 1:2). This truth applies to everyone: rich or poor, famous or obscure. Life is fleeting, and the end is death: "As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more" (Ps 103:15–16); "Surely every man walks about like a shadow; surely they busy themselves in vain; he heaps up riches, and does not know who will gather them" (Ps 39:6).

From these words, we are reminded to shift our focus beyond our temporary earthly existence: we must find salvation for our soul. Hence, Jesus says, "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mt 16:26). To gain eternal life, we should believe in Jesus Christ (Jn 3:15–16), obey His gospel (Acts 2:38–39; 2 Thess 1:8) and keep His commandments (Mt 19:17). These matters constitute God's gracious will for us.

## Angels

### Q1 Who or what are angels?

The Bible refers to them as the “angels of God” (Lk 15:10), “His hosts” and “ministers” (Ps 103:21), and the “sons of God” (Job 38:7). They live in heaven where they behold the face of God (Mt 18:10).

### Q2 Where do they come from?

Angels were created by God and existed before man (Ps 148:2, 5).

### Q3 What are they like?

Angels are ministering spirits (Heb 1:14). Because they are spiritual beings, they do not die or marry (Mt 22:30; Lk 20:35–36). Moreover, being individually created by God, the consequence of one angel sinning does not have a direct impact on another—unlike man, whose first ancestor sinned, causing the entire human race to be plunged into sin (Rom 5:12).

### Q4 How many angels are there?

There are innumerable angels, as indicated by the heavenly visions of the prophet Daniel and elder John:

- “A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened” (Dan 7:10).
- “Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands” (Rev 5:11).

### Q5 Do they have names and ranks?

Angels have different names, roles and ranks. Among them is Michael, “one of the chief princes” (Dan 10:13; cf. 12:1), “the archangel” (Jude 9) and warrior and defender (Rev 12:7). Another is Gabriel, God’s messenger and guide (Dan 8:15–16; 9:21; Lk 1:11, 19, 26). There are also cherubim (Gen 3:24) and seraphim (Isa 6:2).

### Q6 How do angels compare with human beings?

For the present time, the position of man is “a little lower than the angels” (Ps 8:4–5; cf. Heb 2:7). The angels of God are “greater in power and might” (2 Pet 2:11; cf. Ps 103:20). They also possess more wisdom (2 Sam 14:20), holiness (Dan 8:13; Mk 8:38), humility (2 Pet 2:11; Jude 9; Rev 22:9) and glory (Lk 9:26).

### Q7 Can we see angels?

Angels are glorious spiritual beings (Mt 28:2–3; Acts 10:30) who are seldom seen by people, unless God opens their eyes to do so (e.g. Num 22:31). When they do appear to people, they often do so in the form of human beings (e.g. Gen 18:2; 19:10, 16; Dan 8:15). Consequently, people may not even be aware that they have encountered an angel (Heb 13:2).

**Q8 What accounts are there in the Bible of angels appearing to people?**

There are a number of accounts, including the following:

- Two angels delivering Lot and his family from Sodom (Gen 19)
- An angel sending a plague upon the Israelites after David ordered a census (2 Sam 24:15–17)
- The angel Gabriel giving a revelation to Daniel (Dan 9:21–27)
- Gabriel announcing the birth of John the Baptist (Lk 1:11–20)
- Gabriel announcing the birth of Jesus (Lk 1:26–38)
- Two angels appearing to Mary Magdalene after the resurrection of Jesus (Jn 20:11–13)
- Two angels appearing to the disciples after the ascension of Jesus (Acts 1:10–11)
- An angel instructing Cornelius to send for Peter (Acts 10:3–7; cf. 10:30–32)
- An angel rescuing Peter from prison (Acts 12:7–11)
- An angel giving a message of comfort to Paul during a storm at sea (Acts 27:23–24)
- One of seven angels showing John a vision of the new Jerusalem (Rev 21:9)

**Q9 What is the nature of their work?**

In heaven, the angels stand before God (1 Kgs 22:19); carry out His will (Ps 103:20–21); praise Him (Job 38:7; Ps 148:2; Isa 6:3); worship (Phil 2:10; Heb 1:6); wage war against the devil and his angels (Rev 12:7–9).

On earth, the angels help believers by ministering to them (Heb 1:14); strengthening them (1 Kgs 19:4–8; Lk 22:43); protecting them (Ps 34:7; 91:11–12; Dan 6:22); giving them understanding (Dan 8:16, 19; 9:22); comforting them (Acts 27:23–24); directing their work for God (Acts 8:26); teaching them God’s law (Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2); carrying their souls to paradise (Lk 16:22). They also execute God’s punishment (2 Kgs 19:35; Acts 12:23).

On the last day, the angels will descend on clouds from heaven with Jesus (Mt 25:31; 2 Thess 1:7) to gather the elect (Mt 24:30–31) and to separate out the wicked from the righteous (Mt 13:41, 49).

**Q10 Can we worship angels?**

No, we cannot. When elder John fell at the feet of an angel to worship him, the latter said, “See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!...” (Rev 19:10; cf. 22:9). Angels are created beings, just like us. Only God is almighty and worthy of worship; no one is His equal (Isa 40:25).

**Q11 Are they capable of sinning?**

Yes, they are. The letter of Jude describes how some angels “did not keep their proper domain, but left their own habitation...” (Jude 6). The outcome was that God “cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment” (2 Pet 2:4). Here, the Greek verb for “cast down to hell” is *tartaroo*,<sup>1</sup> meaning to consign to Tartarus, a place of restraint for the wicked—a place that is distinct from the “hell” which is the final destination of the devil and sinners.<sup>2</sup>

1 Strong’s reference no. G5020.

2 Compare the use of the Greek word, *Geenna* (G1067) in Mt 18:9; 23:33; Mk 9:43, 47; Lk 12:5.

## The Devil

### Q1 Who or what is the devil?

The devil is an evil spirit who was cast out of heaven, along with his followers (Rev 12:9). Together, these “rulers of the darkness of this age” oppose God and His people (Eph 6:12).

### Q2 Does he have a name?

The Greek word for “devil”, *diabolos*, means “accuser” or “slanderer”.<sup>1</sup> He is so-called because he slanders God before man (Gen 3:1, 4–5) and accuses man before God (Job 1:9–11; 2:4–5; Rev 12:10). In Revelation 12:9, he is also referred to as the following:

- *The great dragon*. The original Greek words are *megas* (“great”)<sup>2</sup> and *drakon* (“dragon”).<sup>3</sup> They denote a “mythical monster, a dragon”, or a large serpent, so-called because of its keen eyesight. The word *drakon* comes from the root word *derk*, meaning “to see”. From the Bible, we learn that the dragon wants to devour Christ (Rev 12:4–5) and His followers (1 Pet 5:8).
- *The serpent of old*. The Greek words are *archaios* (“old”)<sup>4</sup> and *ophis* (“serpent”).<sup>5</sup> The devil made use of the sly and deceitful serpent in the garden of Eden to tempt Eve (2 Cor 11:3).

1 Strong's reference no. G1228.  
2 Strong's reference no. G3173.  
3 Strong's reference no. G1404.  
4 Strong's reference no. G744.  
5 Strong's reference no. G3789.

- *Satan*. The Greek word *satanas* means “adversary”,<sup>6</sup> indicating that his thoughts and actions oppose God and all that is good. The name appears eighteen times in the Old Testament and thirty-six times in the New Testament.

In the rest of the Bible, the devil is given various other names:

- *Belial*, meaning “worthlessness” or “hopeless ruin”<sup>7</sup> (2 Cor 6:15)
- *Beelzebub, ruler of the demons* (Mt 12:24)
- *The evil one* (Mt 6:13)
- *The tempter* (Mt 4:3; 1 Thess 3:5)
- *The ruler of this world* (Jn 12:31)
- *The god of this age* (2 Cor 4:4)

### Q3 Where does he come from?

Everything in the universe, visible or invisible, is God’s creation (Col 1:16–17). God alone is self-existent, for He says, “I AM WHO I AM” (Ex 3:14). This leads us to understand that the devil was created by God, albeit before he became an evil spirit.

The prophet Ezekiel offers us some insights into the origin of the devil. He speaks of him in symbolic terms as the King of Tyre, describing how he was originally an anointed cherub created by God (Ezek 28:12, 14). In 28:12–19, Ezekiel laments his downfall and reveals that the devil:

- was once perfect (vv. 12, 15).
- was full of wisdom and beauty (vv. 12–13).
- was in Eden, the garden of God (v. 13).
- was on God’s holy mountain (v. 14).
- was an anointed cherub (v. 14).
- was perfect and blameless (v. 15).

6 Strong's reference no. G4567.  
7 Strong's reference no. G955.

- was guilty of sinning (v. 15).
- became filled with violence and sin (v. 16).
- became proud on account of his beauty, and his wisdom became corrupt because of his splendour (v. 17).
- became profane and defiled (vv. 16, 18).
- was cast out of the mountain of God (v. 16).
- was thrown to the ground (v. 17).
- will be destroyed by God with fire (vv. 18–19).

The prophet Isaiah also writes about the fall of the devil, symbolizing him as the King of Babylon: “How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations!” (Isa 14:12). Reinforcing the message of Ezekiel, Isaiah describes his arrogant aspirations: “For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High’” (Isa 14:13–14). In other words, the devil desired to be like God, but found himself cast out of heaven as a consequence.

**Q4 What does 1 John 3:8 mean, where it says that “the devil has sinned from the beginning”?**

This verse means that the devil was sinning against God, even before the events in the garden of Eden. As mentioned previously, he became proud and fell from grace (1 Tim 3:6). Jesus says that he failed to remain in the truth: “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” (Jn 8:44).

In the Book of Revelation, there is a prophecy concerning how the devil will cause a multitude to fall: “His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth...” (Rev 12:4).

According to Daniel 8:10, 24, these “stars of heaven” are God’s people who will be deceived in the end time.<sup>8</sup>

**Q5 What does John 8:44 mean, where it says that the devil was “a murderer from the beginning”?**

The words “from the beginning” point to the time of creation. The devil made use of the cunning serpent to make Eve doubt the words of God and to sin against Him. In this way, he brought about man’s spiritual death (Gen 3:1–6; Rom 5:12, 14). Soon after, the devil began inciting people to commit physical murder. Cain, for example, killed his brother, Abel, in a jealous rage after his offering was rejected by God (Gen 4:3–8). Hence, elder John speaks of Cain as belonging to “the wicked one” (1 Jn 3:12).

**Q6 How does the devil oppose God?**

The devil has been continuously opposing God by targeting His salvation work, His chosen people and the world at large. The ways in which he has done this include causing sin to enter the world (Gen 3; 6:5, 12); roaming the earth to scrutinize God’s servants (Job 1:7–8); plotting against Jesus (Lk 22:3; Jn 13:27); sowing tares among the wheat (Mt 13:24–30, 38–39); scheming to make Christians fall (2 Cor 2:11); persecuting the church (Acts 8:1; Rev 20:9); obstructing the work of God’s servants (Dan 10:13; 1 Thess 2:18); distorting the word of God (Mt 4:6; 2 Pet 3:16–17); masquerading as “an angel of light”, and his followers, as “ministers of righteousness” (2 Cor 11:14–15); seeking to sift the believers (Lk 22:31); leading people away from the truth (2 Cor 11:3; 1 Tim 4:1); performing false signs and wonders (2 Thess 2:8–10); perverting the way of the Lord (Acts 13:10); deceiving the world (Eph 6:12; Rev 12:9).

**Q7 How does the devil harm individuals?**

Where there is opportunity, the devil can inflict physical or spiritual harm on individuals. For example, he can enter a person’s heart (Lk 22:3; Acts 5:3); incite a person to sin

<sup>8</sup> Revelation: Bible Study Guide (USA: True Jesus Church, 1999).

(Eph 2:1–3); snatch God’s word away from the listener (Mk 4:15); cause spiritual blindness (2 Cor 4:3–4); bring about sickness and infirmity (Lk 13:16; Acts 10:38); cause suffering and tribulation (Job 2:7; Rev 2:10); possess a person (Mt 8:28; Mk 5:2; Lk 4:33).

#### Q8 Who can overcome his work?

The only one who can overcome the work of the devil is Jesus: “He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 Jn 3:8). Jesus destroyed the work of the devil when He died on the cross. The outcome was that mankind had the chance to turn “from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in [Him]” (Acts 26:18).

#### Q9 Where is he now?

The Book of Revelation describes how the devil was defeated in heaven by the archangel Michael and his angels, and was cast down to earth (Rev 12:7–12). During His ministry, Jesus spoke prophetically concerning this spiritual drama, saying, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Lk 10:18). This prophecy was realized when He died on the cross and shed His blood, thereby overcoming the power of the devil (Rev 12:11). The outcome for believers is that the devil can no longer accuse us before God (Rev 12:10).

The focus of the devil’s work is now on earth: “Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time” (Rev 12:12). Elder Peter says that he is prowling around like a lion seeking whom he may devour—particularly those believers who fail to guard their faith and who lack submission and humility (1 Pet 5:8).

The devil has his own kingdom (Lk 11:18) and exerts his power by controlling human hearts and using all kinds of schemes to

prevent people from knowing God. Therefore, as Christians, we are fighting against “principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12). When we preach the gospel by the power of God, we are battling against those powers and helping to demolish the strongholds of unbelief in people’s hearts, to make them obedient to Christ (2 Cor 10:4–5).

#### Q10 Why does God not destroy him sooner?

God’s thoughts and plans transcend human understanding:

- “He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity into their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end” (Eccl 3:11).
- “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever...” (Deut 29:29).
- “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa 55:9).

However, the Bible gives us some insights concerning the timing of God’s judgment on the devil:

- *God’s perspective of time is different from ours.* “For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night” (Ps 90:4). These words indicate that what we may perceive as a delay may not be so for our eternal God. His perception of time is such that 6,000 years of human history appear merely as days. Moreover, we need to appreciate that He has His own timing for everything (Eccl 3:17; Acts 1:7).
- *God is waiting to reveal His power.* From the Book of Exodus, we learn of God’s dealings with Pharaoh who, in many ways, symbolizes the devil. God told him, “Now if I had stretched out My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, then you would have been cut off from the earth. But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth” (Ex 9:15–16; cf. Rom 9:17). God allowed Pharaoh to

resist to the end in order to reveal the full extent of His power. In the same way, God is waiting to manifest His power over the devil.

- *God is waiting to reveal His wrath.* “What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction” (Rom 9:22). The fact is, God is now storing up His wrath; in the future, He will unleash it upon the devil in righteous judgment.
- *Satan knows his time is short.* When Jesus confronted two demon-possessed men, the demons cried out, “What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God. Have You come here to torment us before the time?” (Mt 8:29). Their words indicate an awareness that Jesus had an appointed time for judging them. Indeed, the Bible says that the everlasting fire has already been prepared (Mt 25:41) and the “the time is at hand” (Rev 22:10). Therefore, elder James says that the demons are trembling even now (Jas 2:19).

#### **Q11 What is the fate of the devil?**

The Bible says that the devil:

- *Has been cast out from the presence of God.* “...Therefore I [i.e. God] cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God” (Ezek 28:16); “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out” (Jn 12:31); “I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me” (Jn 14:30).
- *Has been defeated by Jesus Christ.* After Adam and Eve sinned, God told the serpent, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Gen 3:15). These prophetic words were fulfilled when Jesus died on the cross and overcame the power of death belonging to Satan. Hence, Paul says, “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” (1 Cor 15:55).

- *Will be judged.* “And when He [i.e. the Holy Spirit] has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment ... of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged” (Jn 16:8, 11).
- *Will be thrown into the lake of fire.* “And the devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Rev 20:10).

#### **Q12 The Bible describes a fiery lake that has been prepared for the devil. Who or what else is also destined for this place?**

God has prepared a fiery lake in which to destroy the devil and his angels (Mt 25:41). It is also the final destination of the beast and the false prophet (Rev 20:10). However, it is also God’s will to put an end to death and Hades. The Book of Revelation prophesies: “Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death” (Rev 20:14). Also, Paul says, “The last enemy that will be destroyed is death” (1 Cor 15:26).

God has opened up a new and living way for mankind through His Son (Heb 10:20)—a way that leads to everlasting life. The only conditions for entry are that we believe in Jesus Christ and obey the gospel. Those who reject Him and commit evil will face the same fate as the devil: “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Rev 21:8).

#### **Q13 Is there any possibility of a truce between God and the devil?**

God and the devil are as different as light and darkness. There is no possibility of a compromise or a truce. Moreover, we need to be aware that, with regards to our affiliation, we belong either to God or to the devil (1 Jn 3:8–10; 5:19); there is no middle ground.

