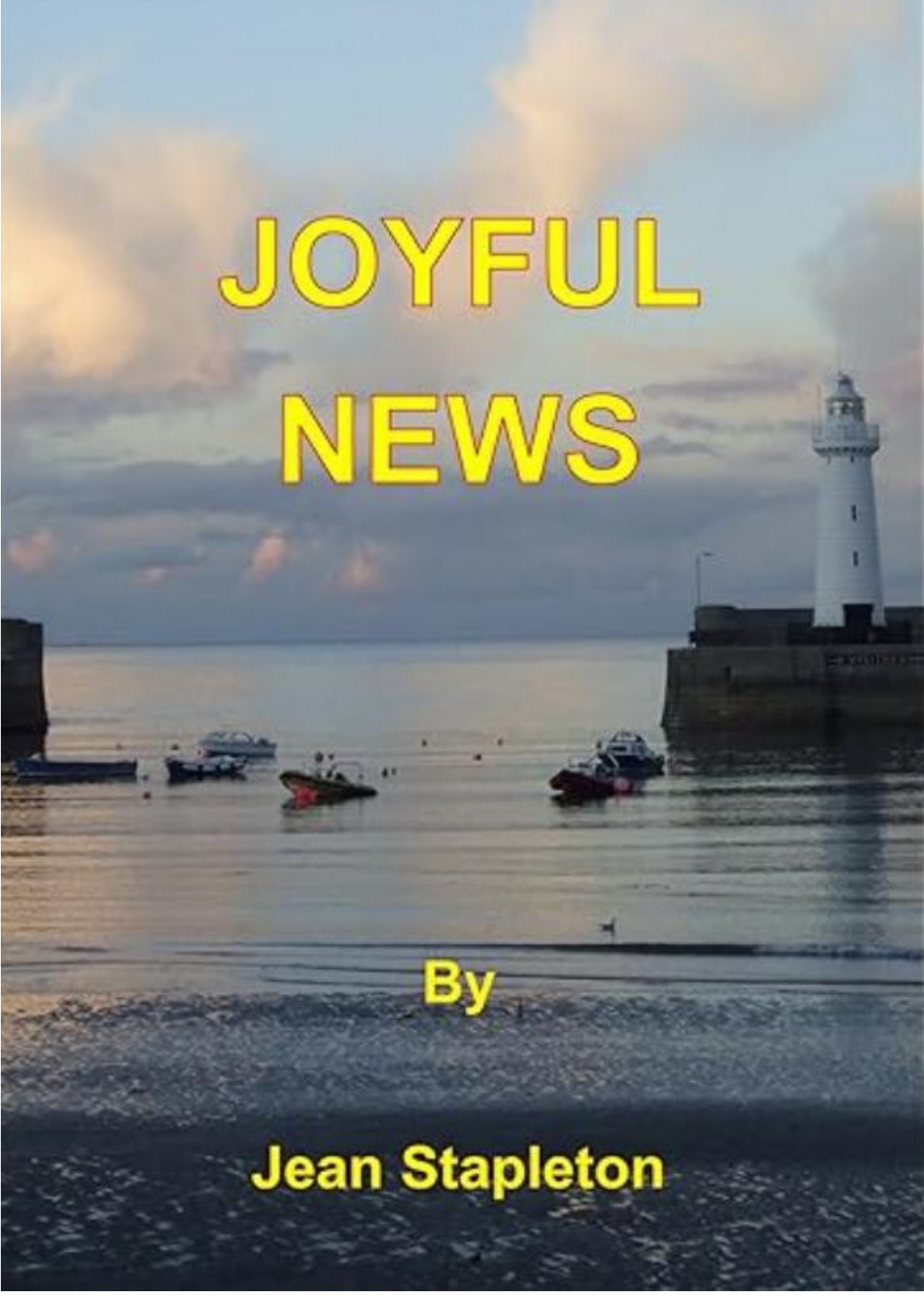




JOYFUL NEWS

By

Jean Stapleton

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INTRODUCTION

We all like to feel happy and we usually do feel happy when good things happen to us. Maybe we are given a present that is something we really wanted, or maybe the sun shines every day when we are on holiday.

The Bible often uses the word '**joy**' for happiness that does not go away, even when things are not going well. In fact, those who love the Lord Jesus are told to keep **rejoicing** (being **joyful**).

In this book, we will read about some of the reasons the Bible gives us, for being **joyful**. We will also learn about people who trusted God and learned to be **joyful** whatever was happening to them.

Chapter 1 - Joyful news

Read: Exodus 18: 6-11

Moses married a lady called Zipporah and they had two sons, Gershom and Eliezer. Zipporah's father was Jethro, whose home was in the land of Midian. Zipporah and her two sons were able to stay with Jethro, while Moses was leading the Israelites out of Egypt. News of all that been happening to the Israelites reached Jethro. He decided it was the right time to take Zipporah and her sons to be with Moses.

Moses had a lot to tell Jethro, about how God had saved the Israelites from the Egyptians. He also told him about the difficulties they had had since leaving Egypt and how God had helped them. As Jethro listened, he was filled with **joy**, because God had been so good to His people. He understood that God was greater than all the false gods that other nations bowed down to.

Jethro did not belong to the nation of Israel, but he realised that Israel's God was the true God. He was also very helpful to Moses. He gave him good advice when he saw Moses dealing with the problems people brought to him all day long. Jethro advised him to choose men who could be trusted to help him to deal with a lot of the peoples' problems. Then only the more difficult things could be brought to Moses. Moses followed Jethro's good advice, so that people would not be waiting for hours to speak to him.

THINK AND PRAY: We should always thank God for His goodness to us, but do we **rejoice** like Jethro did, when we hear about God's goodness to others?

Chapter 2 - God tells His people to be joyful

Read: Deuteronomy 12: 10-12; Psalm 115: 3-8

God chose the people of Israel to be His own special people. He gave them His law: good rules for them to live by. People in other countries bowed down to idols made of gold or silver, wood, or stone. God said that His people must not worship useless idols.

Moses was the man who God chose to be Israel's first leader. He told the Israelites that God would give them their own land to live in. When they had settled in their new land, Moses said that God would choose a place where the people should worship Him.

God said that coming to worship Him in the way that He would teach them, would be a **joyful** time. We know that God taught His people that to worship Him, their sin must be dealt with. The punishment for sin is death. We know that the Lord Jesus died on the cross to take sin's punishment for everyone who trusts in Him. In Old Testament times, God taught His people that a lamb could die instead of the sinful person. Of course, no animal could take away sin, but as the Israelites saw their lamb being killed for them, they knew how serious sin must be. They trusted in the Saviour who God promised to send.

God's people could be **joyful** because when they came to God in His way, they knew that their sin was forgiven. Sin separates us from God, who is perfectly pure and holy. When our sin is forgiven, through

trusting in the Lord Jesus, we have **joy** in our hearts because now we can know God as our loving heavenly Father and our greatest Friend.

THINK AND PRAY: Say thank you to God today, that the Lord Jesus died to take sin's punishment for everyone who trusts in Him. Trusting in Jesus gives lasting **joy**.

Chapter 3 - Hannah's joy

Read: 1 Samuel 1: 9-18, 2: 1

Hannah was very sad, but she knew what she must do. She needed to find a place to pray, so she could tell God all her troubles. She went on her own to the tabernacle: that special tent where God had promised to meet with His people. Hannah prayed that God would give her a son. She also promised that if God answered her prayer, she would give that son to Him.

Hannah's husband, Elkanah, had two wives, as many men did in those days. His wife Peninnah had children to care for and she was very unkind to Hannah because she had no children.

Hannah had cried bitterly because of Peninnah's unkindness. Elkanah loved Hannah and he did not like to see her looking so sad. He may have been surprised when Hannah returned from the tabernacle. Hannah's expression was so different: she no longer looked sad.

God did answer Hannah's prayer. She had a baby boy who she named Samuel. Hannah did keep her promise. As soon as Samuel was old enough to leave her, she took him to the tabernacle, to help Eli the priest. She did not know that the answer to her prayers was also the answer to Israel's need for a new leader. Samuel became the last of the leaders called 'Judges' and God gave him the task of anointing Israel's first two kings.

THINK AND PRAY: We learn from Hannah that we should pray when we are worried or upset. We also learn that like Hannah, we should trust God to answer our prayers: she no longer looked sad after she had prayed.



Chapter 4 - Where joy is found

Read: 1 Samuel 16: 1 and 10-13; Psalm 16: 11

David was chosen by God to be Israel's second king. When he was a young man, he had looked after his father's sheep. He learnt to trust God to help him when wild animals attacked the sheep. He also learned that just as a shepherd looks after his sheep, so God looks after His people. These were lessons that he never forgot.

Many different things happened in David's life. While he was young, he became famous for killing Goliath the giant, who all King Saul's soldiers were afraid of. Then God sent Samuel the prophet to anoint David: to show that He had chosen David to be Israel's next king. Years went by before David did become the king. During these years, King Saul was jealous and wanted to kill him. David had to move from place to place to escape from Saul.

When King Saul was killed in battle, the people made David their king: they knew that God had chosen him. Through all the ups and downs of David's life, he trusted God. In the Psalms he wrote, we read how he asked God to help him when he was in trouble. He also thanked God for His help and praised him for His greatness. In some of the Psalms, we read of David's sorrow when he knew that he had sinned against God.

David knew that real **joy** could only be found in knowing that God was with him. He also knew that

those who love and trust in God, will one day know greater **joy** than they have ever known before. This will be when they are with God for ever, after their life in this world is over. As we read in Psalm 16: 11 - 'In Your presence is fulness of **joy**'.

THINK AND PRAY: Many people spend their lives trying to find happiness. Ask God to help you to tell others where real **joy** can be found.

Chapter 5 - The Joy of giving

Read: 1 Chronicles 29: 1-9

I wonder if you have ever wanted to do something, but someone else has been chosen instead of you? King David wanted to build the temple at Jerusalem. He believed that the temple would be the place where God would especially meet with His people. But God said 'no' to David. He had chosen David's son Solomon for that special task.

David understood God's choice. When he became king, there were many battles to fight against the enemies of Israel. Solomon would have a more peaceful reign. That would be the right time for the temple to be built. David did not lose interest in the temple because it would not be built while he was king. He did everything he could to prepare for the building.

King David gathered all the leaders of the people together. He explained to them why God had chosen his son Solomon to build the temple. Then he told the people about the things he had collected for the building: gold, silver, precious stones, bronze, iron and wood. When they heard this, the leaders of the people also wanted to give towards the building. They were able to add more gold, silver, precious stones, bronze and wood.

There was great **joy** that day, because the people were so glad to give all they could, for the temple that would be built. King David prayed, thanking God for all that He had given them, so that they were able to

give. He also prayed that Solomon would be a good king, obedient to God in all that he did.

THINK AND PRAY: We read in our New Testament that there is more happiness in giving than in getting (Acts 20: 35). Ask God to help you to think of others who you could help.

Chapter 6 - A Joyful coronation

Read: 1 Kings 1: 32-40

Adonijah and his guests were afraid. They had come together for a feast, making King David's son, Adonijah, the new King of Israel. Then they heard a noise: the sound of music and of people rejoicing. Someone came in and told them the news. King David had given instructions that his son Solomon should be anointed king. Adonijah's guests left the feast and hurried to their homes.

King David knew that of his many sons, God had chosen Solomon to be the king after him. Nathan the prophet and Solomon's mother Bathsheba, told him about Adonijah. King David knew that he must act quickly to put things right. He told Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet what they must do. Solomon must ride on the King's mule and go to a place called Gihon. There they must anoint Solomon and say, 'long live King Solomon'. Then they must follow him to the king's throne. David was old now and he said that Solomon must sit on the throne and rule over Israel.

Many people came to see what was happening. It was a time of great **joy** and they all joined in saying, 'long live King Solomon'. This was the noise that Adonijah had heard. It had made him afraid that he would be punished for what he had done. But it was a time of **rejoicing** and not for punishing. So, King Solomon told his brother to go to his home.

THINK AND PRAY: Nathan the prophet acted wisely. He knew what should be done and he helped King David to do what God had said, making Solomon King. Pray that God will help you to act wisely.

Chapter 7 - A very special time

Read: 2 Chronicles 5: 2-5 and 11-14

Early in his reign, Solomon began the building of the temple. The work took seven years and when it was completed, Solomon called all the leaders of the people to Jerusalem. There the great gathering saw the ark of the covenant being brought to the temple. The priests put it into the room called the most holy place. The Levites then sang praise to God, 'for He is good, for His mercy endures forever' (2 Chronicles 5: 13). God showed His presence by a cloud that filled the temple.

King Solomon stood before all the people and spoke to them about how God had fulfilled His promise to his father David. Then Solomon knelt and prayed that God would always hear the prayers of His people. He particularly prayed about difficult times such as war or famine because of the people's sin. He asked that God would forgive and help them, when they repented.

It was in the seventh month of the year that this **joyful** time took place in Jerusalem. The Feast of Tabernacles was held in that month and so the people remained at Jerusalem seven days for the feast. This feast was a time of thanksgiving for the harvest and also a time to remember when the Israelites had lived in tents in the wilderness for forty years (the word tabernacle means a tent). This was such a wonderful time that the feast continued for another seven days.

At last, the king sent the people back to their homes. The feast was over, but the **joy** remained, as the people thought about how good God had been to them.

THINK AND PRAY: Think today about the things that you can thank God for. If your life seems difficult at present, thank God for the promise that the Lord Jesus will never leave those who trust in Him (Hebrews 13: 5).

Chapter 8 - When a lot of people were joyful

Read: 2 Chronicles 22: 10-12; 23: 11, 14-15, 21

There was a very happy day in the land of Judah, the southern part of the land of Israel. It came at the end of six very unhappy years. An evil woman called Athaliah, who worshipped idols, had killed the royal princes and made herself the queen. God had promised that Judah would always have a man from the family of King David, to be their king. For six long years the people must have wondered what had happened to God's promise.

There was a secret in the land of Judah: a secret that had been kept for six years. One little prince had been rescued by his Aunt. Joash was just one year old when Aunt Jehosheba saved him. Joash's uncle Jehoiada was the priest at the temple. It was in a room in the temple that Joash was hidden.

It was very important that Athaliah did not find out about Joash. He would have been in great danger from her and so would his aunt and uncle. But when Joash was seven years old, Jehoiada the priest knew that the time had come to show the people their king. He arranged for the temple to be kept very safe, with lots of people on guard. The crown was placed on Joash's head and the people who were there said, 'long live the King'.

Athaliah heard the sound of music and singing. She came to the temple and saw the young king.

She was taken out and put to death for all the wicked things she had done.

What a time of **joy** in the land of Judah. God had shown His people, that whatever happens, He always keeps His promises. Judah had its rightful king, as God had promised King David. Only seven years old, Joash had his Uncle Jehoiada to teach him what he ought to do.

THINK AND PRAY: The true story of Athaliah helps us to remember that God always does what He says He will do.