**Q14 How can we escape from the power of the devil?**

The only way to escape is to accept God's salvation. In this way, we can enter into the kingdom of Jesus Christ, "in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:14). Thereafter, we need to live a life of submission: "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (Jas 4:7). Lastly, we need to put on the armour of God, remain alert, fight against evil and resist the devil's schemes to the end (Eph 6:11).

## Salvation

**Q1 What is salvation?**

Salvation is God's gift to mankind and comprises a number of life-changing blessings:

- Light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death (Lk 1:79)
- The grace of His calling (Eph 1:18; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 Pet 5:10)
- Freedom from the bondage of sin (Lk 1:77; Rom 6:17–18)
- Deliverance from condemnation, judgment and punishment (Rom 5:16; 1 Thess 1:10; Heb 9:27)
- Justification (Rom 3:24; Gal 2:16; Tit 3:7)
- Glory (Rom 5:2; 8:30; Heb 2:10; 1 Pet 5:10)
- The assurance of everlasting life (Rom 6:22–23)

God's salvation is for everyone: "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men" (Tit 2:11); "And all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Lk 3:6).

**Q2 Why is it important?**

Salvation is important because it entails that:

- *Our sins are forgiven* (Lk 1:77; Acts 5:31). We are powerless to change our own sinful condition—we need the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ: "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph 1:7). God removes our sin and confers

His righteousness and justification upon us—freely and graciously (Rom 3:21–26; 4:5–8).

- *We gain eternal life* (Jn 10:28). After the fall of our first ancestors, we were destined to die in sin, physically and spiritually. However, the salvation of God has meant that “he who believes in the Son has everlasting life...” (Jn 3:36). This blessing is also referred to as the “grace of life” (1 Pet 3:7) and the “[passing] from death into life” (Jn 5:24). Paul says, “So that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 5:21).

### Q3 Why does God want to save us?

God wants to save us because He loves us (Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 4:10, 16) and because He is merciful and gracious (Lk 1:77–78; Tit 3:5). He has “loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace” (2 Thess 2:16) and is “rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us” (Eph 2:4).

### Q4 When did God reveal His plan of salvation?

God prepared His plan of salvation before the beginning of time (2 Tim 1:9) and spoke of it through the Old Testament prophets (Heb 1:1). Nevertheless, the full mystery was not revealed until the appointed time (1 Pet 1:10, 12).

Jesus Christ finally made known God’s salvation when He came to the world. Hence, when the devout Simeon saw the baby Jesus in the temple, the Holy Spirit inspired him to say, “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples” (Lk 2:29–31).

### Q5 How has God manifested His grace?

The Bible says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and not that of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Eph 2:8). God

revealed His grace through Jesus Christ (Jn 1:14, 16–17), who came to the world to redeem us with His own precious blood (Eph 1:7) and to give us the hope of eternal life (2 Tim 1:10). Hence, John writes, “And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace” (Jn 1:16).

Today, we receive God’s grace when we hear and respond to the gospel with faith. Paul says, “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?...So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:14, 17). In other words, God calls us through the gospel, but we need to do our part by believing in Jesus (Mk 16:15–16), obeying the gospel (2 Thess 1:8) and holding fast our confidence to the end (Heb 3:14).

### Q6 What does repentance have to do with salvation?

We need to repent because God “commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). It entails that we:

- *Humble ourselves before God.* The Bible says, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (1 Pet 5:5; cf. Prov 3:34). In a parable of Jesus, we learn of a tax collector who was accepted by God because he knew to ask for mercy, unlike the proud and complacent Pharisee (Lk 18:9–14).
- *Acknowledge that we are sinners.* We should confess our sins before God (Acts 2:38; Lk 19:8–9) and change our ways (Lk 3:8; Acts 3:26; Jas 5:19–20). Without repentance, our faith in God will be superficial and lack grounding in the truth.
- *Fear God.* “Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him...” (Ps 85:9). We can learn from the devout Jews at Pentecost who, when cut to the heart by the gospel, accepted salvation through Jesus Christ (Acts 2:22–41).

**Q7 Is faith alone not sufficient?**

Faith in Jesus Christ is certainly important; however, faith alone cannot save us—we also need to follow through with our actions. Elder James says, “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?” (Jas 2:14).

The Bible records many examples to highlight the importance of faith with works. For example, when Jesus was healing a blind man, He instructed him to wash in the pool of Siloam (Jn 9:1–7). If the man had merely believed in Jesus, but failed to act, he would not have regained his sight (Jn 9:7). In another example, a woman suffering from a haemorrhage touched the garment of Jesus. Without this action, she would not have experienced His healing power (Lk 8:43–48).

While it is true that we are saved by God’s grace through faith, it is also the case that He expects us to fulfil some practical requirements.

*But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior.*

*Titus 3:4–6*

Here, Paul points out that God saves us through His mercy—but it is a mercy that is revealed when we receive water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This truth is reinforced by Peter who preaches, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Also, Jesus Himself says, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mk 16:16).

In summary, we need to believe and have faith in Jesus for salvation. But we also need to manifest our faith by carrying out God’s requirements: to repent, receive water baptism and to ask God for the Holy Spirit.

## Water Baptism

**Q1 Who gave the commandment for water baptism?**

The commandment for water baptism came from the Lord Jesus. Prior to His ascension, He instructed, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19); “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mk 16:15–16).

In light of this, the True Jesus Church performs water baptism for whoever accepts the complete gospel of salvation.

**Q2 What effects does it have?**

Water baptism brings about the following effects:

- Removal of our sins and giving us a clear conscience before God (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Heb 10:22; 1 Pet 3:21)
- Spiritual rebirth and newness of life (Jn 3:5; Rom 6:3–4; Tit 3:5)
- Enabling us to put on Christ and to belong to Him (Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27)
- Justification before God (Rom 3:24–26; 5:9)

For these reasons, it is directly related to our salvation.

**Q3 How does it remove our sins?**

The Book of Hebrews says, “And according to the law almost all things are purged with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb 9:22). In the Old Testament, priests used the blood of animals to atone for people’s sins on a regular and on-going basis. This practice foreshadowed the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross: “Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (Heb 9:12). Today, the blood of Jesus is present in the water during baptism by the power of the eternal Spirit, making it effective for the removal of sins once for all (Heb 9:12–14; 1 Jn 5:6–8).

**Q4 Why is the shedding of blood necessary?**

The shedding of blood for the forgiveness of sins was always a part of God’s redemptive plan: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul” (Lev 17:11). His ultimate will was to overcome sin and to redeem sinners through the blood of Jesus Christ (Heb 9:11–28).

As an additional note, because blood signifies life, Christians are not permitted to consume blood or the meat of strangled animals (Acts 15:29; cf. Gen 9:4; Lev 17:12–14).

**Q5 Why does it have to be the blood of Jesus?**

It must be the blood of Jesus because He alone is holy, sinless and worthy. “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb 9:14); “Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet 1:18–19).

**Q6 What power does His blood have?**

The blood of Jesus has the power to:

- bring about the forgiveness of sins (Eph 1:7).
- cleanse us and make us holy (Heb 13:12; 1 Jn 1:7).
- justify us and save us from God’s wrath (Rom 5:9).
- secure our purchase (Acts 20:28).
- redeem us (Eph 1:7; Rev 5:9).
- free us from the devil’s accusations (Rev 12:10–11).
- bring peace and reconciliation with God (Eph 2:13; Col 1:20–22).
- forge an everlasting covenant between God and ourselves (Mt 26:28; Heb 13:20–21).

**Q7 Jesus shed His blood 2,000 years ago. How can it still be effective today?**

The blood of Jesus is still effective because it has enduring power. The writer of Hebrews explains: “Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (Heb 9:12). It is present during water baptism through the work of the “eternal Spirit” (Heb 9:14).

**Q8 What is the fountain mentioned in Zechariah 13:1?**

The prophecy in Zechariah 13:1 states: “In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness.” This fountain was opened up when Jesus was nailed to the cross. His disciple, John, witnessed a soldier piercing His side with a spear, causing a miraculous flow of blood and water (Jn 19:34). Hence, when writing First John, he recorded specifically: “This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth” (1 Jn 5:6).

Today, this fountain is present whenever the True Jesus Church performs water baptism. Through the power and witness of the Holy Spirit, the blood of Jesus is present in the baptismal water for the remission of sins (1 Jn 5:8).

**Q9 What makes water baptism effective for salvation?**

The Bible highlights the factors that give water baptism its efficacy: water and the blood of Jesus, the presence of the Holy Spirit, the name of Jesus, and the power of the Lord’s word.

When Jesus was pierced on the cross, both water and blood flowed out from His side (Jn 19:34). This reveals that the two elements are inextricably linked and work together to give water baptism its effect. Pertinently, when we study the Bible’s references relating to water baptism alongside those relating to the blood of Jesus, we come to equate water baptism with the presence and power of Jesus’ blood:

Effect	Water baptism	Blood of Jesus
Forgiveness of sins	Acts 2:38; 22:16	Mt 26:28; Eph 1:7; Heb 9:22, 26, 28
Salvation and redemption	Mk 16:16; Tit 3:5; 1 Pet 3:21	Eph 1:7; 1 Pet 1:18–19; Rev 5:9
Cleansing and sanctification	Acts 22:16; 1 Cor 6:11; Eph 5:26; Heb 10:22	Heb 9:14; 13:12; 1 Jn 1:7; Rev 1:5; 7:14
Justification	1 Cor 6:11; Tit 3:5–7	Rom 5:9
Reconciliation with God and a clear conscience	Heb 10:22; 1 Pet 3:21	Eph 2:13; Col 1:20; Heb 10:19–22
Revelation of God’s righteousness	Mt 3:15	Rom 3:25
Enabling a person to belong to God/Jesus Christ	Mt 28:19; Rom 6:3; Gal 3:26–29	Acts 20:28; Rev 1:5–6; 5:9–10

Aside from water and the blood of Jesus, the Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit is also at work during baptism: “And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one” (1 Jn 5:8).

In addition, water baptism is effective when it is conducted in the name of Jesus, in accordance with the commandment of the Lord and the teaching of the apostles (Mt 28:19; cf. Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5). This is because the name “Jesus” has the power to save (Acts 4:12).

Finally, water baptism is effective for salvation because it is the word of Jesus (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:16; Jn 3:5). Jesus says, “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (Jn 6:63). Therefore, when we perform water baptism in the way prescribed by the Bible, we are assured that it will lead to life and salvation.

**Q10 What is the spiritual significance of water baptism?**

Water baptism has the following spiritual significance:

- *It enables us to escape from the power of darkness.* The time before Jesus’ resurrection was a time of darkness (Lk 22:53). When He resurrected, He overcame the power of darkness and was able to say, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:18–19). From these words, we understand that Jesus established water baptism as the way to salvation for mankind. It enables us to be transported from darkness into light, and into the kingdom of God’s beloved Son (Acts 26:18; Col 1:13–14).
- *It frees us from the Mosaic Law.* “The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:56–57). Through the shedding of His blood, Jesus paid off our debt of sin and redeemed us from the law (Gal 4:4–5). The outcome is that, when we are washed in His blood through water baptism, we are delivered from the law and its curse (Rom 7:6; Gal 3:13), enabling us to begin a new life under grace (Rom 6:14).
- *We die, are buried, and are raised up with Jesus.* Paul teaches that water baptism signifies the death and burial of our old

self with Jesus, and our resurrection with Him to a newness of life (Rom 6:3–4; Col 2:12–13).

**Q11 Some Christians argue that we are saved by faith alone and that water baptism has nothing to do with salvation. Are they right?**

No, they are not. When the Bible talks about salvation by faith, we need to understand that faith not only entails belief, it also entails a practical expression of that faith—namely obedience to the commandments of the Lord. Hence, elder James reminds us that faith should be accompanied by actions: “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?” (Jas 2:14); “Do you see that faith was working together with [Abraham’s] works, and by works faith was made perfect?” (Jas 2:22).

Importantly, water baptism is the commandment of Jesus (Mk 16:16). Therefore, while faith is certainly important, we also need to follow through practically by obeying Jesus to receive water baptism. If baptism had nothing to do with salvation, He would not have commanded it.

**Q12 Today, there are different beliefs and practices relating to water baptism: some churches do not perform it; others do, but claim that it is not necessary for salvation. Are they right?**

No, they are not. Water baptism is the plan of God and an integral part of the gospel of salvation (Mk 16:16; Acts 2:38; 10:48; 19:4–5; 22:16). We must therefore believe that, through baptism, we can attain God’s forgiveness and salvation.

True faith is revealed through obedience to the word of Jesus (Jn 8:31). Sadly, some churches have gone against His teaching by abolishing water baptism. Other churches perform it, but deny its power to save (1 Pet 3:21), remit sins (Acts 2:38) and to bring about spiritual regeneration (Tit 3:5). In effect, they regard baptism as nothing more than a ceremonial rite. Such stances go against the truth of the Bible.

**Q13 Some Christians claim that water baptism does not wash away sins, as these are forgiven when a person accepts Christ, or that baptism is merely a testimony before God, man, angels and demons. Are they right?**

No, they are not. The workers in the early church urged people to receive water baptism for the forgiveness of sins. For example, Peter preached, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...” (Acts 2:38), while Ananias told Saul (Paul), “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). Nowhere in the Bible does it say that water baptism merely serves as a testimony to others—and certainly not for indicating in retrospect that our sins have been forgiven.

**Q14 The Bible describes a criminal who received salvation when he repented on the cross. Does it not prove that water baptism is unnecessary?**

Luke 23:39–43 is a unique biblical account of someone repenting at the point of death and receiving salvation through the personal assurance of Jesus. Pertinently, when it happened, Jesus had yet to complete His work of salvation—to die, shed His blood and resurrect—and, therefore, to establish the new covenant, of which water baptism would be a part (Col 2:11–13). Hence, it was only after He resurrected—when He gained all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt 28:18)—that He issued the commandment to perform baptism for the remission of sins and for salvation (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:16; Lk 24:46–47). His disciples proceeded to do this from the day of Pentecost onwards, once the Holy Spirit had descended to establish the New Testament church (Acts 2:41). In light of this, anyone who denies that water baptism is necessary for salvation is, in effect, going against the teaching of the risen Lord.

### Q15 When is it the right time to be baptized?

We can receive water baptism when we have heard and accepted the gospel of salvation, and believe with all our heart that Jesus Christ is God, our Saviour (Acts 8:37). The Bible, for example, records:

- 3,000 people believing and receiving baptism on the day of Pentecost, after hearing Peter’s sermon (Acts 2:41).
- the Ethiopian eunuch believing and being baptized by Philip on his journey home from Jerusalem (Acts 8:36–38).
- Lydia and her household being baptized when the “Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul” (Acts 16:14–15).
- the jailer and his family believing in Jesus and being baptized by Paul and Silas in the middle of the night (Acts 16:25–34).
- the Corinthians being baptized after hearing and believing (Acts 18:8).

### Q16 Should infants be baptized and why?

Yes, they should, for the following reasons:

- They are born with sin and are subject to its outcome, which is death (Rom 5:12, 14). Like adults, they need the salvation of the Lord.
- Jesus says, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:5). This truth applies to everyone, without exception.
- Israelites were circumcised on the eighth day after birth in order to enter into a covenant with God—an act that prefigured water baptism (Col 2:11–12). Later, God established a new covenant with His people through the blood of Jesus Christ, which we can now enter into through water baptism. Like circumcision, the new covenant is inclusive of infants.
- Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven is open to children: “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you,

whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it” (Mk 10:14–15).

- The Israelites would have crossed the Red Sea with their infants—an event that typified water baptism (1 Cor 10:1–2; cf. Ex 10:9; 12:37; 14:21–31).
- In apostolic times, whole households received water baptism (e.g. Acts 16:15, 34). In the original Greek, the word for “household” is *oikos* and refers to a couple, their children, and any servants and relatives living in the home.<sup>1</sup>

### Q17 Infants are unable to believe in the Lord, so how can they be baptized?

Parents have a duty to ensure both the physical and spiritual well-being of their children. Therefore, as long as they have faith, their infants can be baptized. In fact, the Bible puts great emphasis on parental faith (e.g. the healing of the royal official’s son, Jn 4:46–53; the deliverance of a demon-possessed girl, Mt 15:21–28).

After their children have been baptized, parents should raise them up “in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). We can learn from the examples of Lois and Eunice who brought up Timothy to have a genuine faith (2 Tim 1:5). “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov 22:6).

### Q18 Where should water baptism be performed?

The Bible shows us that water baptism should be carried out in natural living water, such as rivers, creeks, streams, lakes and seas. We note, for example, that John baptized Jesus in the River Jordan (Mt 3:13; Mk 1:9). He also performed baptisms in Aenon near Salim “because there was much water there” (Jn 3:23). Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch when “they came to some water” in the desert (Acts 8:36). Nowhere does the Bible indicate that it is acceptable to perform baptism in man-made vessels or bodies of water.