Chapter 9 - A Joyful feast

Read: 2 Chronicles 30: 21-27

After the reign of King Solomon, the land of Israel was divided and had two kings, one in the north and one in the south. The kingdom in the north (called Israel) did not have any kings who loved and obeyed God. The kings in the southern kingdom (called Judah) came from the family of King David. Some of these kings were obedient to God, some turned to the worship of idols.

Hezekiah lived about three hundred years after King David. His father, King Ahaz, had worshipped idols and he had shut the doors of the temple. As soon as Hezekiah became king, he opened the temple doors and set the priests and Levites to work, cleaning the temple and putting everything back in place. The temple was ready to be used as it should have been. Offerings and sacrifices were made as God had instructed. The Levites sang Psalms in praise to God.

The feast of the Passover, held in the first month of the year, reminded the people of how God rescued them from being slaves in Egypt. For a long time, the feast had not been held, but Hezekiah was determined to keep the feast. It had to be in the second month, because the priests needed to get ready. Letters were sent to the people in the north (Israel) and in the south (Judah). Some people in the north laughed at the messengers, but others did make the journey to Jerusalem.

Many people gathered at Jerusalem for seven days. There had not been such a time of **joy** in Jerusalem since Solomon was king.

THINK AND PRAY: Giving up their idols and worshipping the true God brought great **joy**. It is still true today, that those who love and trust in God, have lasting **joy**.



Chapter 10 - Sadness and joy

Read: Ezra 3: 10-13 and Jeremiah 29: 10-11

God had promised His people that He would bless them (give them good and happy lives) if they obeyed Him. But as time went on, they forgot how good God had been to them. They did not obey the good rules God had given them. They copied the people who lived around them by worshipping their useless idols.

God did not want His people to do the evil things that idol-worshippers did. He sent prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah to warn the people of Judah what would happen to them, if they did not change their ways. They would not listen to the warnings they were given. At last, they were taken to the land of Babylon.

Just as God had promised, (Jeremiah 29: 10) after seventy years in Babylon, the Jewish people (as the people from Judah were now called) were told that they could go back to their own land. Zerubbabel, who was from the family of King David, led about fifty thousand people back to Judah. There, they found that the beautiful temple had been burned and the walls of Jerusalem had been broken down.

The Jews began the work of rebuilding the temple. When the foundation was completed, they gave thanks to God. But some old men wept, when they remembered the temple that King Solomon had built. How sad they felt, remembering that they had

lost their beautiful temple because they had disobeyed God. Others shouted for **joy**, as they thanked God that they would have a temple again. This was so important to them, because it was the place where God had promised to meet with His people.

THINK AND PRAY: God gave His people good rules to live by. They disobeyed God because they wanted to be like other nations. If you are ever tempted to do wrong things that you see other boys and girls doing, pray that God will help you to do right.

Chapter 11 - When some sad people began to rejoice: part 1

Read: Nehemiah 1: 1-4; 2: 1-6

Nehemiah looked after the wine for King Artaxerxes in the land of Persia: he was called the King's cupbearer. He was not a Persian; he belonged to the people of Judah who were still living in captivity. The Babylonians had lost their power: Persia was now the most powerful nation.

One day, Nehemiah heard some bad news about the Jews who had gone back to Jerusalem. The Jews were sad because the city walls were broken down and the gates of the city had been burned. Nehemiah began to pray, and he kept on praying for many weeks. He asked God to hear his prayer that the king would be helpful to him.

One day, when Nehemiah was serving his wine, the king noticed that he looked sad. No servant of the king would usually dare to let him see them looking sad. They were supposed to be thinking only about doing what the king wanted them to do. But the king spoke kindly to Nehemiah and asked him why he was so sad. Nehemiah told the king about the terrible state that Jerusalem was in. Then the king asked Nehemiah what it was that he wanted. Nehemiah prayed quietly in his heart and then asked the king for permission to go to Jerusalem. God answered Nehemiah's prayer. He was allowed to go to Jerusalem and he was given all that he needed to rebuild the city walls.

When he arrived at Jerusalem, Nehemiah went out at night to see what needed to be done. He inspected the broken-down city wall and then called on the people to rebuild it.

THINK AND PRAY: Nehemiah prayed because he cared so much about the land of Israel. Do you remember to pray for your family and your friends? God still hears our prayers just as he did when Nehemiah prayed.

Chapter 12 - When some sad people began to rejoice: part 2

Read: Nehemiah 8: 1-3, 8-12

Nehemiah encouraged the people by telling them about how God had answered his prayers. The Jews needed encouragement as they faced many difficulties when they began to build. They had enemies who wanted to stop the work. Nehemiah reminded the builders that their great God was with them. Even though their enemies threatened to attack them, the work went on until the walls and gates were finished.

There was a priest named Ezra, who wanted to teach the people the laws that God had given to Israel long before. The people gathered together and asked Ezra to read God's law to them. So, Ezra stood on a platform and read to the people. God had chosen men from the tribe of Levi to help the priests in their work. Some of the Levites helped the people to understand the words that Ezra read. Many eyes began to fill with tears as the people listened. They knew that their nation had been disobedient to God. They knew that this was why they had been taken away from the land that God had given them and so they wept. Ezra and Nehemiah and the Levites told the people that they must not feel sad: this was to be a day of feasting and **rejoicing**.

The people wanted to hear more of what God had said. As Ezra the priest read, they heard of the Feast of Tabernacles, which was held in the seventh

month. The people brought branches of trees to make the tents that they would live in for the seven days of the feast. This was a time of great **joy** and thankfulness to God for His goodness.

THINK AND PRAY: We can feel sad when we remember that we have done wrong things. But the Lord Jesus gives us the **joy** of knowing that our sins are forgiven, when we trust in Him (1 John 1: 9).

Chapter 13 - Great joy after great fear

Read: Esther 7: 1-6; Esther 9: 1-4

The Jewish people had an enemy who wanted to destroy them. Their enemy was powerful: he was the king's favourite and a very important man in the land of Persia. Of course, Persia was not the Jews' own land. They had been taken away from the land of Israel, because of their disobedience to God. Their enemy, Haman, wanted to destroy all the Jews throughout the whole Persian empire.

Haman's plan was, that on one particular day, the Jews must be killed: the men, the women and the children. He had told the king that the Jews caused him a lot of trouble and the king had agreed to the terrible plan. The Jewish people must have been very afraid.

God had given very special promises to the people of Israel, who were called Jews. God had said that the promised Saviour would be born into their nation. If the Jews were destroyed, what would happen to God's promises?

There is no-one who can stop God doing what He says He will do. God made sure that there was someone ready to stop the evil plan from happening. The king had chosen a Jewish lady called Esther, to be his queen. Esther was able to speak to the king and plead for her people. The king could not change a law that he had made, but he could add a new law

to it. The new law said that the Jews could defend themselves against anyone who tried to harm them.

There was great **rejoicing** when the Jews heard about the new law. On the day when they would have been killed, they overcame all their enemies.

THINK AND PRAY: In the Bible, God has given us many wonderful promises. What does the Book of Esther teach us about God's promises?

Chapter 14 - A Joyful journey

Read: Psalm 122

Setting out on a journey can be exciting. We may be going on holiday or visiting friends. We look forward to seeing new places and meeting new people. We have many ways to travel: a boat across the sea to another country, or a very fast journey on an aeroplane. For travelling in our own country, we may use trains, buses or our own family car.

Travelling in Bible times was very different from what we know. Boats were not very safe and were more useful for crossing a river than crossing the sea. There were no trains, buses, cars or planes. There was a lot of walking along very bumpy paths or roads. If a family owned a donkey, it would be able to carry the luggage and one person in the family would be able to ride on it.

The Jewish people had special feast days each year, when God said they should meet in the place He would choose for them. The city of Jerusalem was the chosen place and people would travel there from all over the land of Israel. They would have to think very carefully about how many miles they could walk each day, where they could sleep at night and how much food they would need to carry with them.

Travelling was difficult, but there were good things about these journeys. Families from the same town or village would travel together. Sometimes they sang as they walked. We have some Psalms that they sang in our Bible: Psalms 120 – 134. In Psalm

122, King David says that he was glad to go to Jerusalem. He wanted to be in the place where God had chosen to meet with His people.

THINK AND PRAY: We do not have to go on a long difficult journey to meet with others who trust in the Lord Jesus. Are we glad when we set out for Sunday School or other meetings of our local church? Think about how helpful it is to learn more about our great God and to be with others who love Him.

Chapter 15 - Joy for all nations

Read: Isaiah 56: 6-8; Matthew 21: 12-13

The first temple at Jerusalem was built at the time of King Solomon, about one thousand years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem. The temple was destroyed by the Babylonians under King Nebuchadnezzar. The second temple was built by those who returned from their captivity in Babylon, about five hundred years later. A few years before the Lord Jesus was born in Bethlehem, King Herod began the work of enlarging the temple. This work took many years and the building was greatly enlarged.

The Lord Jesus found the temple being used in a way God never intended. Animals to be used for sacrifice were on sale there. Moneychangers were there, changing people's money for the coins used in the temple. It is likely that there was cheating going on, as people were not given the full value of the money they exchanged.

We read in Matthew chapter 21, of the Lord Jesus turning all the traders out of the temple. He quoted words from Isaiah chapter 56. We read in that chapter that people from other nations who worshipped the true God, were to be welcomed at the temple. God said that the temple would be 'a house of prayer for all nations'. It was also to be a place of **joy** for all who loved and obeyed God (Isaiah 56: 6-7).

At some time in our lives there will be decisions to be made about where we should live. If we belong to the Lord Jesus, we will want to make sure that there is a local church to attend. This should be a church that is doing what God intended His church to do: telling people the good news of a Saviour who died so that sinful people could be forgiven and be with Him always.

THINK AND PRAY: Pray that local churches will be faithful to what God intends: worshipping Him and making the Gospel known.



Chapter 16 - A King is glad

Read: Daniel 6: 1-23

When Daniel was a young man, he had been taken away from his home in the land of Judah. He was brought to Babylon, where he had to learn many things, so that he could work for the king of Babylon. God helped Daniel and he became a very great man in the land. The king trusted him, but some men were jealous of Daniel. They thought of a way to get him into trouble.

Those men, who also worked for the king, had a plan. They told the king that it would be so good if, for a whole month, no-one asked anyone except him for anything. This would make the king feel how important he was and he agreed to the plan. The punishment for breaking this new law, was to be thrown into a den of lions.

When Daniel knew about the law, he did what he had always done. He went to his room and prayed to God three times a day. Of course, his enemies told the king that Daniel was still praying: bringing his requests to God instead of to the king.

The king was very sad when he realised he had been tricked by men who were jealous of Daniel. He had to keep his own law: Daniel was thrown into the den of lions. All night long, the king stayed awake. Early in the morning he went to the den and called to Daniel. How glad he was to hear Daniel say that God had sent an angel to protect him. Those wicked men

who had wanted to harm Daniel, were thrown to the lions and they were not kept safe.

THINK AND PRAY: There are people we should obey: our parents, our teachers, the people who make the laws of the country we live in. However, if anyone tells us to do something that God says is wrong, like Daniel, we must obey God.

Chapter 17 - When everything goes wrong

Read: Habakkuk 3: 17-19

All families need to be sure that they have enough food in the cupboard or in the fridge or freezer. When there is something we need, we go to the shop or the supermarket. Usually there is plenty to choose from and we can fill our food cupboard again. Sometimes we forget that food does not grow on supermarket shelves. We need the farmer to grow our fruit and vegetables and wheat for flour, to make bread and cakes.

In Old Testament times, people depended on their land to grow their crops and feed their animals. But what if there was a bad year, when the crops did not grow? The prophet Habakkuk thought about what he would do in a year like that.

Habakkuk was very troubled. The people of Judah were not living as they should have been. People who did wrong things were not punished. Life was very hard for those who tried to do what was right. God told Habakkuk that a strong nation would come against Judah. This would be the punishment for their sinful ways. This made the prophet even more unhappy, until he thought about what God had done for him.

Habakkuk thought about some of the bad things that could happen. No fruit on the trees – even no

olives to give the oil for cooking. No wheat or corn to make bread and no grass to feed the sheep or cows. As Habakkuk thought of all these troubles that might come, he knew that God would strengthen him. Instead of being afraid, he said that he would **rejoice** in his God.

THINK AND PRAY: God never promises us that everything in life will go well. But He does promise that He will never leave those who trust in Him. Like God's prophet, we can find **joy** in knowing God and knowing that He will always care for His people in good days or bad days.

Chapter 18 - Joy, because the King is coming

Read: Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21: 1-9

God chose men to be prophets so that they could bring His messages to His people. Sometimes the prophets warned of what would happen if the people were disobedient to God. They also brought God's instructions for looking after those who were poor. God cared about the poor and He was not pleased when they were not being helped.

An important part of the prophet's work was to speak of the promised Saviour. Isaiah told of how the Saviour would suffer and die, for everyone who trusts in Him (Isaiah 53: 5-9). Nathan the prophet told King David that from his family, Israel would always have a king. The Saviour who would die in the place of sinful people, would be Israel's true King. The Lord Jesus was born in Bethlehem about a thousand years after King David's reign. His mother Mary and her husband Joseph were both descendants of King David.

The prophet Zechariah brought God's message to the people in difficult days. The Israelites had been captured by the Babylonians and taken away from their own land. Now some had returned and were finding it difficult to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. God sent His prophets Zechariah and Haggai to encourage the people. But Zechariah also told the people about the King who was coming.

About five hundred years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Zechariah was telling the people to **rejoice** (be **joyful**) because their King was coming. This King would not ride proudly into Jerusalem. He would come in a humble way, riding on a donkey. The Saviour God promised, was not only Israel's King, He is King over all the world. The Book of Revelation calls Him 'King of Kings' (Revelation 19: 16): the greatest King of all, God's own Son, the Lord Jesus.

THINK AND PRAY: When the Lord Jesus came, everything happened exactly as the prophets had said. What does this teach us about God's promises?

Chapter 19 - A Baby boy brings joy

Read: Luke 1:11-20; Isaiah 40: 3; John 1: 23

One day when Zacharias the priest was in the temple, an angel appeared to him. Seeing that he was afraid, the angel told him not to fear. The angel brought a message: God had heard Zacharias' prayers that his wife Elizabeth would have a child. The angel said that they would have a baby boy, who would have a special job to do when he grew up. He would be the one who God had chosen, to make people ready for the promised Saviour. The angel promised that many people would **rejoice** when this child was born (Luke 1: 14).

Zacharias was puzzled. He could not understand how this could happen. He and Elizabeth were older than people usually are when their baby is born. The angel said that because he did not believe the good news that God had sent, he would not be able to speak until the baby was born.

Of course, the angel's message was true: Elizabeth had a baby boy. The baby was named John, as the angel said he should be. Friends and relations came to share in Zacharias' and Elizabeth's happiness. As soon as John was given his name, Zacharias was able to speak again.