<sup>1</sup> Strong’s reference no. G3624.

### Q19 What is the correct way to baptize?

Aside from the requirement to perform it in natural living water, the correct mode of water baptism also entails:

- *Full immersion.* In the account of Jesus' baptism, we learn that, "When He had been baptized, [He] came up immediately from the water..." (Mt 3:16). Also, when Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, both of them "went down into the water" (Acts 8:38). Full immersion is important because it signifies our death and burial with Christ (Rom 6:3–4).
- *Bowing of the head.* Paul says that baptism entails our being "united together in the likeness of [Jesus'] death" (Rom 6:5). The Gospel of John describes that likeness as the bowing of the head: "...And bowing His head, He gave up His Spirit" (Jn 19:30). Furthermore, when we bow our head, we acknowledge that we are sinners who need God's mercy and forgiveness (Job 10:15; Ps 40:12; Lk 18:13).
- *Calling upon the name of Jesus.* Jesus told His disciples to baptize people "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). The disciples correctly interpreted His meaning by baptizing believers in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5). The Bible states that there is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved (Acts 4:12).
- *Administration by a qualified baptist.* The baptist should be an ordained minister of the True Jesus Church who himself has been baptized in the correct manner and has received the Holy Spirit. This could be an elder, deacon or preacher. In this way, we can be sure that he has been sent by the Lord and carries His authority, like the apostles (Jn 20:21–23; Rom 10:15).

### Q20 How many times can we be baptized?

We should only be baptized once. This is because Jesus died one time for us: "For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified" (Heb 10:14). However, the baptism we receive must comply with God's requirements, for there is only "one baptism" that leads to salvation (Eph 4:5).

The importance of the correct water baptism is illustrated clearly in the Bible's account of the believers in Ephesus. Prior to their meeting with Paul, they had already received John's baptism for repentance. Nevertheless, Paul took care to re-baptize them in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins (Acts 19:1–5). This indicates that anyone who has not yet received the correct water baptism—one that meets the standard of the gospel—will need to be re-baptized.

## Baptism of the Holy Spirit

### Q1 What did Jesus say concerning the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

Before His ascension, Jesus instructed the disciples to wait for the baptism of the Holy Spirit: “And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’” (Acts 1:4–5). The Holy Spirit duly came down on the day of Pentecost and filled the disciples (Acts 2:1–4).

### Q2 Who gives the Holy Spirit?

God revealed to John the Baptist that Jesus was the one who would baptize people with the Holy Spirit. John testified, saying, “I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit’” (Jn 1:33). These words were fulfilled after Jesus’ ascension, and Peter stood up to witness to an astonished crowd, saying, “Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He [i.e. Jesus] poured out this which you now see and hear” (Acts 2:33).

### Q3 Which biblical prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost?

From Peter’s sermon, which is recorded in Acts 2, we learn that the events at Pentecost fulfilled an age-old prophecy of Joel: “‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy’” (Acts 2:17–18; cf. Joel 2:28–29).

### Q4 How did people react to the event at Pentecost?

When the Holy Spirit came down at Pentecost, the disciples spoke in tongues. It was witnessed by a crowd of Jews who gave a mixed reaction: “So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘Whatever could this mean?’ Others mocking said, ‘They are full of new wine’” (Acts 2:12–13). Peter stood up to refute the latter allegation, saying, “For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day” (Acts 2:15). He then proceeded to explain the truth of the matter and to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Today, we continue to see mixed reactions to the speaking of tongues, ranging from fear to bemusement, highlighting people’s inability to comprehend this spiritual phenomenon. Jesus indicated as much when He told the disciples, “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you” (Jn 14:16–17). We will do well, then, to learn from those devout Jews at Pentecost who opened their hearts to the gospel and were able to receive salvation and the promise of the Holy Spirit for themselves (Acts 2:38–42).

### Q5 Is the baptism of the Holy Spirit meant only for the Jews?

At Pentecost, Peter addressed his sermon to a crowd of Jews (Acts 2:14). However, from his concluding words, we understand that his message is relevant to everyone—to

people of all races and cultures: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38–39). Here, the “gift of the Holy Spirit” refers to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is a promise for every person whom God calls through the complete and perfect gospel (Eph 1:13).

Indeed, Peter’s words were fulfilled not long afterwards, for the Gentile Cornelius and his household were blessed with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as soon as they heard the gospel (Acts 10:44–48). Peter later testified, saying, “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 11:15–16).

#### **Q6 Are the events at Pentecost still relevant to Christians today?**

The Bible says, “I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him” (Eccl 3:14); “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (Jas 1:17). The baptism of the Holy Spirit is God’s promise to people near and far, and of all generations. Since the time of Pentecost, people throughout the world have been receiving the Holy Spirit. However, we need to be aware that the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of truth—only abides where the truth is found (Jn 14:17). In other words, He will be poured out solely in the church that preaches the complete gospel of salvation.

#### **Q7 Did anyone receive the Holy Spirit before Pentecost?**

No, the Holy Spirit did not descend until the day of Pentecost. Before then, the Holy Spirit inspired God’s workers or came upon them for a time, as in the case of the judges, kings, prophets and other specially chosen people (e.g. Num 27:18;

Judg 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 14:6; 1 Sam 10:10; 16:13; Lk 1:41, 67; 2:25). However, these occurrences did not constitute the baptism of the Holy Spirit, for it was not until Pentecost that He came to “abide with [believers] forever” (Jn 14:16).

During His ministry, Jesus spoke of the promised Holy Spirit, saying, “Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you” (Jn 16:7). Also, the Gospel of John records, “...For the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (Jn 7:39).

Soon after He resurrected, Jesus revealed the imminent coming of the Holy Spirit once again: “...He breathed on [the disciples], and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (Jn 20:22). Then, before He ascended to heaven, He instructed the disciples to wait in Jerusalem, saying, “For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:5). Jesus’ words were finally fulfilled on the day of Pentecost.

#### **Q8 How does the Bible describe the baptism of the Holy Spirit?**

The Bible uses a variety of terms to describe the same phenomenon:

- “Behold, I send the *Promise of My [i.e. Jesus’] Father* upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are *endued with power from on high*” (Lk 24:49; cf. Gal 3:14).
- “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has *come upon you...*” (Acts 1:8; cf. 19:6).
- “...You shall receive the *gift of the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 2:38).
- “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit *fell upon them*, as upon us at the beginning” (Acts 11:15).
- “...They sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might *receive the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 8:14–15).
- “‘For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be *baptized with the Holy Spirit* not many days from now’” (Acts 1:5; cf. 11:16).

- “...Having believed, you were *sealed with the Holy Spirit* of promise” (Eph 1:13).
- “...He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He *poured out on us* abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Tit 3:5–6).

**Q9 Some Christians argue that we do not need to pray for the Holy Spirit as He has remained with the church ever since Pentecost? Are they right?**

No, they are not. From the accounts in the Book of Acts, we see that, following the downpour of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2), Peter and John went to Samaria to lay hands on the believers so that they could receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14–17). Later on, Paul did the same for the believers in Ephesus (Acts 19:6). These examples prove that the believers in the early church prayed for the Holy Spirit after Pentecost. It is not the case that the disciples in Jerusalem somehow received the Holy Spirit in a representative manner on behalf of all believers thereafter, as some Christians believe. Today, if we wish to receive the Holy Spirit, we need to ask of God who gives graciously (Lk 11:13).

**Q10 Ephesians 1:13 says, “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.” Does this verse mean that we receive the Holy Spirit as soon as we believe in Jesus?**

Paul’s words constitute a general statement about the nature of the Christian journey: we receive the gospel, believe in Jesus Christ, and are sealed with the Holy Spirit—three steps. His statement does not indicate that we receive the Holy Spirit the moment we believe.

The accounts of people receiving the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts show that the timing varied between individuals: some received the Holy Spirit when they heard the gospel, some before water baptism, and others, after water baptism. For example, Cornelius and his household received the Holy Spirit

and spoke in tongues while they were listening to the gospel (Acts 10:44–45). In the case of the Samaritan believers, they did not receive the Holy Spirit even after water baptism; it was not until Peter and John were sent to them by the apostles in Jerusalem, to lay hands on them, that they did so (Acts 8:14–17). Saul (Paul) was chosen by the Lord on his way to Damascus, but did not receive the Holy Spirit until Ananias laid hands on him (Acts 9:17). Also, the disciples in Ephesus did not receive the Holy Spirit until Paul re-baptized them in the name of Jesus and laid hands on them (Acts 19:5–6). It is significant that, in this particular case, Paul had earlier asked the believers, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” (Acts 19:2). The answer was clear: “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.”

These examples illustrate the fact that a person does not receive the Holy Spirit automatically when he accepts the Lord as his Saviour—or even during, or immediately after, water baptism. The timing rests with God.

**Q11 What does the Book of Acts have to say concerning the baptism of the Holy Spirit?**

The Book of Acts records the work of the Holy Spirit during the time of the apostles and details the establishment and growth of the early church. It describes how God poured out His Holy Spirit on the early Christians and provides the church today with the guidelines for discerning whether a person has received the Holy Spirit or not.

Some key points concerning the baptism of the Holy Spirit include the following:

- According to Peter’s testimony, it is both a visible and audible experience: “Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now *see and hear*” (Acts 2:33).
- The primary sign is the speaking of spiritual tongues (Acts 2:4). On the day of Pentecost, 120 disciples received the Holy Spirit and spoke loudly in tongues, drawing the

attention of a crowd (Acts 2:6). Later, Cornelius and his household also received the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues, praising God (Acts 10:45–46). In Ephesus, Paul was able to discern that twelve disciples had received the Holy Spirit, for they spoke in tongues and prophesied (Acts 19:6).

- The spiritual tongues utter mysteries to God (1 Cor 14:2) and cannot be understood unless He opens a person's ears to interpret them (1 Cor 14:5, 13). In Acts 2, we find such an example:

*And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?"*

*Acts 2:6–8*

God enabled these people to hear the disciples "speaking in [their] own tongues the wonderful works of God" (Acts 2:11).

### **Q12 Does everyone speak in tongues when they receive the Holy Spirit?**

The speaking of tongues is the primary evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit. From the Book of Acts, we see that, after the first downpour of the Holy Spirit on the disciples at Pentecost, subsequent believers also spoke in tongues when they received the Holy Spirit. Hence, when Peter witnessed Cornelius and his household receiving the Holy Spirit, he immediately related it to the disciples' own experiences, saying, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit *just as we have?*" (Acts 10:47; cf. 15:8).

Some Christians claim that the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23) is sufficient evidence that a person has received the Holy Spirit. This assertion is true in part, as the bearing of the fruit of the Spirit pre-supposes that a person has received the Holy Spirit. However, we must be careful not to assume that all virtuous behaviour constitutes the fruit of the Spirit. If we return to the example of Cornelius, we know that, prior to believing in Jesus Christ, he was already "a devout man and one who feared God

with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always" (Acts 10:2). In short, he possessed many virtues, but these did not constitute the fruit of the Spirit: at the time, he had not yet received the Holy Spirit (or even water baptism). His bearing of spiritual fruit would only come after he received the Holy Spirit and began walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:16, 25).

### **Q13 What are the effects of receiving the Holy Spirit?**

Prior to the downpour of the Holy Spirit, the disciples exhibited various shortcomings: slowness to believe in the Scriptures (Lk 24:25), lack of faith and hardness of heart (Mk 16:13–14), fearfulness (Jn 20:19, 26), selfish ambition (Mk 9:34; 10:37), and an inability to grasp the Lord's teachings (Jn 16:12). Peter also denied the Lord three times (Mt 26:69–75). But all that would change, for Jesus promised: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you..." (Acts 1:8). Indeed, starting from the day of Pentecost, they were transformed by the Spirit. The outcomes were spiritual renewal, enlightenment and empowerment for God's ministry (Zech 4:6).

### **Q14 What happens when we receive the Holy Spirit?**

When we receive the Holy Spirit, we will manifest the primary evidence, which is the speaking of tongues. It is also possible that we might experience other signs, such as the movement of the body, the singing of spiritual songs, joy, and visions.

The Bible describes the baptism of the Holy Spirit as our being "sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance..." (Eph 1:13–14). In Paul's words, our body becomes the "temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 6:19). He will fill our spiritual void, satisfy our soul and lead us to eternal life. This is because Jesus promises, "But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (Jn 4:14).

The Holy Spirit will also transform and renew us (Tit 3:5). God says, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you;

I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them” (Ezek 36:26–27). In other words, the Spirit will empower us to overcome our weaknesses and to keep God’s commandments. The result is that we will grow in the likeness of the Lord: “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18).

However, our greatest transformation will occur when Jesus comes again, for the Holy Spirit will change us into spiritual beings:

- “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body...” (Phil 3:20–21).
- “Behold, I tell 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 trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Cor 15:51–53).
- “Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess 4:17).

### Q15 What is the purpose of the spiritual tongues?

Spiritual tongues serve two functions, which are praying and preaching:

- *Praying*. The primary function of tongues is self-edification through prayer: “He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself...” (1 Cor 14:4). In this case, they are directed at God and cannot be understood: “For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries” (1 Cor 14:2). Paul tells the church, “Do not forbid to speak with tongues”

(1 Cor 14:39) and expresses a wish that everyone had this ability (1 Cor 14:5). This type of tongue is given to all those who receive the Holy Spirit and is the primary sign of baptism in the Spirit.

- *Preaching*. The tongues for preaching are a special gift which the Bible calls “different kinds of tongues” (1 Cor 12:10). It is only given to some believers, as the Holy Spirit wills (1 Cor 12:11), for the edification of the church (1 Cor 12:7). For this reason, the tongues require interpretation (1 Cor 14:5). Paul advises, “But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God” (1 Cor 14:28). In other words, when there is no one to interpret their meaning, the speaker should refrain from using the tongues to address the congregation and should reserve them for prayer instead.

### Q16 In 1 Corinthians 12:8–10, tongues are listed at the end of the spiritual gifts. Does it not indicate that they are the least important?

First of all, we need to understand that, in relation to spiritual tongues, there are two types of gifts. One type is the charismatic gift mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:10, which is given by the Holy Spirit for preaching and edifying the church (1 Cor 12:7). The second type is termed *dorea* in the original Greek, whereby the gift is the Holy Spirit Himself<sup>2</sup> (e.g. Acts 2:38). The spiritual tongue that is *dorea* is for prayer and personal edification. It is the primary evidence of baptism in the Spirit.

Secondly, we should not mistakenly believe that the Bible in some way ranks God’s spiritual gifts in order of importance. Elder James reminds us, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (Jas 1:17). Both the gifts of *dorea* and *charisma* are graciously bestowed by God, and we should esteem them both.

1 From the Greek word *charisma*, meaning “gift”. Strong’s reference no. G5486.

2 Strong’s reference no. G1431.

**Q17 What do the terms “guide”, “move”, “inspire”, “baptize” and “fill” mean in relation to the work of the Holy Spirit?**

The Bible uses a variety of terms to illustrate the different ways in which the Holy Spirit works in a believer:

- “*Guide*”. Jesus told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would “guide [them] into all truth” (Jn 16:13). The original Greek word for “guide”, *hodegeo*,<sup>3</sup> means “to lead the way”.
- “*Move*”. Peter says, “For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:21). The Greek word *phero*<sup>4</sup> means “to bear” or “to carry”.
- “*Inspire*”. Paul says, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). The Greek word *theopneustos*<sup>5</sup> means “God-breathed”.
- “*Baptize*”. Before His ascension, Jesus promised the disciples, “For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:5). The Greek word is *baptizo*, meaning “to dip in”, and carries the “sense of immersing”.<sup>6</sup>
- “*Fill*”. The Book of Acts describes believers who were “filled” (Gr., *pletho*)<sup>7</sup> by the Holy Spirit. This happened to the disciples on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4), to Paul (Acts 9:17), and to the workers of God who were empowered and comforted (Acts 4:8, 31; 7:55; 13:9, 52). These examples reveal that God has the authority to give of His Spirit generously and without measure. Hence, apostle Paul encourages us to pursue the infilling of the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18).

3 Strong's reference no. G3594.

4 Strong's reference no. G5342.

5 Strong's reference no. G2315.

6 Strong's reference no. G907.

7 Strong's reference no. G4130.

**Q18 The Bible talks about the power of both water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit to bring about spiritual rebirth. Do they do this in different ways?**

The Bible explains how water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit lead to spiritual rebirth:

- *Water baptism*. Paul says that water baptism signifies the death and burial of our old sinful self and our resurrection to a newness of life (Rom 6:3–11; Col 2:11–12). Hence, after water baptism, we become a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). However, this is but the first step in a lifelong process; thereafter, we need the Holy Spirit to renew us continuously.
- *Baptism of the Holy Spirit*. Jesus told the disciples, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you...” (Acts 1:8). When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were transformed into powerful vessels of God, in fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy: “Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isa 40:30–31).

Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as “living water” (Jn 4:10) and as “a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (Jn 4:14) that can satisfy and sustain us. Through Him, we can be “strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man” (Eph 3:16) to live an abundant and victorious life.

Both water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit are essential for spiritual rebirth and salvation. This is why Jesus says, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:5).

**Q19 Some churches discourage their members from praying for the Holy Spirit in case they receive evil spirits. Others claim that speaking in tongues is a sign of demon-possession. Are they right?**

No, they are not. Sadly, many churches object to the speaking of tongues and praying for the Holy Spirit due to their

misunderstanding of the Bible and a lack of spiritual experience. Hence, their criticism of Christians who practise otherwise and, worse, their accusations of demon-possession. However, in doing these things, they are in danger of opposing God and blaspheming the Holy Spirit (Mk 3:28–30).

Telling believers not to pray for the Holy Spirit is wrong for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is contrary to the teaching of Jesus who encourages us to ask the heavenly Father for the Holy Spirit (Lk 11:13). Secondly, it goes against the practice of the workers in the apostolic church who actively supported the believers in praying for the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14–15; 9:17; 19:6). Thirdly, it is contrary to the promise of God, as revealed by the Old Testament prophets: “Ask the Lord for rain in the time of the latter rain. The Lord will make flashing clouds; He will give them showers of rain, grass in the field for everyone” (Zech 10:1). The fact is, we are now in the time of the latter rain, and we can ask God to send us “showers of rain”—His Holy Spirit—to relieve the spiritual drought within our hearts.

#### **Q20 Is there any possibility that we might receive an evil spirit when praying for the Holy Spirit?**

Elder John says, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 Jn 4:1). In other words, we need to be aware that the devil can take the opportunity to work—even among the believers of God. We learn, for example, that Satan entered Judas after he had the notion to betray Jesus (Jn 13:27) and that he filled the heart of Ananias to make him lie to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3).

The way to guard against the devil’s work is firstly, to pray for the Holy Spirit in the church that preaches the gospel according to the Bible. This is because the Bible says that God will give His Spirit to those who obey Him and keep His commandments (Jn 14:21; Acts 5:32)—but we can only obey Him properly when we have received the truth.

Secondly, we need to make sure that we have pure motives, a clear conscience, and that we ask God with faith, humility and patience. Elder James encourages us, saying:

*But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

*James 1:6–8*

It is important that we believe in the promise of Jesus, who assures us, saying, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Lk 11:13).

Thirdly, when we pray, we should do so in the name of Jesus as it is the Lord’s promise that He will answer our prayers when we do (Jn 14:14). Finally, we can say “Hallelujah” which is a word of praise and power (Rev 19:1–6).

#### **Q21 How can we discern whether a spirit is from God?**

The advice of elder John is to “test the spirits, whether they are of God” (1 Jn 4:1). We do this by referring to the Bible for guidance and by using the spiritual gift of discernment (1 Cor 12:10).

- Jesus says, “You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?” (Mt 7:16). Here, the “fruits” refer to a person’s attitude, words and deeds. It follows that someone who has received an evil spirit will bear bad fruit, while someone who has received the Holy Spirit will bear good fruit.
- The Bible says, “And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world” (1 Jn 4:3); “Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son” (1 Jn 2:22). These words remind us to be aware that any person who denies the Lord, His resurrection, ascension to heaven, and second coming cannot claim to have the Holy Spirit.
- Elder John says, “They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not

hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error” (1 Jn 4:5–6). In other words, those who have received the “spirit of error”—the evil spirit—will manifest an unwillingness to listen to the workers of God or to submit to the truth of the Bible. Instead, they will follow and preach a message that belongs to the world, because the source of their spirit is the devil, who is the god of this world (2 Cor 4:4).

- The Bible says, “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” (1 Tim 4:1). In the end time, the devil will make use of deceptive philosophies that are based on human tradition—the so-called “depths of Satan” (Rev 2:24)—to capture people’s minds and lead them away from the truth (Col 2:8). Today, within Christianity, we are witnessing the fulfilment of this prophecy: false teachers have emerged with destructive heresies (2 Pet 2:1), perverted the gospel (Gal 1:6–7), distorted the Bible (2 Pet 3:16), and strayed from the doctrine of Christ (2 Jn 9).
- Demon-possessed people are likely to hurt themselves and others. Examples from the Bible include the demoniac from Gadara who cut himself with stones (Mk 5:2, 5), and an evil spirit which caused a man in Ephesus to attack those around him (Acts 19:13–16).
- Evil spirits stir up ill-will and dissensions. The Book of Revelation records a prophecy of evil spirits agitating the world to war in the end time: “For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (Rev 16:14).
- Evil spirits entice people to submit to the lusts of the flesh (2 Pet 2:18). Revelation records this lamentation: “And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, ‘Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the

earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury’” (Rev 18:2–3).

- Satan can masquerade as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14). However, his work will be evident, especially to those who have the gift of discernment. The Book of Acts gives an account of a slave girl who followed Paul, shouting, “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17). Realizing it was the work of the devil behind the seemingly innocuous message, Paul cast out the evil spirit in the name of Jesus (Acts 16:18).
- Believers who receive the Holy Spirit will speak in tongues and may sometimes shed tears of emotion, laugh, sing and move about. However, their actions will be orderly and controlled, for God is a God of order, not of confusion (1 Cor 14:33). In contrast, people who receive evil spirits often fall down, shout, lose consciousness, and may even harm themselves or others (e.g. Mt 17:15; Mk 5:5; Lk 9:39).

## Footwashing

### Q1 Where did the custom of footwashing come from?

Footwashing, as a custom, originated in the ancient east:

*When a guest arriving for the meal had been greeted, a slave would remove the guest's sandals in preparation for washing his feet and so that the sandals would not bring in dirt that had been picked up along the way. Then the feet were washed by a servant, water being poured over them, which were then rubbed with hands and dried with a towel (Gen 18:4; 19:2; 24:32; 1 Sam 25:41; Jn 13:3–5; 1 Tim 5:10).*

Ralph Gower, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times*

An example in the Old Testament is found in the account of Abraham receiving three angels. He welcomed them with the words: “Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree” (Gen 18:4).

Footwashing remained a custom in the New Testament, for we learn of John the Baptist telling the people that he was unworthy even to untie the straps of the Lord’s sandals (Lk 3:16). Also, Jesus reproached Simon, the Pharisee, for not providing Him with water to clean His feet when He went to dine at his house (Lk 7:44). During the time of the apostles, the washing of the saints’ feet by elderly widows was deemed a virtuous service (1 Tim 5:10).

### Q2 How did footwashing become a sacrament?

Footwashing became a holy sacrament when Jesus instituted it during His final Passover meal with the disciples. John 13:1–17 records that Jesus got up from the meal (v. 4); laid aside His

garments (v. 4); wrapped a towel around His waist (v. 4); poured water into a basin (v. 5); washed the disciples’ feet (v. 5); dried their feet with the towel (v. 5); took His garments and returned to His seat (v. 12).

Jesus told the disciples, “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you” (Jn 13:14–15). He added, “If you know these things, happy are you if you do them” (Jn 13:17).

### Q3 Why is footwashing necessary?

Footwashing as a sacrament is essential for salvation. Jesus said to the disciples, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me” (Jn 13:8).

In addition, it gives us a number of important teachings:

- *Footwashing teaches us to honour one another and to strive for unity.* Paul says, “But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary” (1 Cor 12:20–22). Unity entails that we have the same mind and that we endeavour to share one another’s sorrow and joy (1 Cor 12:25–26).
- *Footwashing reminds us of the depth of the Lord’s love.* The Gospel of John records, “Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end” (Jn 13:1). Jesus’ love is as great as it is enduring; and what He requires is that we love one another, just as He loves us.
- *Jesus wants us to learn from His humility.* He told the disciples, “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet” (Jn 13:14). Jesus was God manifested in the flesh; yet, He humbled Himself, becoming a servant who was obedient to the point of death. We should learn from Him and avoid becoming proud, power-seeking, unkind, selfish and disrespectful. Instead,

we should be humble, respectful of others (Rom 12:10), submissive (1 Pet 5:5), ready to serve (1 Pet 4:10) and forgiving (Eph 4:32).

#### Q4 When should footwashing be performed?

The sacrament of footwashing should be performed after water baptism, before a believer partakes of the Holy Communion for the first time. Ordained ministers should wash the feet of the newly baptized person so that he has part with Jesus.

Aside from performing footwashing as a sacrament, members can also apply the Lord's teaching by washing one another's feet as a symbolic reminder about humility, love and forgiveness—as and when the need arises.

#### Q5 If we apply the spiritual lessons from footwashing, can we forego the formality?

No, we cannot. The sacrament of footwashing was personally instituted by Jesus, and He instructed us to follow His example. Therefore, the church has the duty to keep His commandment. Importantly, the sacrament is directly related to salvation, for Jesus says, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me” (Jn 13:8). Also, He says, “He who is bathed<sup>1</sup> needs only to wash<sup>2</sup> his feet, but is completely clean...” (Jn 13:10). These words tell us that, following water baptism, we still need to have our feet washed in order to fulfil the Lord's teaching.

<sup>1</sup> Greek, *louo*, meaning “to wash the body”; Strong's reference no. G3068.

<sup>2</sup> Greek, *nipto*, primarily used to mean “washing part of the body”; Strong's reference no. G3538.

## Holy Communion

### Q1 What is the Holy Communion?

The Holy Communion is a sacrament in which believers partake of the bread and the cup of the Lord Jesus—which are His body and blood—in remembrance of His death (Lk 22:14–20; cf. 1 Cor 11:23–26). In the Bible, the Holy Communion is referred to variously as “the Passover” (Lk 22:13, 15), “the Lord's Supper” (1 Cor 11:20), “the Lord's table” (1 Cor 10:21) and “the breaking of bread” (Acts 2:42).

### Q2 Where, in the Bible, is it recorded that Jesus instituted it?

There are four biblical passages that record Jesus' institution of the Holy Communion: 1) Mt 26:26–29; 2) Mk 14:22–25; 3) Lk 22:14–20; 4) 1 Cor 11:23–26.

From the account in Matthew, we learn that Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to the disciples, saying, “Take, eat; this is My body” (Mt 26:26). Next, He took the cup, gave thanks and said, “Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Mt 26:27–28). His words, “My blood of the new covenant”, describe the role of His blood in forging a new relationship between God and ourselves.

**Q3 What are the differences between the Holy Communion and the Old Testament Passover?**

Jesus' institution of the Holy Communion during His final Passover meal with the disciples marked an important transition: He turned a Passover meal belonging to the old covenant into the Holy Communion, belonging to the new covenant. Under the old, the Jews observed the Passover with an unblemished lamb (Ex 12:3–11, 27); under the new, Jesus became the Paschal lamb who was sacrificed for us (1 Cor 5:7; 1 Pet 1:18–19). His blood was the basis of the “better covenant” (Heb 8:6). Hence, when Jesus took the cup, He said, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you” (Lk 22:20; cf. 1 Cor 11:25).

**Q4 Can the cup remove our sins?**

The Holy Communion cup contains the blood of Jesus which marks a new covenant. The Bible does not teach us that the forgiveness of sins comes from drinking it; rather, it comes from our being washed in the blood of Jesus through water baptism (Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Jn 5:6, 8; Rev 1:5).

**Q5 What materials should we use for the Holy Communion?**

Following the example set by Jesus, we should use one unleavened bread (1 Cor 5:8; 10:17) and one cup containing the “fruit of the vine”, which is grape juice (Mt 26:29). The absence of leaven (yeast) in both the bread and the cup is spiritually significant: leaven symbolizes “malice and wickedness” (1 Cor 5:8)—qualities that can never be associated with the Lord. This is because Jesus was “a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet 1:19; cf. Heb 9:14).

**Q6 What is the nature of the bread and cup?**

It is significant that when Jesus took the bread, He said, “This is My body” (Mt 26:26), and when He took the cup, He said, “This is My blood” (Mt 26:28). From these words, we understand that the bread and the cup cannot be regarded as mere symbols: after

consecration, they become the body and blood of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit and the word of the Lord.

**Q7 What blessings are associated with the Holy Communion?**

When we partake of the Holy Communion, we are assured of a number of blessings:

- *Communion with the Lord.* Paul says, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” (1 Cor 10:16).
- *Spiritual life.* Jesus says, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you” (Jn 6:53); “I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world” (Jn 6:51).
- *Fellowship.* Paul says, “For we, being many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread” (1 Cor 10:17); “So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another” (Rom 12:5).
- *Resurrection on the last day.* Jesus says, “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (Jn 6:54). When we partake of the Holy Communion, we have the hope that we will be raised up on the last day with a glorious spiritual body, to be like the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 15:42–53; Phil 3:20–21).

**Q8 What is the significance of the Holy Communion?**

The Holy Communion enables us to:

- *Remember the Lord's death.* Jesus says, “Take eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me” (1 Cor 11:24); “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me” (1 Cor 11:25). In our lives, we should always be mindful of the Lord's grace, and the Holy Communion offers us a regular opportunity for reflection. By observing it, we allow

God's love to touch us continually. In this way, we can become like Paul, who was able to say, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

- *Proclaim the Lord's death.* Paul says, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Cor 11:26). Jesus died for the sins of mankind. By keeping the Holy Communion, we are declaring to everyone their need to believe in Jesus, to be reconciled to God and to be saved by the life of Christ (Rom 5:10).
- *Keep our covenant with God.* Jesus says, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you" (Lk 22:20). God had previously made a covenant with the ancient Israelites, but they failed to honour it, with the result that He disregarded them (Heb 8:9). However, God spoke of a new covenant through which He would take away man's sin (Rom 11:27). This covenant was later established through the blood of Jesus Christ. Today, we can enter into it through water baptism. Thereafter, we have a duty to keep the covenant faithfully: if we sin again wilfully, we will be despising the blood of Jesus that has sanctified us (Heb 10:26, 29).
- *Anticipate the Lord's second coming.* When we partake of the Holy Communion, we are anticipating His second coming (1 Cor 11:26). Jesus says, "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom" (Mt 26:29). These words encourage us to remain alert and to prepare for that day.

### **Q9 Are there prescribed times for holding it?**

Many denominations have a tradition of holding the Holy Communion specifically on Sundays and also during their Easter season. However, this is not taught in the Bible; it simply states that we should hold this sacrament on a regular basis: "For

*as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Cor 11:26).*

### **Q10 Does the "breaking of bread" recorded in Acts 2:42 refer to the Holy Communion?**

In the Bible, the "breaking of bread" refers to two things, depending on the context: a fellowship meal and the Holy Communion. Examples of those contexts that indicate a fellowship meal include the Lord's breaking of bread with two believers in Emmaus (Lk 24:28–31); the early Christians breaking bread from house to house (Acts 2:46–47); Paul breaking bread with the believers in Troas (Acts 20:7); Paul breaking bread with his travelling companions during a storm at sea (Acts 27:35–36).

However, there is good reason to believe that the breaking of bread mentioned in Acts 2:42 refers to the Holy Communion. It reads: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." Here, the specific context is the religious life of the early Christians: the breaking of bread is mentioned alongside other matters directly relating to their faith—keeping the teachings of the apostles, fellowship and prayer.

Putting matters of context aside, the important point to note is that the early Christians "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine", which would have included the commandment to observe the Holy Communion (Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:23–26). Hence, when Paul wrote to the church in Corinth about the Holy Communion, he addressed them in a manner that indicated their familiarity with the sacrament (1 Cor 10:16–17; 11:17–34).

### **Q11 Who can partake of the Holy Communion?**

The Holy Communion is no ordinary meal. It is a communion or fellowship with the Lord (1 Cor 10:16) and between the believers: "For we, being many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread" (1 Cor 10:17). Therefore, only those who have entered into the body of Christ

through water baptism (1 Cor 12:13) can partake of it—in the same way that only circumcised Israelites were allowed to eat of the Passover meal (Ex 12:43).

Paul teaches us to examine ourselves before we partake of the Holy Communion, lest we be found unworthy and judged for “not discerning the Lord’s body” (1 Cor 11:27–29). He warns us of the possible consequences, which are sickness and even death (1 Cor 11:30). For this reason, anyone who has committed a mortal sin—a sin that cannot be forgiven (1 Jn 5:16)—should refrain from it.