When John grew up, he knew that God had special work for him to do. He knew that he was the man who Isaiah the prophet had spoken about, many years before. Many people came to hear John and to be baptized in the River Jordan. This was to

show that they were sorry for their sins. Some of Jesus' first disciples were told by John that Jesus was the promised Saviour.

THINK AND PRAY: Think about how wonderful it is that God hears the prayers of boys and girls who love Him. Zacharias may have waited a long time for God's answer: what can we learn from this?

Chapter 20 - Mary is visited by an angel

Read: Luke 1: 26-33 and 46-49

Mary lived in the town of Nazareth, in the land of Israel. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph. One day, God sent an angel with a message for Mary. When the angel came into Mary's home and told her to **rejoice**, she was troubled. This visitor was not like anyone she had seen before. The angel then gave Mary God's message.

God had chosen Mary to be the mother of the Saviour He had promised. Mary was puzzled. She was not yet married, so how could she have a baby when of course, all babies have a mother and a father. The angel explained that this Baby would be God's own Son, a special Baby with no human father. Mary accepted all that the angel told her and the task of caring for God's own Son.

Mary went to stay with her cousin Elizabeth, who was much older than she was and who was also awaiting the birth of a baby. We can read words that Mary spoke while she was in Elizabeth's home in Luke chapter 1. Mary's own words in that chapter, tell us that she did not want to be treated as a very special or important person. She did want people to know how great God is and how He had done such great things for her.

Joseph was anxious when he knew that Mary was going to have a Baby, but in a dream an angel spoke to him about it. The angel even told him the name

the Baby should be given. He was to be called Jesus, which means Saviour. Joseph took care of Mary and her Baby.

THINK AND PRAY: God chose Mary for the very special task of caring for the Lord Jesus while He was a Child. Think about the Bible verses you have read today: was Mary proud of being a very special person?

Chapter 21 - An Angel brings joyful news

Read: Luke 2: 8-17

The world that God made was perfect. The first people, Adam and Eve, were perfect too. God had made a beautiful garden for them to live in and God talked with them there. Nothing spoiled the happiness that Adam and Eve felt, until one sad day, when they disobeyed the loving God who had made them.

This was how sin came into God's perfect world and with sin, came sadness, sickness and death. In the Old Testament part of our Bible, we read the true, sad story of all the harm that sin did, making people hate and hurt each other. Sin was also like a wall between God and the people who lived in His world. But we also read God's promise to send a Saviour: Someone who would rescue us from all the sad results of sin.

In the land of Israel, people who understood God's promise, were waiting for the promised Saviour. Then, one night, God sent an angel with a wonderful message. The angel did not go to the king in his palace, or to priests in the temple. He brought his message from God to some shepherds who were in a field looking after their sheep.

The shepherds were afraid when they saw the angel, but the angel told them not to be afraid because he brought news of great **joy** for people everywhere. The angel's message was about a

Baby who had been born in Bethlehem. This Baby was Jesus, God's own Son, the Saviour God had promised.

The shepherds hurried to Bethlehem and found the Baby just as the angel had said. They told lots of people about what they had seen and heard that night.

THINK AND PRAY: The angel told the shepherds that there was great **joy** for people everywhere, because Jesus had been born. Think about why Jesus came and why this is **joyful** news.



Chapter 22 - The wise men rejoice

Read: Matthew 2: 1-11; Micah 5: 2

The prophets of Old Testament days brought many messages to the people of Israel, about the Saviour who God promised to send. This promised Saviour would belong to the family of King David. But when Jesus was born, wise men from a country far away from Israel, came seeking Him. These men would have studied the stars in the night sky. When they saw an unusual star shining over the land of Israel, they believed that a special king had been born there.

How did men from an Eastern country know about a king being born in Israel? It may be that when Daniel and his friends were taken to Babylon many years before, they had told people about God's promise. However they knew, some of the wise men of an Eastern land set out on the journey to the land of Israel.

When the wise men arrived in the land of Israel, they went to Jerusalem, the city where King Herod lived. They thought that they would learn from the king where a new king had been born. King Herod knew about God's promise, so he asked the priests where the promised One would be born. They were able to tell him that it would be in Bethlehem, because the prophet Micah had said that, about seven hundred years before (Micah 5: 2).

King Herod told the wise men to go to Bethlehem. As they set out, they saw the star that they had seen

before and they were filled with **joy**. The star led them to Bethlehem, to the house where the Lord Jesus was, with Mary His mother. The wise men bowed down to the Lord Jesus and gave gifts to Him.

THINK AND PRAY: The king and the people of Jerusalem did not want to hear that the One God had promised, had been born. It was strangers from a land far away who welcomed Him.

Chapter 23 - When treated badly

Read: Matthew 5: 11-12; John 15: 18-21

The Bible says that the Lord Jesus went about doing good. He healed people who were ill, He gave sight to blind people and hearing to deaf people. He was kind to those who needed help and He patiently taught the people about God His Father. But many of the important people were jealous. They wanted everyone to listen to them and they did not like seeing them listening to Jesus. They were not even pleased when sick people were made well, because they knew that this would make people listen to Jesus more.

The important leaders of the Jewish people and the priests hated Jesus so much, that they planned to kill Him. The Lord Jesus warned His special friends, the disciples, that those who hated Him, would hate them as well. They would try to stop them teaching about the Lord Jesus, by hurting them or putting them in prison. We would not like to be told that people are going to treat us unkindly. We would be surprised that Jesus told His disciples that when this happened, they should be **joyful**. The Lord Jesus gave two reasons why anyone who suffers because they belong to Him, can **rejoice**. The first reason is that they will have a great reward in heaven.

For those who trust in the Lord Jesus, when their life in this world is over, they will go to be with Him in heaven. That will be for always, a life that never ends

and that will bring no sadness, sickness or death. The second reason that Jesus gave, is that God's prophets were badly treated. Knowing this, Christians can be sure that they are doing what is right, as the prophets did.

THINK AND PRAY: Pray today for Christians who are badly treated, just because they trust in the Lord Jesus. This is happening in many countries, just as the Lord Jesus said it would.

Chapter 24 - Not the real thing

Read: Matthew 13: 3-9, 18-23

The Lord Jesus often taught the people who came to hear Him, by telling stories of things they saw around them. Today's Bible verses tell the story of a farmer scattering seed as he walked up and down his field. In those days there were no tractors to ride on and no machines to plant the seed.

Jesus spoke about four different sorts of soil that the seed would fall on. Later, He explained to His disciples that when people hear about Him, there are four different ways they receive the message. Some people are like the hard ground of the pathway (your Bible may say 'the wayside'). They are not interested in hearing about the Lord Jesus and God's enemy, the devil, helps them to forget everything they have heard.

Then there are people who are very glad to hear about Jesus. When they know that their sins can be forgiven and that they can go to heaven when they die, they feel very **joyful**. These people are the 'stony ground' hearers. They have not really understood what they heard. The Lord Jesus never said that if we believe in Him, everything will go well for us and life will be easy. When things get difficult, especially if people are unkind when they say they are Christians, these people give up and are just as they were before they heard the Gospel message. Their '**joy**' was not the real, lasting **joy** that God gives to His people.

The third sort of soil describes people who think of following Jesus, but they are far too busy with other things in their lives, to have time to learn about what being a Christian really means.

THINK AND PRAY: Pray that you may be like the fourth soil, the 'good ground'. Ask God to help you understand what it means to trust in the Lord Jesus, so that you will love and obey Him.