#### **Q12 With what attitude should we partake of it?**

The bread and cup are holy. Anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body of Christ will be judged (1 Cor 11:29–30). Therefore, we need to adopt the right attitude, which entails that we:

- *Uphold the truth.* We do this by accepting the Bible’s teaching concerning the Holy Communion—to understand that it is a holy sacrament through which we commemorate and proclaim the Lord’s death (1 Cor 11:24–26) and receive His spiritual life (Jn 6:54). We should partake of it in recognition of the truth, lest we “be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Cor 11:27).
- *Examine ourselves.* Before partaking of the Holy Communion, we should examine ourselves to determine whether we have a clear conscience (1 Cor 11:28). Elder John says, “Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God” (1 Jn 3:21).
- *Discern the body and blood of Christ.* We need to understand that we are partaking of the body and blood of Jesus: “For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body” (1 Cor 11:29).

#### **Q13 How should we give thanks for the grace of the Lord?**

After partaking of the Holy Communion, we should show our gratitude by keeping the Lord’s commandments, living holy lives and serving Him. We can also learn from the words of Paul:

*For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.*

*Romans 14:7–9*

## Prayer

### Q1 What is prayer?

The act of prayer has been practised from time immemorial and is evident in all cultures. It appears to be instinctive, as evidenced by the tendency of people—Christians and non-Christians alike—to appeal to a higher power in times of crisis. It shows that mankind once had a close relationship with the one true God, before sin intervened to create a dividing wall, and before man lost his way by creating false gods and idols (Rom 1:21–23).

For Christians, prayer is the channel of communication with God. The Bible likens it to an offering of incense or a sacrifice (Ps 141:2; Rev 5:8).

### Q2 What can we pray for?

We can pray for anything, as long as it does not go against the glory of God or the welfare of others (Jn 14:13–14; 15:16–17). Apostle Paul encourages us, saying, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Phil 4:6).

### Q3 Are there prayers that we can learn from?

There are many notable prayers in the Bible, including:

- Jacob’s prayer for deliverance from Esau (Gen 32:11)
- Moses’ prayer for forgiveness on behalf of the Israelites, after they had worshipped the golden calf (Ex 32:30–32)

- Hezekiah’s prayer for healing from a terminal illness (2 Kgs 20:1–3)
- David’s prayer for Solomon to be endowed with godly fear and the heart to build God’s temple (1 Chr 29:19)
- Elijah’s prayer for rain during a prolonged drought in Israel (Jas 5:17–18)
- Jesus’ prayer on the cross for the forgiveness of His persecutors (Lk 23:34)
- The prayer of the 120 disciples for the downpour of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:13–15)

### Q4 Is there a prayer that all believers can make?

Yes, it is the Lord’s Prayer, which is recorded in Matthew 6:9–13:

*Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be Your name.  
Your kingdom come.  
Your will be done  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
As we forgive our debtors.  
And do not lead us into temptation,  
But deliver us from the evil one.  
For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

### Q5 Why is this prayer important?

The Lord’s Prayer is important because it is a model prayer given to us by Jesus (Mt 6:9; Lk 11:2). When we reflect upon the words recorded in Matthew 6:9–13, we gain some important teachings about our relationship with God and the priorities of life:

- “Our Father in heaven” (v. 9). This opening address reminds us that we are praying to God, who is our Father in heaven. We call Him “Father” because we are born of Him (Jn 1:12–13), He adopted us as His children (Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5), and He has poured out the Spirit of His Son into our hearts (Gal 4:6). Hence, we should fear Him: “And if you call on the Father,

who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear" (1 Pet 1:17). The words also remind us that our true home is in heaven and, for now, we are merely pilgrims in this world (Heb 11:13–16; 1 Pet 2:11). One day, Jesus will return to take us to our Father in heaven (Jn 14:2–3; 20:17).

- *"Hallowed be Your name"* (v. 9). These words teach us to revere God's name (Rev 15:4), which is "holy and awesome" (Ps 111:9). Today, believers and unbelievers alike often profane God's name: believers do it when they sin and dishonour God (Prov 30:9; 1 Tim 6:1); unbelievers do it when they blaspheme God's name, His church and His followers (Rev 13:6).
- *"Your kingdom come"* (v. 10). Jesus began His ministry by proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 4:17; cf. Mk 1:15). Where is God's kingdom? Firstly, Jesus tells us it "is not of this world" (Jn 18:36). He says, "For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you" (Lk 17:21). In other words, God's kingdom is where He rules: it is both in heaven and within submissive hearts. As Christians, we should pray each day for God's kingdom to be revealed and to joyfully anticipate the Lord's second coming, when we shall enter that everlasting place (2 Pet 1:11).
- *"Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"* (v. 10). The Bible says that God's purpose never changes (Heb 6:17) and that no one can hinder His will (Dan 4:35). Those who help to accomplish His will are the angels in heaven (Ps 103:20–21) and the believers on earth. However, because Satan is constantly trying to obstruct His work, and believers often fail to submit to His will, we need to pray that God's will be done here on earth, as it is in heaven. Importantly, we should ask Him to fill us "with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Col 1:9) so that we can implement it (Mt 7:21).
- *"Give us today our daily bread"* (v. 11). God understands our needs (Mt 6:8, 32). Therefore, when we ask Him for our daily bread, He will answer us. Moreover, by asking, we acknowledge that everything comes from Him and that we

are sustained by His grace. God says, "For the world is Mine, and all its fullness" (Ps 50:12).

Asking God to give us our daily bread also reminds us of a number of important biblical teachings related to Christian living:

- \* "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Mt 6:33).
- \* "...Let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need" (Eph 4:28).
- \* "That you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing" (1 Thess 4:11–12).
- \* "And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content" (1 Tim 6:8; cf. Prov 30:8–9).
- \* "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you" (Lk 6:38).
- \* "...It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Mt 4:4; cf. Deut 8:3).
- \* "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him" (Jn 6:27).
- *"And forgive us our debts"* (v. 12). We all have weaknesses; hence, even after water baptism, we may still commit wrongs, which can be likened to accruing debts before God. Elder James points out that merely failing to do what we know is right constitutes a sin (Jas 4:17). Therefore, he teaches us to confess our sins before God and to ask for forgiveness (1 Jn 1:7, 9). Thereafter, we should strive to do the "good works" that God has purposed for us and to be fruitful (Eph 2:10; Col 1:10; Tit 2:14).

- “As we forgive our debtors” (v. 12). It is the Lord’s will that we forgive one another (Mt 6:14–15; 18:21–35; Mk 11:25–26). “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do” (Col 3:12–13); “And above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins’” (1 Pet 4:8).
- “And do not lead us into temptation” (v. 13). The Bible is clear that God would never tempt us or lead us to sin (Jas 1:13). For this reason, we take these words to be a request to God to save us from falling into sin (Mt 26:41; cf. Rom 1:24; Gal 6:1). In another sense, “temptations”<sup>1</sup> can refer to the trials of life. We can ask God to protect us amidst life’s challenges, so that we do not depart from Him or do anything that compromises our faith. And when we ask, we can be assured of His help: “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Cor 10:13).
- “But deliver us from the evil one” (v. 13). There are many reasons to ask God to deliver us from the evil one, including the latter’s wish to make us fall. But the devil can only work if we fail to curb our weaknesses: “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (Jas 1:14–15). For this reason, we should ask God to strengthen us, so that we can obey Him, rather than our own desires. In this way, the devil will have no room to work: “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (Jas 4:7).
- Aside from leading us to sin, the devil may also try to attack us: to harm us physically or mentally, especially while we are serving God. We can see this from the life of Paul who had to face relentless persecutions. After being tried by

the authorities on one occasion, he declared, “And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom...” (2 Tim 4:17–18). Hence, he offers us these words of comfort: “But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one” (2 Thess 3:3).

- “For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever” (v. 13). These concluding words remind us that, as Christians, our citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20). One day, we will reign with the Lord in His kingdom (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 22:5).
- The Lord’s Prayer ends with *Amen*<sup>2</sup> (v. 13), a Greek word transliterated from Hebrew, meaning “verily” or “so let it be”. In saying this, we affirm the sincerity of our prayer and ask God to fulfil it.

## Q6 Who should we pray for?

Christians have a responsibility to pray for everyone (1 Tim 2:1): ourselves (2 Cor 12:8–9); our families (e.g. 2 Sam 12:15–17); evangelists (Acts 12:5; Eph 6:19–20; 2 Thess 3:1–2); the sick (Jas 5:14); the demon-possessed (Mt 17:21); saints (Eph 6:18); sinners (1 Jn 5:16); kings and others in authority (1 Tim 2:2); our enemies (Mt 5:44).

## Q7 What can we pray for?

We can pray for any matter, as long as we seek God’s glory and divine will in the process (Jn 14:13–14; 1 Jn 5:14). Elder James tells us that we sometimes fail to receive things because we do not ask, or else, we ask out of wrong or selfish motives (Jas 4:2–3). What, then, can we ask for?

In relation to the church ministry, we can ask God to:

- send out workers to bring in the harvest (Mt 9:38).
- open the door for the gospel of salvation (Col 4:3; 2 Thess 3:1).

<sup>1</sup> Greek, *peirasmos*. Strong’s reference no. G3986.

<sup>2</sup> Strong’s reference no. G281.

- give us courage and eloquence to preach the gospel (Eph 6:19–20).
- revive His work (Hab 3:2).
- stretch out His hand to perform signs and wonders (Mk 16:17–18; Acts 4:30).
- pour out His Holy Spirit on the believers (Acts 8:14–17).

In relation to our own faith, we can ask Him to:

- grant us the Holy Spirit (Lk 11:13; Jn 4:10; 7:37–39).
- strengthen us “with might through His Spirit in the inner man” (Eph 3:16).
- teach us His way (Ps 86:11).
- give us wisdom and knowledge (Eph 1:17; Jas 1:5).
- teach us to do His will (Ps 143:10).
- increase our faith and love (1 Thess 3:12).
- keep us in His love (Jude 20–21).

#### **Q8 How should we begin our prayer?**

We should begin each prayer by calling upon the name of Jesus. This is because Jesus says, “And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it” (Jn 14:13–14; cf. 15:16). Therefore, when we pray, we should first say, “In the name of Jesus, I pray...”

Another reason for praying in the name of Jesus is because it is God’s name: it was given by the heavenly Father to the Son (Jn 17:11–12). Therefore, we understand that Jesus is God Himself—a truth confirmed by Isaiah: “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6).

#### **Q9 What makes for an effective prayer?**

An effective prayer is the result of faith:

*But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

*James 1:6–8*

The writer of Hebrews adds, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb 11:6). Also, Jesus offers us this encouragement: “Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them” (Mk 11:24).

Additionally, the Bible shows that God answers the prayers of those who are righteous (Jas 5:16); humble and penitent (Lk 18:13–14); pure in heart (Mt 5:8; 2 Tim 2:22); devout and God-fearing (Acts 10:1–4); sincere (1 Sam 1:10–18); careful to keep His commandments (Lk 1:6, 13).

#### **Q10 Why does God not always answer our prayers?**

Elder John says, “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us” (1 Jn 5:14). From these words, we understand that one possible reason for unanswered prayers is their non-compliance with God’s will. In the Bible, we see such examples: Paul asked the Lord on three occasions to remove “a thorn in the flesh... a messenger of Satan” (2 Cor 12:7–8), but God chose not to answer his prayer in order to keep him from pride and conceit (2 Cor 12:7–8); Moses asked God to let him cross the Jordan to see Canaan, but God would not permit it on account of his earlier disobedience (Deut 3:25–27; Num 20:12; 27:12–14).

Other reasons for unanswered prayers may include God’s timing (Eccl 3:1) and His desire to train up our faith (Lk 18:1; Rom 12:12). Furthermore, the Bible reminds us to keep watch over the condition of our heart, for God may reject our prayers if we fail to address certain shortcomings:

- Insincerity (Mt 15:8–9)
- Hypocrisy (Mt 6:5)
- Pride and self-righteousness (Job 35:12; Lk 18:9–14)
- Lack of forgiveness (Mt 5:23–24; 6:14–15)
- Doubt (Jas 1:6–8)
- Selfish motives (Jas 4:3)
- Sin and unrighteousness (Ps 66:18; Jn 9:31; 1 Pet 3:12)

### Q11 How do people pray?

In the Bible, we see people praying in different ways: sitting down (2 Sam 7:18); standing (Lk 18:13); kneeling (Acts 20:36); falling prostrate (Mt 26:39); with hands lifted (1 Tim 2:8); looking up to heaven (Jn 11:41); with raised voice (Ezek 11:13; Acts 4:24); in silence (1 Sam 1:13); with tears (Heb 5:7); beating the breast (Lk 18:13); with joy (Lk 10:21). Whichever way we pray, it is important that we are motivated by sincerity and devotion to God. Jesus says, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:24).

### Q12 What is the purpose of fasting prayers?

Fasting prayers are for those occasions when we need to devote ourselves to prayer. They enable us to humble ourselves and focus on God (Ps 35:13). People fast and pray for different reasons: to petition God for help in the face of difficulties; to ask for power to do His work; to repent and ask for forgiveness. Before Jesus started His ministry, He fasted for forty days and nights (Lk 4:1–2). The outcome was that He was able to overcome the temptations of the devil and was empowered by the Holy Spirit to take up the work entrusted to Him by the heavenly Father (Lk 4:13–14).

### Q13 What words can we use when we pray?

We can pray in two ways: with words of understanding or with spiritual tongues. Paul, who was able to pray in both these ways, said, “I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the

understanding” (1 Cor 14:15). Here, “pray[ing] with the spirit” refers to prayers offered up in tongues—speaking mysteries through the Holy Spirit for self-edification (1 Cor 14:2, 4); while “pray[ing] with the understanding” refers to prayers made in understandable words.

An important purpose of prayer is to praise God, and the Bible gives us a wonderful word to use: *Hallelujah*,<sup>3</sup> which means “Praise God”. In Revelation 19:1–6, a great multitude praises God with *Hallelujahs*, creating a sound like that of many waters and mighty thunderings.

When we pray to God in words of understanding, we should be mindful of Jesus’ advice: “But when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words” (Mt 6:7). His words remind us to pay attention to what we say because God sees into our heart.

### Q14 What are the right conditions for prayer?

It is helpful to set aside a time and place for prayer. Firstly, we need to find somewhere quiet so that we can concentrate. We note that Jesus did exactly this: He habitually withdrew into the wilderness to pray (Lk 5:16). The purpose of a peaceful environment is to create the right conditions within our heart, such as inner quietness and devotion. Secondly, we should endeavour to pray at least three times a day (Ps 55:17; Dan 6:10). But, where necessary, we can pray anywhere—a silent prayer on the way to work or college, or a short prayer when we need God’s guidance, or simply to give thanks.

Furthermore, Paul encourages us to pray in the Spirit: “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints” (Eph 6:18). When we pray in the Spirit, He intercedes for us in spiritual tongues that transcend the limitations of the human language: “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who

<sup>3</sup> Strong’s reference no. G239. Also spelt *Alleluia*.

searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Rom 8:26–27). In short, when we pray in tongues, we have the confidence that the Holy Spirit will articulate our needs in the most appropriate way before God.

## The Church

### Q1 What is the church?

The church is a community of people who have been called by God (Acts 2:47) and purchased with His blood (Acts 20:28). Ephesians 4:4–6 mentions seven “ones” that characterize God’s church:

- “*One body*” (v. 4). The members are “joined and knit together” (cf. Eph 4:16).
- “*One Spirit*” (v. 4). The members have been baptized by one Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 12:13).
- “*One hope*” (v. 4). The members trust in the living God (cf. 1 Tim 4:10).
- “*One Lord*” (v. 5). The members believe in one Lord—Jesus Christ—through whom they are justified (cf. Isa 45:25; Acts 13:39).
- “*One faith*” (v. 5). The members share a common faith that is based on the teachings of the apostles, prophets and Jesus (cf. Eph 2:20).
- “*One baptism*” (v. 5). The members have been baptized into Christ and have put on Christ (cf. Gal 3:27–28).
- “*One God and Father of all*” (v. 6). The believers are sons of God on account of their faith in Jesus (cf. Gal 3:26).

**Q2 When was it established?**

The church was established on the day of Pentecost, when God poured out His Holy Spirit (Acts 2). This anointing gave the apostles the power to preach the gospel and the authority to baptize believers in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38–41).

**Q3 Who founded the church?**

Jesus said, “On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Mt 16:18). These words indicate clearly that He is the founder of the church. Moreover, apostle Paul describes the members of the church as being created in Jesus: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). For this reason, the True Jesus Church does not recognize any human founders—only faithful workers who helped God to accomplish His will: the apostles in the time of the early church, and key workers in the formative years of the True Jesus Church.

**Q4 Who does the church belong to?**

The Bible speaks of the church as belonging to Jesus Christ (Mt 16:18) and to God (1 Cor 10:32; 1 Tim 3:15). It says that the heavenly Father “put all things under [Jesus’] feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph 1:22–23; cf. Col 1:18). Jesus purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28), and through Him all the members have been united as one (1 Cor 12:12–13, 27). Apart from Jesus, no one else can claim ownership of the church.