Chapter 25 - Joy in the synagogue

Read: Luke 13: 10-17; Exodus 20: 8-11

One Sabbath day, the Lord Jesus was teaching in a synagogue, the place where the Jewish people met to learn from the Old Testament. The Lord Jesus particularly noticed a woman who was bent over, because she could not straighten her back.

What a difficult life this woman had. Everything she did, even getting dressed or cooking a meal, must have been very hard for her. Walking along the road, she could not look up at the faces of the people passing by. The Lord Jesus knew that this poor woman had been like this for eighteen years.

Jesus called the woman to Him and told her that her illness was over. He put His hands on her and she was able to straighten up. How she thanked God for healing her! How wonderful it was to be able to look around her, her back straight and see the faces of all the people there.

The man in charge of the synagogue was not pleased. He said that it was the Sabbath day, a day when God said work should not be done. The Lord Jesus told him, that anyone who owned animals would lead them to water on the Sabbath day. Jesus said that if a man did this for his animals, it was certainly right to help this poor woman. Other people in the synagogue that day, **rejoiced** because of the wonderful things the Lord Jesus did.

THINK AND PRAY: God said that every seventh day should be different from the other six days. You read about this today in Exodus chapter 20. Our special day is Sunday, when Christians meet to worship God and to learn from the Bible. The Lord Jesus has taught us that it is right to be kind to people who need our help on that special day.

Chapter 26 - A Shepherd's joy

Read: Luke 15: 1-7 and Isaiah 53: 6

The Lord Jesus sometimes taught the people by telling a story. We call those stories 'parables': stories with a meaning. One day, the Lord Jesus had two very different sorts of people listening to Him. There were some people who others did not like very much. They were sinful people who everyone knew had done bad things. Then there were some other people who were quite sure that they were very good. We would call them religious people. They believed that they kept all God's laws and that God must be very pleased with them.

That day, Jesus told a story about a shepherd who had a hundred sheep. One day he realised that one of his sheep was missing. The shepherd cared about the lost sheep. He left the ninety-nine sheep that were safe and he went to search for the lost one. At last, he found it and this made him so happy. He put the sheep on his shoulders and carried it home.

The Bible says that we are all like that lost sheep, because we all go our own way (Isaiah 53: 6). We need to repent, which means being sorry for our sin and asking God to change our sinful hearts. The Lord Jesus said that there is **joy** in heaven when one sinful person repents.

The sinful people listening to Jesus, must have felt very glad to know that God is ready to forgive 'lost' people like them. The proud people who thought that they were so good, did not understand

that they needed God's forgiveness as well. Their proud, hard hearts were sinful.

THINK AND PRAY: Instead of keeping away from people who they thought were so sinful, those religious people should have been helping them. What should they have been telling them about God?

Chapter 27 - A Woman's joy

Read: Luke 15: 8–10

The Lord Jesus told a second parable about something that was lost – He was still speaking to two sorts of people: some who thought that they were very good and some who knew that they were not good.

A woman who had ten silver coins, lost one of them. Those coins were very precious to her, so she searched for it. She took a lamp, to make sure she could see the coin. She swept the floors and looked in every corner until she found it. She was so happy that she sent for her friends and neighbours, to tell them her good news. Her precious piece of jewellery, made from ten silver coins, was complete again: the lost coin had been found.

The Lord Jesus repeated what He had said after the story of the lost sheep. There is **joy** in heaven when one sinful person repents. Neither the lost sheep nor the lost coin, could do anything to help themselves. We are all just like that. Our sin separates us from God and we cannot put things right.

The Lord Jesus said that He had come to seek and save the lost. When He died on the cross, He took the place of every man and woman and every boy and girl who trusts Him to forgive their sin. When we repent: admit that we have sinful hearts and ask God to forgive us, there is **joy** in our hearts and there is **joy** in heaven too.

THINK AND PRAY: That little silver coin did not know that it was lost. It is only as we read the Bible that we understand that we are lost and need the Saviour to find us.



Chapter 28 - A Father's joy

Read: Luke 15: 11-32

To-day's Bible verses are the third story the Lord Jesus told about something lost. This story is quite different from the other two: it tells us about a young man who chose to go away from a father who loved him. He had a good home with his father and his brother and he had all that he needed.

Asking for the share of money that would be his when his father died, was very unkind. His father gave him what he asked for: he could have used the money wisely, but he chose to go as far away from home as he could and he wasted his father's money.

No doubt this young man had plenty of friends while he had lots of money. But when all the money was gone and there was a famine in the land, no-one helped him. Famine is a time when the crops have failed to grow because there has been no rain and so there is very little food to be found. It was when he was very hungry, with no friends to help him, that the young man thought about his home and his father.

What happens next, teaches us what it means to repent. He changed the way he was going: he went towards his home, instead of away from it. He was willing to admit that he had sinned and he was willing to work as a servant, if his father would let him.

The welcome that the father gave his son teaches us what God is like, when we come to Him for forgiveness. Because the Lord Jesus died in the

place of sinners, God welcomes any boy or girl, any man or woman who asks Him to forgive their sin.

THINK AND PRAY: The Bible says that we have all sinned (Romans 3:23). When we tell a lie, are selfish or unkind, we need God's forgiveness. Can you think of something else that we need?

Chapter 29 - A visit that brought joy

Read: Luke 19: 1-10

Zacchaeus was a tax-collector. He collected money for the Roman government. A lot of people did not like Zacchaeus because they did not like anyone who worked for the Romans who ruled over their land. There was another reason why people did not like tax-collectors. They knew that they were being cheated. Men like Zacchaeus took more money than they needed to and kept some of it for themselves.

One day the Lord Jesus came to the town where Zacchaeus lived. Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus, but he had a problem. He was not tall enough to see over the crowd that had gathered. As he thought about this, Zacchaeus had a good idea. Further down the road there was a sycamore tree. Zacchaeus hurried ahead of the crowd and climbed the tree. What a good place he had found, to see Jesus as He passed that way.

Something unexpected happened that day. The Lord Jesus stopped right beside the sycamore tree. He looked up at Zacchaeus, called him by his name and told him to hurry down, as He was coming to Zacchaeus' home. Zacchaeus did as Jesus had said. He hurried down, so full of **joy** that Jesus had chosen to come to his house.

The crowd grumbled. Why would Jesus go home with such a sinful person? But everything changed for Zacchaeus that day. He talked about what he

planned to do. He said that he would give half of what he owned to the poor people. Also, anyone he had cheated, he would pay back four times as much as he had taken.

As the Lord Jesus travelled around, He met many people who thought that they were 'good'. Zacchaeus knew that he was not good at all. Jesus said that He had come to find people just like Zacchaeus. People who were lost in their sinfulness. People who knew they needed God's forgiveness.

THINK AND PRAY: Think about the big change in Zacchaeus' life when he met the Lord Jesus.

Chapter 30 - Joy after work well done

Read: Matthew 25: 14-30

The Lord Jesus knew that He would not be with His disciples much longer. Soon He would be crucified. He would rise from the dead and He would go back to His Father in heaven. Jesus spoke to His disciples about the way His followers should live, until He returns. His words are still important now for everyone who trusts in Him. Only God knows when the Lord Jesus will come back to this world.

To help us, Jesus told two parables (stories with a meaning). The first story (Matthew 25: 1-13) is about being ready and prepared for His coming. The second one, today's Bible reading, is about using our time and all that God gives us, wisely. The master in this story entrusts a lot of money to his servants (the word 'talent' in the New Testament means a lot of money).

When the master returned after a long time, he was pleased with the servants who had worked hard to increase his wealth. They shared their master's **joy** and were rewarded by him.

The Lord Jesus gives everyone who trusts in Him, something to use for Him. There are many ways of doing this. Some Christians travel to other countries to tell people about the Lord Jesus. Others live quietly at home, helping those who need their help

and inviting friends and neighbours to come along to church, where they will hear the gospel message.

THINK AND PRAY: If we love the Lord Jesus, we will want to use all He has given to us, as we wait for His return. Ask God to show you how best you can do this.

Chapter 31 - When the disciples should have rejoiced

Read: John 13: 21 and 37-28; John 14: 28

The disciples felt very sad, as they ate the Passover meal with the Lord Jesus. Jesus knew that He would soon be put to death, but He was not afraid. He had come into the world so that He could die, to take sin's punishment for everyone who would trust in Him.

There were three things that the Lord Jesus had said to His disciples, that had made them feel sad. He told them that one of them would betray Him: help His enemies who wanted to kill Him. He also said that Peter, who really loved the Lord Jesus, would be so afraid, that he would say that he did not even know Him. The third thing that made them so sad was that Jesus told them that He was going away and they could not come with Him. He said they should be **joyful** because He was going back to His Father. Everything happened as Jesus had said.

Judas did betray the Lord Jesus to those who hated Him. Peter did become so afraid that he said he did not know the Lord Jesus. Jesus was put to death by those who hated Him.

Three days after the Lord Jesus was crucified, He rose from the dead. The disciples began to understand why they could **rejoice**. He would go back to His Father and God would send His Holy Spirit to be with them always. The Lord Jesus had done all that He had come into the world to do. Sinful

people could be forgiven because, by dying, Jesus had taken the punishment for their sin.

THINK AND PRAY: The Lord Jesus told His disciples not to be troubled, because He was going to prepare a place for them. He knew that everyone who trusts in Him will be with Him forever, where there is no sadness, sickness or dying, but **joy** and peace for always.

Chapter 32 - A Joyful morning

Read: Matthew 28: 1-10; John 20: 19-20

The Lord Jesus' friends, the disciples, had been with Him for three years. They had seen the wonderful things He did, healing the sick people, stilling a great storm, feeding a crowd of more than five thousand people. But after all these things, He had been cruelly put to death by people who hated Him.

The disciples had believed that the Lord Jesus was the Saviour who God had promised to send. They had not understood when He told them, that He would be killed and that He would rise from the dead after three days. When He was nailed to a wooden cross and left to die, they thought that all their hopes had ended.

The disciples were not just sad, they were also frightened. People would know that they had been with Jesus. What would happen to them, if the people who put Jesus to death, came looking for them? The day after Jesus had been crucified, the disciples stayed indoors, making sure that the doors were shut.

On the third day after Jesus died, some women came to the grave where Jesus' body had been placed. The grave was like a cave with a heavy stone placed at the entrance. The women found that the stone had been moved. An Angel spoke to them, telling them to tell the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead. As they set out, Jesus met them and

told them to **rejoice**. Later that day, Jesus came to the disciples: the locked door could not keep Him out. Now their sadness and fear were gone. Now they really knew that Jesus was God's Son and that He had conquered death.

THINK AND PRAY: The good news that the disciples heard on the first Easter day, is still good news which everyone needs to hear. After our life in this world is over, the Lord Jesus promises that everyone who trusts in Him, will live forever with Him.

Chapter 33 - Too good to be true?

Read: Luke 24: 33-45

What a strange day it had been for Jesus' disciples. The women who had been to Jesus' grave in the morning, told them about the angels who had spoken to them. Peter and John had hurried to the grave. They saw that it was empty, but they did not see the angels.

Later the same day, two men (one named Cleopas) told them that the Lord Jesus had met them as they walked to a village called Emmaus. They had not recognised Him at first, but He explained to them that the Old Testament said that the Saviour must suffer and die. When they arrived at Emmaus, they asked Jesus to stay with them, as it was getting late. As they ate together and the Lord Jesus gave thanks for the bread, they knew Him, but at that moment He went away.

As the disciples listened to Cleopas and his friend, the Lord Jesus came. The disciples were very frightened. They knew that Jesus had died and that His body had been placed in a grave. They thought that they were seeing a spirit (or as we would say, a ghost). The Lord Jesus calmed their fears and showed them the scars on His hands and feet, where He had been nailed to the cross. It was so wonderful that the Lord Jesus had risen from the dead, that the disciples were filled with **joy** and yet, they still could hardly believe it was true. The Lord Jesus explained to the disciples all that the Old Testament taught

about Him, just as He had explained to the two friends on the road to Emmaus

THINK AND PRAY: About seven hundred years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Isaiah the prophet had written about Him. Only God could have helped Isaiah to write about the Saviour, who would suffer for the sins of others (Isaiah chapter 53). The books of the Old Testament contain many other prophecies of the coming of the Saviour.



Chapter 34 - Joyful Christians

Read: Acts 2: 1-8, 41-47

Before the Lord Jesus went back to His Father in heaven, He told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to come to them. Jesus knew, that to do the work of telling people everywhere about Him, they would need the help of God's Holy Spirit.

In the Book of Acts, the word 'apostle' is used for those who had been Jesus' disciples. A disciple is someone who is learning. An apostle is someone sent to do a special task.

On the day of Pentecost, a special feast day of the Jews, the apostles were together in Jerusalem. It was on that day that the Holy Spirit came to them. As it was a feast day, Jews from many countries had come to Jerusalem. When the apostles began to speak, people who spoke different languages were able to understand them. This was because the Holy Spirit had enabled the apostles to speak in different languages. Peter spoke about the Lord Jesus: His crucifixion, His resurrection and His return to heaven. Many people believed Peter's words and on that day three thousand people became Christians.

These early Christians helped one another. Some sold land or other things that they owned, so that they could help those who were poor. They listened to all that the apostles taught them and they went to the temple to worship God together. They were **joyful** Christians, glad to meet together, learn together and worship God together.

THINK AND PRAY: Men and women, boys and girls, still need to hear about the Lord Jesus. The work that the apostles began, still continues. God still sends His Holy Spirit to help in this great work.

Chapter 35 - The Jailer who rejoiced

Read: Acts 16: 25-34

Paul and Silas were in the city of Philippi (in Greece). They had travelled there to tell the people about the Lord Jesus. Some men became very angry with Paul and Silas and they were put in prison. The jailer was told that they must be kept very safe. He locked them up, with their feet fastened so that they could not move about.

Paul and Silas had not done anything wrong. They could have been angry and upset because they had been treated very roughly and cruelly. But the other prisoners heard something in the middle of the night very different from angry words. They heard Paul and Silas praying to God and singing hymns. Suddenly the prison was shaking, the doors came open and all the prisoners found that their chains had come loose. It was an earthquake.

The jailer woke up and saw that the prison doors were open. He thought that all the prisoners had escaped. If this happened, he would be severely punished. He took his sword as if he would have killed himself, but Paul saw him. He called out to the jailer that the prisoners were all there: he must not harm himself.

The jailer had never known any prisoners like Paul and Silas before. He was trembling when he asked them, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul and Silas told him all about the Lord Jesus and how he must believe in Him. That very night, the jailer and

his family became Christians: they trusted in the Lord Jesus.

The jailer then treated Paul and Silas kindly. He took them to his house and gave them a meal. Then the jailer **rejoiced** because he had understood all that Paul and Silas had said. He knew that his sins were all forgiven because he had believed in the Lord Jesus.

THINK AND PRAY: It was not good for Paul and Silas to be put in prison. But what was the very good thing that happened because they were there?