**Q5 Did Jesus delegate authority for governing the church to anyone?**

No, He did not. Jesus alone governs the church (Heb 3:6). He does this through His Spirit who guides, directs and coordinates

her work and the workers (e.g. Acts 10:19; 13:2; 16:6–7). The church must therefore submit to the Spirit’s leadership.

God’s church is based on the principles of love and unity: “From whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Eph 4:16). For this reason, there is no place for hierarchy or politics.

Within the church, there are different workers who have either been ordained or elected by the congregation, to plan, implement and oversee the work of God. Importantly, the nature of their leadership is spiritual: it is based on love, service and personal example. Jesus teaches us, saying, “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant” (Mk 10:42–43; cf. 2 Cor 1:24; 1 Pet 5:2–3).

**Q6 How was the church organized in the time of the apostles?**

The early church started in Jerusalem with a core group of apostles and elders using it as their base from which to coordinate church affairs and to discuss issues. Their role was to ensure that all the believers upheld a common faith—one that was based on the truth (see Acts 15:6–31; 16:4–5). Soon, the gospel spread far and wide—going beyond Jerusalem, to Judea, Samaria and abroad. Many local churches were established, but all shared the same faith, were joined together as one body, and heeded the guidance of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem.

**Q7 Who makes up the church?**

The church is made up of believers. Some are elected to particular offices by the congregation, including church board and committee members. Others—specifically, deacons, deaconesses, elders and preachers—are ordained by the church (1 Tim 3:1–13; Tit 1:5–9).

## Q8 How does the Bible refer to the church of God?

The Bible uses a range of terms, metaphors and symbols to describe the church:

- Spiritual house built with living stones (1 Pet 2:4–5)
- Temple of God, in which the Spirit dwells (1 Cor 3:16; Eph 2:19–22)
- One flock with one shepherd (Jn 10:16)
- Good seeds (Mt 13:38)
- God’s field (1 Cor 3:9)
- True vine and branches (Jn 15:1–4; Jer 2:21)
- Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27; Eph 1:22–23)
- Bride of Jesus (2 Cor 11:2; Rev 21:9)
- Ark that saves (Heb 11:7; 1 Pet 3:20)
- Chosen generation, royal priesthood, holy nation, God’s own special people (1 Pet 2:9; cf. Rev 1:6)
- Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, (Heb 12:22; cf. Rev 21:10; Isa 2:2–3)

## Q9 Has the church remained the same since apostolic times?

The apostolic church was the one true church. However, as prophesied by Jesus, false prophets and false christs emerged to spread heretical teachings and to bring about her decline (Mt 7:15–16; 24:24–26). Indeed, after the apostles died, the church started altering the truth and introducing many changes, including the iconic veneration of Jesus, Mary and the saints; Sunday worship in place of the Sabbath; sprinkling as a mode of baptism; the sale of indulgences;<sup>1,2</sup> and the establishment of Christmas as a religious festival.

In the sixteenth century, Martin Luther attempted to redress the Roman Catholic Church’s deviation from the truth by spearheading a major religious reformation. However, despite

his best efforts, it failed to reinstate the complete truth and to restore the apostolic church. Today, we are left with the legacy: many Christians remain unaware of the biblical truth of salvation, and Christianity itself has become increasingly fragmented.

## Q10 What are God’s requirements for the true church in the end time?

God’s requirements for the true church in the end time are the same as those for the apostolic church. She should:

- be “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” (Eph 2:20). It entails that she uphold all of the Lord’s commandments (Jn 14:21, 23–24; 2 Jn 9) and the apostles’ teachings (Acts 2:42).
- acknowledge Jesus Christ as her head (Eph 1:22; Col 1:18).
- preach the gospel of Jesus (1 Cor 15:1–2; Gal 1:6–9).
- perform water baptism for spiritual rebirth, the forgiveness of sins and salvation (Jn 3:5; Acts 2:38; Tit 3:5; 1 Pet 3:21).
- enable believers to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Zech 14:17; Acts 8:17; 10:44; 19:6).
- have the testimony of signs and miracles (Mk 16:17–18; Heb 2:3–4).
- be full of charismatic gifts (1 Cor 12:4–11).
- be holy and set apart from the world (Jn 17:16–19; Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 6:17–18).
- manifest righteous deeds, being “arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright”, as is fitting for the bride of the Lamb (Rev 19:8).
- be the salt and the light of the world, giving glory to God and edifying others (Mt 5:13–16).

1 An “indulgence” was a full or partial remission of the punishment for sin.

2 “Indulgence”; *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, 2009.

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/286800/indulgence>.

## Q11 Why the name “True Jesus Church”?

In many cultures, a name expresses a person’s character or what something stands for. The same principle applies to the “True Jesus Church” which expresses the nature of God and His salvation.

Firstly, the word “True” testifies to the nature of God:

- “But the Lord is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King...” (Jer 10:10; cf. Isa 65:16).
- “He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true” (Jn 3:33).
- “You both know Me, and you know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know” (Jn 7:28).
- “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (Jn 17:3).
- “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life” (1 Jn 5:20).

Likewise, the nature of Jesus, the Son of God, is true:

- “I am the true vine...” (Jn 15:1).
- “I am the way, the truth, and the life...” (Jn 14:6).
- “...My witness is true...” (Jn 8:14).
- He is “the true bread from heaven” (Jn 6:32).
- Jesus is the “Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God” (Rev 3:14).
- “...He who is holy, He who is true, ‘He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens’” (Rev 3:7).

Secondly, the name “Jesus” in “True Jesus Church” signifies that God accomplished His salvation plan through Jesus Christ: Jesus came to do God’s will (Heb 10:7); He was God manifested in the flesh (Jn 1:18; 1 Tim 3:16); He was “the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person” (Heb 1:3); He emptied Himself for our sake, becoming a servant (Phil

2:6–7) and obeying to the point of death on the cross (Phil 2:8). Because of His sacrifice, we have been reconciled to God (Rom 5:10–11; Col 1:21–22) and called by Him (Rom 8:28–30). Therefore, the Bible says, “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5; cf. 1 Jn 2:1).

Today, the True Jesus Church upholds the name of the Lord because:

- He shed His blood to purchase people for God “out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev 5:9).
- the church is the bride of the Lamb (Rev 19:7; 21:9–10).
- there is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved (Acts 4:12).
- the church belongs to Jesus, as He refers to her as “My church” (Mt 16:18).

Importantly, “Jesus” is the name of God (Jn 17:6, 11–12)—the name that was wonderfully revealed to mankind in the New Testament era (Mt 1:21). The Bible says:

- God took from the Gentiles a people for His name (Acts 15:14).
- God promised: “... In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you” (Ex 20:24).
- God indicated that His habitation would bear His name. His chosen people would go there to worship Him and make offerings (Deut 12:5, 11).
- the “church of God” (1 Cor 1:2) should rightly bear His name.

Thirdly, the word “Church” in “True Jesus Church” signifies that God is accomplishing His salvation through her. The original Greek word for “church” is *ekklesia*,<sup>3</sup> which is derived from *ek*, meaning “out of,” and *klesis*, meaning “a calling.” In other words, it refers to a group of people who have been called out by God. Jesus says, “If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (Jn 15:19).

3 Strong’s reference no. G1577.

### **Q12 When was the True Jesus Church established?**

The True Jesus was established in China in 1917. She comprises saints past and present: “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb 12:22–23). While the apostolic church was established 2,000 years ago on the day of Pentecost by the Holy Spirit of the early rain, the True Jesus Church was established in 1917 by the Holy Spirit of the latter rain (Hos 6:3). She is the revived apostolic church.

The True Jesus Church is the true church of the end time, as prophesied in the Bible (Song 6:9). Ezekiel spoke of her emergence from the east: “And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory... And the glory of the Lord came into the temple by way of the gate which faces toward the east” (Ezek 43:2, 4). Similarly, Jesus prophesied, “For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Mt 24:27).

### **Q13 Is it possible for the True Jesus Church to diminish or disappear?**

“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 3:11); “Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and ‘Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity’” (2 Tim 2:19); “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb 13:8).

God’s workers have a duty to build upon the foundation of the church, in accordance with God’s instructions (Ezek 43:11–12; Heb 8:5). They must build with gold, silver and precious stones (1 Cor 3:12). They must never use unworthy materials such as human glory, power, worldly values, strife and false teachings,

for such work will not endure (1 Cor 3:15). Moreover, anyone who builds in this way will be removed when God purges the threshing floor to sanctify His church (Mt 3:12).

Finally, the workers must only preach Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4:5), sanctify the Lord in their hearts (1 Pet 3:15) and endeavour to present everyone perfect in Christ (Col 1:28). In this way, the church will have an enduring presence.

### **Q14 Why should believers gather together?**

As the church is a community upholding a common faith, the members should heed the exhortation in the Book of Hebrews: “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb 10:25).

The purpose of assembling is to worship (Acts 4:31; 1 Cor 14:25); praise God (Heb 2:12); share His word and give mutual encouragement (Acts 20:7–8; 1 Cor 14:26); partake of the Holy Communion (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor 10:16–17); observe the Sabbath (Acts 13:14; 16:13); and have fellowship (Acts 2:42).

### **Q15 What work has God entrusted to the church?**

God has entrusted different types of work to the church:

- Evangelism (Mt 28:19–20; Acts 1:8)
- Pastoral care (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2)
- Decision-making (Acts 15:6–29)
- Choosing and sending out workers (Acts 6:3–6; 8:14; 11:22)
- Hospitality (Acts 15:4; 3 Jn 5–8)
- Intercession (Acts 12:5)
- Giving aid (Phil 4:15–18; 1 Tim 5:16)
- Arbitration (1 Cor 6:1–3)

The greatest ministry is undoubtedly evangelism, as it entails the saving of souls (Mk 16:16), and through this work, God is greatly glorified.

**Q16 What are the duties of the believers?**

The believers in the church have a duty to:

- obey the commandments of God (Mt 19:17).
- listen to the church (Acts 16:4–5).
- show care and concern for the church (2 Cor 8:24; 11:28; Col 1:24).
- help strengthen the church (Acts 15:41).
- take care of the flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim 3:5; 5:17; 1 Pet 5:2).
- use their gifts to edify the church (1 Cor 14:12).
- give aid to those in need (1 Cor 16:1–2).
- avoid burdening the church (1 Tim 5:16).

## Sabbath

**Q1 What is the Sabbath?**

The Sabbath is a day of rest (Isa 58:13) which falls on Saturday, the seventh day of the week. It originated when God created the heavens and the earth in six days and rested on the seventh day.

*Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.*

*Genesis 2:1–3*

God blessed the Sabbath and made it holy. His purpose in instituting it was to benefit man, hence the words of Jesus: “The Sabbath was made for man...” (Mk 2:27).

**Q2 What significance does it have?**

The Sabbath has great significance for believers, for on this day, we are reminded of a number of important teachings:

- *God created the heavens and the earth.* Many people do not believe in God, but the Bible points out that they are without excuse: the whole of creation testifies to His existence and His role as Creator: “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so they are without excuse” (Rom 1:20). The Sabbath is the day on which God desires us to remember His creation work (Ex 20:11). It is also a sign that He is our God: “Hallow My

Sabbaths, and they will be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God” (Ezek 20:20).

- *God has saved us.* The Book of Deuteronomy records God’s words to the Israelites: “And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day” (Deut 5:15). As Christians, God has similarly delivered us, saving us from the bondage of Satan and sin (Acts 26:18; Rom 6:17). For this reason, we must remember God’s saving grace each Sabbath.
- *God grants us a special blessing.* The Book of Genesis records: “Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it ...” (Gen 2:3). The prophet Isaiah explains that the blessing comes upon believers when they keep the Sabbath:

*If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath,  
From doing your pleasure on My holy day,  
And call the Sabbath a delight,  
The holy day of the Lord honorable,  
And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways,  
Nor finding Your own pleasure,  
Nor speaking your own words,  
Then you shall delight yourself in the Lord;  
And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth,  
And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father.  
The mouth of the Lord has spoken.*

*Isaiah 58:13–14*

The blessing that is the “heritage of Jacob” is recorded in Genesis 28:4: “And give you [i.e. Jacob] the blessing of Abraham, to you and your descendants with you, that you may inherit the land in which you are a stranger, which God gave to Abraham.” This promised land was Canaan, a place that God calls an “everlasting possession” (Gen 17:8) and which symbolizes the heavenly kingdom. As Christians, we are the spiritual seed of Abraham and heirs on account of Christ (Gal 3:29). When we keep the Sabbath, we can expect to be blessed with this heritage. This truth is reinforced by Jesus, who teaches us to keep the commandments of God for eternal life (Mt 19:17).

- *We should be holy.* God says, “Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them” (Ezek 20:12). God has given the Sabbath to everyone He has called—both Jews and Gentiles (Isa 56:6–7)—to remind them of the need to be holy. Elder Peter says, “But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct” (1 Pet 1:15); “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9).
- *God gives us physical and spiritual rest.* Genesis 2:2 records: “And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.” In this verse, the Hebrew word for “rested” is *sabat*, meaning “to repose, i.e. desist from exertion” and “to cease”.<sup>1</sup> We know that our everlasting God does not tire (Isa 40:28), yet He rested from His work to show us to do likewise. This is why Jesus says, “The Sabbath was made for man...” (Mk 2:27).
- *We anticipate a future heavenly rest.* The writer of Hebrews says that the Sabbath prepares us for an eternal rest:

*There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience.*

*Hebrews 4:9–11*

This is the ultimate hope of all Christians. But the only way to secure this hope is through faith and obedience to God’s commandments (Heb 4:1–13).

### **Q3 When was the Sabbath included in the Ten Commandments?**

God included the Sabbath in the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, after the Israelites had left Egypt.

<sup>1</sup> Strong’s reference no. H7673.

*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.*

*Exodus 20:8–11*

#### **Q4 Did God’s people keep the Sabbath before then?**

Yes, the Bible records God instructing the Israelites to observe the Sabbath soon after they departed from Egypt, before their arrival at Mount Sinai. He did this in tandem with the bestowal of manna, guiding the people to gather manna for six days and to rest on the seventh. Hence, Moses declared, “This is what the Lord has said: ‘Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord...’” (Ex 16:23); “See! For the Lord has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day” (Ex 16:29).

#### **Q5 Was the Sabbath only meant for the Israelites?**

The belief that the Sabbath was solely for the Israelites is a misconception for a number of reasons. Firstly, the Sabbath transcends race: the Bible records clearly that it was established by God at the beginning of time, before the Israelites even existed (Gen 2:3). Secondly, every person has a duty to remember God’s creation, for we are all beneficiaries (Ex 20:11). Thirdly, even though we may not be able to relate directly to God’s deliverance of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, we are mindful that we were once slaves to sin (Rom 6:17) and had to be saved by God through the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Pet 1:18–19). Hence, just as He freed the Israelites from the oppression of Pharaoh, so He has freed us from the power of Satan (Acts 26:18). Fourthly, we note that when God delivered the Ten Commandments, He also instructed the Israelites to ensure that the Gentiles in their midst could

likewise enjoy the Sabbath (Ex 20:10; Deut 5:14).

Finally, the Book of Isaiah speaks of a time when Gentiles will keep the Sabbath. God will bring them to His holy mountain—His church—where they will worship Him with joy.

*Also the sons of the foreigner  
Who join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him,  
And to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants—  
Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath,  
And holds fast My covenant—  
Even them I will bring to My holy mountain,  
And make them joyful in My house of prayer.  
Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices  
Will be accepted on My altar;  
For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.*

*Isaiah 56:6–7*

Today, we are experiencing the fulfilment of this blessing and are reminded of Paul’s teaching that God is also a God of the Gentiles (Rom 3:29).

#### **Q6 Has Jesus not abolished the law, including the Ten Commandments?**

The first point to note is that the Sabbath predates the Mosaic Law, including the Ten Commandments. It was established by God at creation (Gen 2:1–3), two and a half thousand years before He delivered the law at Sinai. Moreover, God commanded the Israelites to keep the Sabbath even before their arrival at Sinai (Ex 16:23–30).

The second point to note is that when Jesus came to the world, He did not abolish the law:

*Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*

*Matthew 5:17–19*

Here, the word for “fulfil” is *pleroo* in Greek. It has various nuances of meaning, including to “make full”, “complete” and “make perfect”.<sup>2</sup> Jesus fulfilled the law by making it full, complete and perfect: He made clear the spirit of God’s law and highlighted the fact that God now requires us to keep His commandments from within our hearts (see Matthew 5–7). In terms of the Sabbath, He taught and showed us through personal example a number of important truths: the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath (Mk 2:27); it is a day for doing good to others (Mt 12:12); God desires mercy over sacrifice (Mt 12:7); He is Lord of the Sabbath (Mt 12:8).