Chapter 36 - Joy even when trouble comes

Read: Acts 17: 1-10; 1 Thessalonians 1: 6

On their journeys to tell people about the Lord Jesus, Paul and Silas came to Thessalonica (in present day Greece). Paul explained to the people, that Jesus was the One who God had promised to send into the world. Paul told them about how the Lord Jesus had died on the cross but had risen from the dead.

There were some men and women in Thessalonica who believed what Paul told them: they became Christians by trusting in the Lord Jesus. The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit gave these new Christians **joy**, but they also had afflictions (1 Thessalonians 1:6). Affliction means trouble or suffering and those Thessalonians saw what trouble meant, right at the beginning of their Christian lives.

There were people in Thessalonica who did not like seeing Paul and Silas telling others about the Lord Jesus. They were jealous that people were taking notice of what Paul and Silas taught. They managed to get an angry crowd together and complained to the leading men in the city. Such trouble was stirred up, that the Christians sent Paul and Silas away in the night, so that they would be safe.

Paul did not forget the Christians in Thessalonica. In our New Testament, we have two letters that he wrote to them. We learn from the first letter that Paul

had sent Timothy to help them. Paul was concerned that if people continued to cause trouble for the Christians, their faith would be shaken. He was so thankful to hear from Timothy that this had not happened. Even though troubles continued, the Christians were standing firm.

THINK AND PRAY: Christians in many lands today know both **joy** and suffering. God is able to give them strength and courage, just as He did for the Christians in Thessalonica.

Chapter 37 - Fruit

Read: Galatians 5: 22-23

If you live in or near the countryside, you will know that there are many different kinds of trees. Trees grow in different shapes: some are very tall and some are quite small. You may have learnt to recognise trees by their leaves, but there is a much easier way to recognise some trees. If we see apples growing on a tree, we know straight away what sort of tree we are looking at. We know the tree by its fruit.

The Lord Jesus spoke about fruit growing on a tree, as a picture of things in our lives that show whether we really belong to Him or not. Today's Bible verses give us a list of the fruit that grows in the life of a Christian. Becoming a Christian is a beginning: God's Holy Spirit begins to work in our hearts. It is He who helps us to change, so that there is kindness instead of unkindness, love instead of hate and all the other good things in that list as well.

Joy is part of the fruit that the Holy Spirit brings into our lives. Not just feeling happy because we are on holiday or everything is going well for us. A Christian's **joy** is a **joy** that lasts, because we know God as our Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus as our Saviour and our dearest Friend. We have the wonderful promise that Jesus gave to those who follow Him, that He will never leave us. We also know that when our life in this world ends, we will be with

God forever and will know what King David called 'fulness of **joy**' (Psalm 16: 11).

THINK AND PRAY: The things listed in Galatians 5: 22-23 are all present in the Lord Jesus. In bringing His lovely 'fruit' into our lives, the Holy Spirit is making us more like Jesus. This is what happens in the lives of men and women and boys and girls who have their trust in Him.

Chapter 38 - When we should be joyful

Read: Philippians 4: 4-9

Paul had once been a persecutor of Christians. That meant that he treated them cruelly, making sure that they were put in prison or even killed. One day, the Lord Jesus spoke from heaven to Paul. After that, his whole life was changed. From that time, he travelled many miles by land and sea, to tell as many people as he could, to believe in the Lord Jesus.

Paul had travelling companions such as Barnabas, Timothy and Luke. God helped them, so that wherever they went, some people became Christians. So, it was that churches began to grow. (We know that in the Bible the word 'church' always means people, not buildings.)

Paul wanted to help the new Christians and when he could, on his travels he visited them again. But Paul also wrote letters to the churches. In this way he taught them more about what it meant to be a Christian.

In Paul's letter to the church at Philippi, we find these words, "**Rejoice** in the Lord always. Again I will say, **rejoice**!" Paul did not say, **rejoice** on days when everything is going well for you. They were to **rejoice** always, whatever was happening in their lives.

We might wonder how Paul expected these Christians to be **joyful** if they were badly treated, or if they were ill or had some other troubles. The answer is, of course, that they were to **rejoice** "in the

Lord". When we think that God loved us so much, that He sent His own Son the Lord Jesus, to die so that we could be forgiven, that is something that always makes us **rejoice**.

Paul's letters to churches are in our Bible. That is because all that he wrote to those new churches is for us as well. We need to learn how we should live to please God. We need to know that the **joy** that Jesus gives us, will be in our hearts whatever is happening in our lives.

THINK AND PRAY: Think of the reasons that those who love the Lord Jesus should be **joyful**, even on difficult days.

Chapter 39 - A Joy expected

Read: Philemon: 10-21

Onesimus was a slave who belonged to a Christian man named Philemon. When a slave was bought, he belonged to his master and must work for him. A slave was not free to go where he wanted, but Onesimus ran away and he may have taken some of Philemon's money with him.

Somehow Onesimus met the apostle Paul who was in prison. Of course, Paul had not done anything wrong. He was put in prison for teaching people about the Lord Jesus. Paul told Onesimus about the Lord Jesus and Onesimus became a Christian.

Onesimus' life was completely changed. He became very helpful to Paul. Prison life was hard and Paul was so glad to have Onesimus there. But Paul knew that Onesimus belonged to his friend Philemon who lived in the town of Colosse. He thought that Philemon would be quite willing for Onesimus to stay with him. But he must let his friend decide. Onesimus must go back to his master.

Slaves could be severely punished for running away. Paul wrote a letter for Onesimus to take with him. He asked Philemon to welcome Onesimus just as he would welcome him. He trusted Philemon to do this, welcoming Onesimus as a Christian, so different from the slave who had run away.

Paul was so concerned that Philemon would treat Onesimus kindly, that he said that this would give him **joy**. He trusted his friend and so he expected to

hear the **joyful** news that Philemon had done as he had asked.

THINK AND PRAY: Thank God for people who worked to stop the buying and selling of people as slaves.



Chapter 40 - The Joy of the Lord Jesus

Read: John 14: 1-6; Hebrews 12: 2

Our Bible verse from the Book of Hebrews, tells us that the Lord Jesus 'endured the cross'. To endure means to keep going however difficult or painful life may be. Jesus endured something that no-one else has ever done or ever could do. People who hated the Lord Jesus, had Him nailed to a wooden cross and left to die. Other people were put to death like that in those days, when they had done some very bad things. Jesus had not done anything wrong: He was the only person who had never sinned in His words, or His thoughts or His actions. But He died instead of sinful people like us.

All our sin, our selfishness and unkindness, was taken by Him, so that He could take the punishment for everyone who trusts in Him. We have sinful hearts. We cannot ever understand what it was like for the Lord Jesus, who was perfect, to take our sins. This was what no-one else could ever do for us.

While the Lord Jesus was suffering great pain and great sorrow, He knew that He would have great joy. He knew that He would rise again from the dead. He knew that he would go back to His Father in heaven, but there was something more. He knew that a lot of men and women and boys and girls would trust Him to forgive their sins. They would then go to be with Him for ever, where there would be no sin, no sorrow, no sickness or death. The Lord Jesus looked

forward to that great day, when all the people that He had saved from sin's punishment would be with Him.

THINK AND PRAY: Say thank-you to God today, that the Lord Jesus endured much suffering, so that all who trust in Him may share His **joy**.

FURTHER INFORMATION

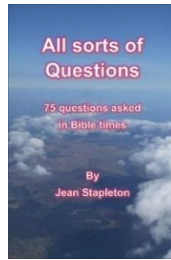
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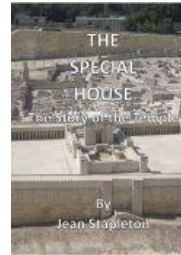
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