### Q7 How did Sunday observance come about?

History indicates that Sunday observance came about gradually, after the passing of the apostles:

- Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, taught Christians to observe the “Lord’s Day” (Sunday) in addition to the Sabbath from about AD 100.<sup>3</sup>
- Tertullian, writing in the third century AD, advocated the need for Christians to rest on Sunday.<sup>4</sup>
- From the fourth century AD onwards, church councils began enforcing Sunday worship—the first being the Council of Elvira around AD 300.<sup>5</sup>
- In AD 321, the Roman emperor Constantine decreed Sunday to be a public holiday and outlawed work. Later emperors added other prohibitions.<sup>6</sup>
- Around AD 364, the Council of Laodicea (in Phrygia Pacatiana) stipulated the following in its 29th Canon:<sup>7</sup>

*Christians must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honouring the Lord’s Day; and, if they can, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ.*

### Q8 What justification does the Catholic Church give for Sunday observance?

The justification for Sunday observance can be found in the literature of the Catholic Church. *The Convert’s Catechism of Catholic Doctrine*,<sup>8</sup> for example, gives the following explanation:

Q. What is the Third Commandment?<sup>9</sup>

A. The Third Commandment is: Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day.

Q. Which is the Sabbath day?

A. Saturday is the Sabbath day.

Q. Why do we observe Sunday instead of Saturday?

A. We observe Sunday because the Catholic Church transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday.

Q. Why did the Catholic Church substitute Sunday for Saturday?

A. The Church substituted Sunday for Saturday, because Christ rose from the dead on a Sunday, and the Holy Ghost descended upon the Apostles on a Sunday.

Q. By what authority did the Church substitute Sunday for Saturday?

A. The Church substituted Sunday for Saturday by the plenitude of that divine power which Jesus Christ bestowed upon her.

Q. What does the Third Commandment command?

A. The Third Commandment commands us to sanctify Sunday as the Lord’s Day.

Q. What does the Third Commandment forbid?

A. The Third Commandment forbids (1) The omission of prayer and divine worship; (2) All unnecessary servile work; (3) Whatever hinders the keeping of the Lord’s Day holy.

<sup>2</sup> Strong’s reference no. G4137.

<sup>3</sup> Ignatius, *Epistle to the Magnesians 9*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library. <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.v.iii.ix.html>>

<sup>4</sup> Slater, T., “Sunday”, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912). New Advent. <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14335a.htm>>

<sup>5</sup> “Church year”, *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, 2009. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/117239/church-year>>

<sup>6</sup> “Sunday”, *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, 2009. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/573790/Sunday>>

<sup>7</sup> *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol 14, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Henry Percival (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1900). Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3806.htm>>

<sup>8</sup> Geriermann, Peter, *The Convert’s Catechism of Catholic Doctrine* (Saint Louis, MO: Herder Book Co., 1946).

<sup>9</sup> Note: In the New King James Version of the Bible, the Sabbath commandment is the fourth commandment (see Exodus 20:8–11). But, as the commandments are not specifically numbered, the Roman Catholic Church states: “The division and numbering of the Commandments have varied in the course of history. The present catechism follows the division of the Commandments established by St. Augustine, which has become traditional in the Catholic Church.”

Q. Is the desecration of the Lord's Day a grievous matter?

A. The desecration of the Lord's Day is a grievous matter in itself, though it admits of light matter.

In addition, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*<sup>10</sup> states:

*Sunday is expressly distinguished from the sabbath which it follows chronologically every week; for Christians its ceremonial observance replaces that of the sabbath.*

Paragraph 2175

*The sabbath, which represented the completion of the first creation, has been replaced by Sunday which recalls the new creation inaugurated by the Resurrection of Christ.*

Paragraph 2190

#### Q9 What were the religious associations of Sunday before the Catholic Church adopted it as their day of worship?

The very name "Sunday"<sup>11</sup> is indicative of its pagan associations:

*The Babylonians named each of the days after one of the five planetary bodies known to them and after the Sun and the Moon, a custom later adopted by the Romans. For a time the Romans used a period of eight days in civil practice, but in AD 321 Emperor Constantine established the seven-day week in the Roman calendar and designated Sunday as the first day of the week.*

"Week", *Encyclopaedia Britannica*<sup>12</sup>

This day was dedicated to the worship of the sun in the time of the Roman Empire.<sup>13</sup> However, in AD 321, Emperor Constantine decreed that all judges, city people and craftsmen rest on "the venerable day of the sun".<sup>14</sup> This move benefited those Christians who had been observing the Lord's Day (Sunday) as their day of rest and worship, for their practice became more acceptable to the hostile pagan world. They reinterpreted the pagan name "Sunday" to signify Christ, the "Sun of Righteousness" (see Mal 4:2).<sup>15</sup>

10 *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd edition (Sunday Visitor: 3/1/2000).

11 Latin, *Dies Solis*, "Day of the Sun"

12 "Week", *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, 2009.

<<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/638786/week>>

13 Unger, Merrill F., *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988).

14 *Documents of the Christian Church*, ed. Henry Bettenson (OUP: 1976).

15 Unger, Merrill F., *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988).

#### Q10 Did the apostles replace the Sabbath with Sunday worship?

No, they did not. From the Bible, we see no evidence of the apostles substituting the Sabbath with Sunday worship. On the contrary, after Jesus' ascension, they continued observing the Sabbath, worshipping and preaching in the synagogues.

Examples in the Book of Acts include:

- *Paul and Barnabas in Antioch*: "But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down" (Acts 13:14); "And the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God" (Acts 13:44).
- *Paul and Silas in Philippi*: "And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there" (Acts 16:13).
- *Paul and Silas in Thessalonica*: "Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures" (Acts 17:1-2).
- *Paul in Corinth*: "And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 18:4).

Furthermore, it is reasonable to expect that, if the apostles had abolished the Sabbath or replaced it with Sunday worship, we would see evidence for it in the New Testament Scriptures. This is because changes to traditional practice, such as circumcision, provoked great feeling and debate in the early church (see Acts 15:2, 7). However, there is no indication that this happened with the Sabbath.

Finally, where the Bible does mention church activity on the first day of the week, there is no indication that the believers were observing Sunday in place of the Sabbath. For example, Acts 20:7 records: "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight." From the previous verse, we understand that Paul

had stayed in Troas for seven days. Finally, on the first day of the week, the disciples gathered to break bread and to listen to his message before his departure the next day. In short, this was a farewell service. Another often quoted reference is 1 Corinthians 16:2: “On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.” Here, Paul was simply instructing the members in Corinth to put aside their donations for their fellow brethren in Jerusalem on the first day of the week, so that there would be no last minute rush when he next visited them. We note that he did not state the need to do this in conjunction with a church service.

**Q11 Is there any biblical basis for the argument that Christians should observe Sunday in place of the Sabbath in order to commemorate the resurrection of Jesus?**

No, there is not. While the Bible records that Jesus resurrected on the first day of the week (Mt 28:1–8; Lk 24:1–3), there is no reason to infer that Christians gained a new teaching to observe Sunday in place of the Sabbath.

Christians who argue the need for Sunday observance often cite Revelation 1:10 in an attempt to prove the overriding significance of this day. However, there are two problems with this argument: one is that there is no indication that the “Lord’s Day” mentioned in this verse refers to Sunday; a second is that, even if the “Lord’s Day” did refer to Sunday, we still cannot assume that we have a new commandment to commemorate the Lord’s resurrection on this day, or that it replaces the Sabbath. The Bible simply does not give us these teachings.

Concerning the argument that Jesus abolished the Sabbath, again, there is no biblical basis for this. He neither abolished it, nor gave His disciples a new commandment to observe Sunday. Instead, we learn that Jesus Himself observed the Sabbath (Lk 4:16; 6:6), as did the apostles (Acts 13:14, 44; 16:13; 17:1–2; 18:4). What Jesus did do was to teach the people about the true significance of the Sabbath—for example, that it is a day for doing good to others (Lk 6:9). Moreover, when challenged for not complying with the rabbis’ legalistic regulations, He

declared, “The Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath” (Lk 6:5). In other words, the Sabbath belongs to Jesus; indeed, He instituted it because He was the one who made the heavens and the earth and rested on the seventh day (Jn 1:1–3).

**Q12 How should Christians observe the Sabbath?**

God has always intended the Sabbath to be a joyful day—a day for believers to rest and receive His blessings. Jesus, who is Lord of the Sabbath, encourages us, saying:

*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*

*Matthew 11:28–30*

From His words, we understand that He would never give us a heavy burden to bear, especially not on the day that He has gifted to us.

In terms of how we ought to observe the Sabbath, the Bible gives us the following teachings:

- *To rest from our secular work:* “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates” (Ex 20:8–10).
- *To keep it holy:* “Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who lays hold on it; who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and keeps his hand from doing any evil” (Isa 56:2; cf. 58:13–14).
- *To gather with others to worship God:* “Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation...” (Lev 23:3); “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb 10:25).

- *To read the Bible:* “So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read” (Lk 4:16); “For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath” (Acts 15:21).
- *To pray:* “And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made...” (Acts 16:13).
- *To listen to the word of God:* “And the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God” (Acts 13:44).
- *To preach God’s word:* “Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught” (Mk 1:21).
- *To do good deeds:* “...Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” (Mt 12:12).

## Miracles

### Q1 What are miracles?

The *Compact Oxford English Dictionary* defines a miracle as “an extraordinary and welcome event attributed to a divine agency”. In truth, we constantly see God’s extraordinary deeds around us in nature and throughout the universe. But every now and then, we come across special miracles that add to our understanding of His almighty power.

### Q2 Can we view all natural phenomena as miracles?

Apostle Paul says, “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” (Rom 1:20). Everything in the universe originates with God, and what we often take for granted as natural phenomena are in fact His gracious miracles. They testify to the fact that He is both real and omnipotent.

*But now ask the beasts, and they will teach you;  
And the birds of the air, and they will tell you;  
Or speak to the earth, and it will teach you;  
And the fish of the sea will explain to you.  
Who among all these does not know  
That the hand of the Lord has done this,  
In whose hand is the life of every living thing,  
And the breath of all mankind?*

*Job 12:7–10*

### Q3 What do miracles reveal about God?

Miracles reveal the glory, power and compassion of God and of Jesus Christ, His Son:

- When the Israelites turned aside to idols during the time of Elijah, God performed a miracle to demonstrate His power and to show that He was the true God: He sent fire down from heaven to burn up a sacrifice prepared by the prophet. As a result, the people fell on their faces, crying, “The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!” (1 Kgs 18:39).
- During His ministry, Jesus revealed His compassion through miracles that targeted the physical and spiritual needs of the people. For example, He cast out demons, healed the sick, cleansed lepers, raised the dead, made the blind to see and fed five thousand people.
- The miracles that revealed the glory of God included Jesus turning water into wine in Cana (Jn 2:11); Jesus raising Lazarus (Jn 11:40); Peter healing a lame man (Acts 4:21).

### Q4 Do all Christians believe in them?

Today, there are some Christians who accept the teachings of Jesus, but doubt that He actually performed miracles. Such a stance has a number of problematic implications. The first is the denial of Jesus’ divinity and power. The Gospels clearly show that, aside from being an authoritative teacher, He also had the power to cast out demons, heal the sick and control nature. The second implication is a disregard for the Lord’s promise to give signs<sup>1</sup> to confirm the true gospel (Mk 16:17–18, 20). The third implication is the denial of the greatest miracle of all—His resurrection. Jesus Himself spoke of this miracle as “the sign<sup>2</sup> of Jonah” (Lk 11:29). It demonstrated His power over death and the fact that He is justifiably the Saviour of mankind. To all those who disbelieve His resurrection, Paul has this to say:

*And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.*

*1 Corinthians 15:17–19*

### Q5 Are they relevant to the church today?

Miracles testify to God’s glory, power and mercy. Therefore, they have a rightful place in His church. It is significant that when Jesus sent His disciples out to preach, He gave them the power to cast out demons and to heal the sick (Lk 9:1–2). Also, before His ascension, Jesus said, “And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover” (Mk 16:17–18). The fact is, signs and miracles confirm the authenticity of the gospel and prove that the church belongs to God (Mk 16:20).

### Q6 What purpose do they serve?

Miracles play an important part in God’s ministry. They:

- prove that Jesus is from God (Mt 14:22–33; Jn 3:2; 5:36; 10:37–38).
- testify of true apostleship (2 Cor 12:12).
- confirm the authenticity of the gospel (Mk 16:20; Acts 14:3; Heb 2:3–4).
- lead people to believe in the Lord (Ex 4:30–31; Jn 4:48; 12:9–11; Acts 5:12–14; 9:36–42; 13:6–12; Rom 15:18–19).
- dispel doubt (Mt 11:2–5).
- have the power to confound those who oppose the gospel (Acts 4:14–16).
- reveal God’s glory, power and goodness (Mk 2:1–12; Jn 9:1–3; 11:1–4; Acts 10:38).

<sup>1</sup> The Greek word for sign, *semeion* (G4592), has the meaning of “miracle” or “wonder.”

<sup>2</sup> Here, the word *semeion* is used again.

- glorify God’s name (1 Chron 17:21; Isa 63:12; Jer 32:20; Mk 1:27–28; Acts 19:16–17).
- show that Jesus has forgiven a person’s sin (Mk 2:9–12).
- convince people to depart from wrongdoing (Acts 19: 13–20).
- will cause the unrepentant to be judged (Mt 11:20–24).
- frustrate the work of the devil (Ex 7:8–12; Acts 8:9–13; 13:8–12).

The most important purpose of miracles is to bring people to Christ. Unfortunately, not everyone will respond in a positive way, as Jesus Himself discovered when He performed mighty miracles in certain cities (Mt 11:20–24). However, anyone who fails to repent despite witnessing the power of God faces judgment, because there is no excuse for their unbelief.

**Q7 Apart from the workers of God, can anyone else perform miracles?**

Jesus warned His disciples, “For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Mt 24:24). These words came true not long after the early church was established, for we learn of people like Simon the sorcerer who attracted a great following in Samaria and was acclaimed as “the great power of God” (Acts 8:10). However, even Simon converted to Christ and was baptized; then, it was his turn to be amazed by the power of God (Acts 8:13).

False prophets and christs make use of the power of Satan to perform “signs and lying wonders” to deceive and confuse people (2 Thess 2:9). However, these false miracles will not stand the test of time and will be revealed for what they are. God’s power always triumphs—just as it did when Moses prevailed over Pharaoh’s magicians (Ex 7:8–12) and when Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18:20–39).

**Q8 Why are they seldom seen nowadays?**

Miracles will only occur when two conditions are fulfilled. Firstly, the church must have the abidance of God’s Spirit. We see the importance of this condition from Peter’s testimony about Jesus: “How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, *for God was with Him*” (Acts 10:38). Secondly, the church needs to have the authority of God, in the same way that the disciples had the authority of Jesus, enabling them to heal the sick and to cast out unclean spirits (Mt 10:1; Lk 10:19). Today, God has given this authority to the church that preaches according to the Bible, because miracles confirm the gospel of salvation (Mk 16:15–18).

## Judgment

### Q1 What is judgment?

Judgment is the final part of God's plan. The Bible refers to this event as "the righteous judgment of God" (Rom 2:5) and "the judgment of the great day" (Jude 6). It is when Jesus will review the deeds of every person—both the living and the dead (2 Tim 4:1; Rev 20:12–13). The outcome for the righteous will be a glorious reward (Rev 11:18; 22:12); the outcome for sinners will be destruction (Rev 20:15; 21:8).

### Q2 Do we know when the day of judgment will be?

No, we do not. However, we know it is soon, for Jesus says, "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work" (Rev 22:12).

### Q3 Why would a loving God judge us?

The nature of God is certainly loving, but He is also righteous and just. In the Book of Romans, apostle Paul describes God's righteous judgment:

*But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who "will render to each one according to his deeds": eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil,*

*of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

*Romans 2:5–10*

The purposes of His judgment are:

- *To separate the good from the evil:* "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats" (Mt 25:31–32); "Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him" (Mal 3:18).
- *To determine the end for each person:* "His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Mt 3:12); "... First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn" (Mt 13:30); "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Mt 25:46).

### Q4 Much of human behaviour is hidden. Can God really bring everything to account?

God is omniscient. All our deeds are laid bare before Him—nothing is hidden from His sight (Job 31:4; 34:21–22; Ps 33:13–15; 1 Cor 4:5). King Solomon says, "For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil" (Eccl 12:14). Also, Paul says, "Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later. Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden" (1 Tim 5:24–25).

Whether they are hidden or exposed, God has recorded all our words and deeds for the day of judgment (Dan 7:10; Rev 20:12). The Bible mentions a book of remembrance for this purpose, "for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name" (Mal 3:16). Knowing this, we should be careful in what we say

and do. Jesus warns, “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Mt 12:36–37).

## Q5 Who will be judged?

Everyone will be judged; no one is exempt. Hence, the writer of Hebrews says, “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Heb 9:27). Similarly, apostle Paul says, “[God] has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). This is why God “now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30).

The Bible talks about the judgment of the following:

### A. THE CHURCH

God’s judgment will begin with the church: “For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?” (1 Pet 4:17). The reasons for His judgment are:

- *To separate out the good from the bad:* “The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness” (Mt 13:41; cf. Mt 13:24–30).
- *To reveal each person’s work:* “Each one’s work will become manifest; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is” (1 Cor 3:13). Those whose work endures because they have used the best materials will have a reward; but those whose work is of inferior quality will lose it, and they themselves “will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Cor 3:15).
- *To make each person give an account:* “So then each of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom 14:12).
- *To expose what is hidden:* “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light

the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts; and then each one’s praise will come from God” (1 Cor 4:5).

- *To reward and punish:* “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10; cf. 1 Cor 4:5; Heb 6:7–8; 10:26–31).

### B. THE ISRAELITES

Jesus told the disciples, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Mt 19:28). The Israelites were God’s chosen people from ancient times, beloved by Him on account of the patriarchs (Rom 11:28). His judgment of them will be based on one of two things: the Mosaic Law for those who lived under the law (Rom 2:12), or the gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Thess 1:8). Regarding the latter, Jesus says, “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (Jn 12:48).

Until now, few Jews have accepted Jesus Christ and His gospel, but the Bible speaks of a time when they will turn to Him and be saved: “For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins’” (Rom 11:25–26).

### C. THE DEAD

Revelation 20 describes the judgment of the dead: “And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the

things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works” (Rev 20:12–13). It also reveals that whoever’s name is not recorded in the Book of Life—a book that lists the names of those entitled to inherit eternal life—will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20:15).

#### **D. ALL THE INHABITANTS OF THE EARTH**

Everyone in the world, both lowly and great, will be judged:

*And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”*

*Revelation 6:15–17*

#### **E. THE BEAST AND THE FALSE PROPHET**

The Book of Revelation prophesies concerning God’s judgment upon a formidable opponent of the truth and his ally, both of whom will emerge in the end time: “Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone” (Rev 19:20).

#### **F. THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS**

The Bible says that the devil and his angels will be judged: “And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own habitation, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6); “For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment” (2 Pet 2:4). For now, the devil and his angels

have been imprisoned, awaiting judgment. Their fate will be an “everlasting fire” which has already been prepared (Mt 25:41).

#### **Q6 Aside from Jesus, who else will execute judgment?**

The twelve disciples (Mt 19:28) and all the saints will sit in judgment, alongside Jesus. Paul says, “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?” (1 Cor 6:2–3).

#### **Q7 What will be the basis of judgment?**

God shows no partiality (Rom 2:11). Therefore, He will judge everyone in a fair and just manner—based on what He has revealed to them about right and wrong, sin and the way to salvation.

- Those under the Mosaic Law will be judged according to the law: “... And as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law” (Rom 2:12).
- Gentiles without the Mosaic Law will be judged according to their conscience: “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things contained in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them” (Rom 2:14–15).
- Those who have heard the gospel will be judged by it: “... When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 1:7–8); “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (Jn 12:48).

- Those who have witnessed miracles will be judged if they disbelieve:

*Then [Jesus] began to upbraid the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.”*

*Matthew 11:20–22*

- Believers will be judged by the truth, which is the word of God: “But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?” (Rom 2:2–3).

#### **Q8 How can people escape the judgment that leads to condemnation?**

God’s judgment will lead to different outcomes. Those who obey the gospel of Jesus Christ and maintain their faith to the end will find their names recorded in the Book of Life. Theirs will be a judgment that results in a reward, according to what they have done for the Lord (Mt 16:27; Rom 2:6–7; 1 Cor 3:8; Rev 22:12). However, those who reject Jesus and His gospel will face a different type of judgment—one leading to eternal punishment (2 Thess 1:7–9). This is because they will remain in sin, having chosen not to be delivered by Jesus (Jn 8:24; Eph 2:1–3).

The only way to escape judgment is to accept and obey the gospel of salvation. This entails our believing in the Lord Jesus Christ (Mk 16:16); repenting and receiving water baptism in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16); and receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit for the guarantee of eternal life (Jn 3:5; Acts 2:38; Eph 1:13–14). Thereafter, we should lead a fruitful and Spirit-filled life (Gal 5:16–26). In this way, we can appear before the Lord on the day of judgment to receive due praise and everlasting life.

## The Second Coming of Jesus

### **Q1 What is the second coming of Jesus?**

The second coming of Jesus is the time when He will return to the world to execute judgment and take the saved believers to heaven. The Bible refers to it as “the day of the Lord” (1 Thess 5:2; 2 Pet 3:10); “the day of God” (2 Pet 3:12); “the day of Christ” (2 Thess 2:2); “the/that Day” (Mt 24:36; Lk 21:34; 1 Cor 3:13; 2 Thess 2:3).

Jesus describes His second coming in this way: “Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Mt 24:30–31).

### **Q2 What is the difference between the first and second comings?**

When Jesus first came to the world 2,000 years ago, He came in the flesh as the Saviour of mankind. He proclaimed the gospel of salvation, died on the cross, resurrected and ascended back to heaven in glory (1 Tim 3:16). The next time He comes, it will be in judgment. Every person will see this event, including those who crucified Him (Rev 1:7).

### Q3 What is the implication of His second coming?

The Lord's second coming will mark the end of the corrupt earth, which He will destroy with fire (2 Pet 3:10, 12). In its place will be "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pet 3:13; cf. Rev 21:1). Elder Peter reminds us to strive for holiness and godliness so that we will be ready for that day (2 Pet 3:11–14).

### Q4 Why must Jesus come again?

Jesus will come again to do three things:

- *To execute judgment.* He will "judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom" (2 Tim 4:1). By that time, the door of salvation will be closed, and anyone wishing to enter in will be unable to do so (Lk 13:25). Those who do not know God or who refuse to obey the gospel will be "punished with everlasting destruction" (2 Thess 1:8–9). In contrast, those who believe faithfully to the end will obtain their reward (Rev 22:12).
- *To put an end to this evil generation.* This present world is corrupt and lies under the control of the devil (1 Jn 5:19). It is reminiscent of the days of Noah, when God sent a flood to destroy the earth (Gen 6:12–13, 17; cf. Lk 17:26–27). Only this time, He will destroy it permanently with fire (2 Pet 3:12). Elder Peter says, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up" (2 Pet 3:10).
- *To take the saved ones to heaven.* Jesus promises, "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (Jn 14:2–3). As members of God's true church, we are now betrothed to Jesus Christ (2 Cor 11:2). The Bible calls us His "perfect one" (Song 6:9), a bride who is preparing herself for the marriage of the Lamb (Rev 19:7). At His second coming, we shall be

caught up "in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess 4:17).

### Q5 When will He come?

Jesus says, "But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Mt 24:36; cf. Acts 1:7). It is God's good will for the timing of Jesus' second coming to remain a secret. Not knowing on our part compels us to stay alert (1 Thess 5:6), to avoid focusing on the transient things of life (2 Cor 4:18; Col 3:2–4), and to keep ourselves holy and blameless (2 Pet 3:14).

The Bible says, "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him" (Mt 24:44). It also warns that not everyone will be prepared. Some people will:

- say, "Peace and safety!" whereupon destruction comes upon them suddenly (1 Thess 5:3).
- be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the cares of life (Lk 21:34).
- be eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting and building (Lk 17:28).
- be slumbering when the cry goes out at midnight to meet the Lord (Mt 25:6; Rom 13:11).
- say in their hearts, "My master is delaying his coming" (Lk 12:45).
- find their lamps going out for want of oil (Mt 25:8).
- stubbornly refuse to repent (Rev 2:5; 3:3; 9:21; 16:9, 11).

### Q6 What are the signs of His second coming?

The Bible highlights a number of signs heralding Jesus' second coming. Some will manifest in the world and in the universe; others will manifest within and outside the church. Many are already apparent in this present time:

## A. SIGNS IN THE WORLD AND THE UNIVERSE

- *The worsening condition of the human heart:*

*But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!*

2 Timothy 3:1–5

- *Selfishness and greed:*

*Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter.*

James 5:1–5

- *Increasing knowledge:* “But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase” (Dan 12:4). The hallmark of this age is man’s expanding knowledge. It has led to significant advances in science and technology and a better quality of life for most people. But such progress has been offset by negative changes, including our damage to the planet and increasing political and religious conflict. One can only wonder if such things will prove to be the undoing of mankind, for they make us think of Jesus’ warning that there will come a time when “men’s hearts [will fail] them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken” (Lk 21:26).
- *Frequency of wars:* Jesus warns, “And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet” (Mt 24:6).

Revelation records what happened when the Lamb of God opened the second seal on a heavenly scroll: “And another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword” (Rev 6:4). Here, the horse symbolizes warfare, and its red colour signifies bloodshed. Such things will occur more frequently in the end time, despite man’s best efforts to promote peace.

- *Calamities and famines:* “And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven” (Lk 21:11). Famine and disease will become increasingly common, as will natural disasters such as floods, droughts, storms and earthquakes. Today, we are seeing evidence of this prophecy in fulfilment, and it brings to mind the scenario depicted by the prophet Isaiah: “The earth is violently broken, the earth is split open, the earth is shaken exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall totter like a hut; its transgression shall be heavy upon it, and it will fall, and not rise again” (Isa 24:19–20).
- *Strange celestial phenomena:* “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Mt 24:29); “I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and notable day of the Lord” (Acts 2:19–20; cf. Joel 2:30–31). All these celestial phenomena will precede the final sign: “Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (Lk 21:27).

## B. SIGNS WITHIN AND OUTSIDE OF THE CHURCH

- *Heresies:* “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” (1 Tim 4:1). Here, the “deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” are part of the devil’s strategy to lead believers astray. He will succeed where

people become bored of the truth: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Tim 4:3–4).

Unfortunately, many of these teachings will emanate from within the church itself: “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction” (2 Pet 2:1).

- *False christs*: “For many will come in My name, saying ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many” (Mt 24:5); “And He said: ‘Take heed that you not be deceived. For many, will come in My name, saying, ‘I am He,’ and, ‘The time has drawn near.’ Therefore do not go after them” (Lk 21:8). Here, Jesus warns that people will use His name to lead others astray: they will preach a form of Christianity, but it will not be the truth.

Today, we see the words of Jesus being fulfilled in different ways. For example, some people teach that He was merely a social reformer or teacher and deny that He was God manifested in the flesh, was born of a virgin, or had the power to perform miracles. Others preach Jesus as the Saviour, but argue that salvation comes through faith alone, without the need to keep the commandments of God. To all such people, Jesus will say, “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do the things which I say?” (Lk 6:46).

- *Antichrists*: “Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour” (1 Jn 2:18); “Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son” (1 Jn 2:22). There are two types of antichrists. One type disbelieves and opposes Jesus Christ, as mentioned by John. The other type is the “enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things”

(Phil 3:18–19). They are believers who love the world more than Jesus, and for whom elder James reserves this severe reprimand: “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (Jas 4:4).

- *Scoffers*: “Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation’” (2 Pet 3:3–4; cf. Jude 18–19). Many people, including some Christians, disbelieve the second coming of Jesus and are convinced that life and the world will go on indefinitely. Such people do not feel the need to accept Jesus as their Saviour or to change their erroneous ways.
- *The downpour of the Holy Spirit of the latter rain*: “Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God; for He has given you the former rain faithfully, and He will cause the rain to come down for you—the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month” (Joel 2:23). On the day of Pentecost, God poured down the Holy Spirit of the former (autumn) rain. Now, in this end time, He is pouring out the latter (spring) rain, as prophesied by Zechariah: “Ask the Lord for rain in the time of the latter rain. The Lord will make flashing clouds; He will give them showers of rain, grass in the field for everyone” (Zech 10:1).

The coming of the Lord is near. It brings to mind the words of James: “Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand” (Jas 5:7–8). The Book of Revelation says that, when Jesus comes, He will gather in the harvest of the saved believers: “So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped” (Rev 14:16). After that, He will sift out the unrighteous for destruction: “So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God” (Rev 14:19).

- *The gospel reaches the whole world:* “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Mt 24:14). The gospel will reach the world in different ways: through evangelists, personal evangelism, the Bible, and gospel literature. However, the work requires many workers—those who are willing to help bring the Lord’s sheep into the one true fold (Jn 10:16). Apostle Paul says, “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom 10:14). One of the greatest challenges facing the church today is the paucity of workers. Jesus Himself points out that the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few (Mt 9:37). Therefore, we need to pray for more workers, so that the everlasting gospel can be preached “to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (Rev 14:6). In the meantime, God is waiting patiently, as He does not wish anyone to perish. Even so, “The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night...” (2 Pet 3:10).

- *The restoration of Israel:*

*For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.”*

*Romans 11:25–27*

Here, Paul speaks prophetically of the time when God will restore His relationship with Israel. Even though they had rejected Christ and His gospel, they will come to believe in Him one day and enter into His salvation. Paul describes this occurrence using the symbolism of God grafting the Jews back into the olive tree (Rom 11:23–24). He says that it will take place when “the fullness of the Gentiles has come in”—that is, when the Gentile church becomes perfect.

- *The bride is prepared:* “Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His

wife has made herself ready” (Rev 19:7); “Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev 21:2). In these biblical passages, the bride symbolizes the true church who is betrothed to Christ. God has adorned her with many precious things: the truth of salvation (Eph 2:19–20), the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:22), signs and miracles (Mk 16:17–18, 20), charismatic gifts (1 Cor 12:4–11), holiness (Eph 5:27; Rev 21:10), and His glory (Rev 21:11). It is these spiritual qualities—as opposed to worldly ones (1 Cor 1:17–29)—that please Him and qualify her to be His bride (Song 6:9).

- The believers should strive to ensure that God’s church is “a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:27).

## **Q7 What will happen when Jesus comes again?**

Jesus says that He will come when we least expect Him: “Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming... Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Mt 24:42, 44). When He does come, the event will be witnessed by every person: “Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen” (Rev 1:7).

The Bible reveals what will happen when the Lord makes His final visit to the world:

- He will descend “from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire...” (2 Thess 1:7–8); “on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Mt 24:30); “with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God...” (1 Thess 4:16).
- He will sound the trumpet to send His angels to gather the elect from the four winds (Mt 24:31; Mk 13:27).

- Those in their graves will hear His voice and come out (Jn 5:28–29), while the sea, Death and Hades will give up their dead (Rev 20:13).
- The dead in Christ will rise first (1 Thess 4:16) and be transformed into incorruptible spiritual beings, as will those who are still living (1 Cor 15:52–53).
- The devil, beast and false prophet—the enemies of Christ—will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone (Rev 20:10).
- Jesus will execute judgment: to reward the righteous and punish the sinners (Rev 11:18; 21:7–8).
- All those who do not know God and have not obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Thess 1:7–9)—whose names are not recorded in the Book of Life—will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20:15).
- The saved ones will be caught up in the clouds to meet with the Lord (1 Thess 4:17).
- Death and Hades will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20:14).

- testifying for the Lord courageously (Lk 9:26; 12:9).
- not being afraid of persecution (Mt 10:28).
- continuously gathering to worship (Heb 10:25).
- manifesting our gentleness before everyone (Phil 4:5).
- holding fast to our faith (Rev 2:25; 3:11) and to the name of the Lord (Rev 2:13).
- remaining holy and blameless (1 Pet 3:14).
- understanding and doing the will of God (Eph 5:17; 1 Jn 2:17).
- waiting patiently for the coming of the Lord (Jas 5:7–8).
- enduring to the end (Mt 24:13).

“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev 22:20).

#### **Q8 How can we prepare ourselves?**

Now is the time of grace—a window of opportunity for everyone to believe in the Lord and repent (2 Pet 3:9). For those of us who have already accepted Christ, we should make ourselves ready so that we can welcome Him with confidence (1 Pet 3:14; 1 Jn 2:28).

The Bible teaches us to prepare by:

- remaining alert and sober (Mt 25:13; 1 Thess 5:6).
- ensuring our lamps are replete with oil—that is, to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Mt 25:1–13).
- serving God faithfully (Mt 24:45–47).
- departing from works of darkness and walking in the light (Rom 13:12–14).
- loving one another fervently (1 Pet 4:7–8).
- not grumbling against one another (Jas 5:9).
- loving the Lord (1 Cor 16:22).



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