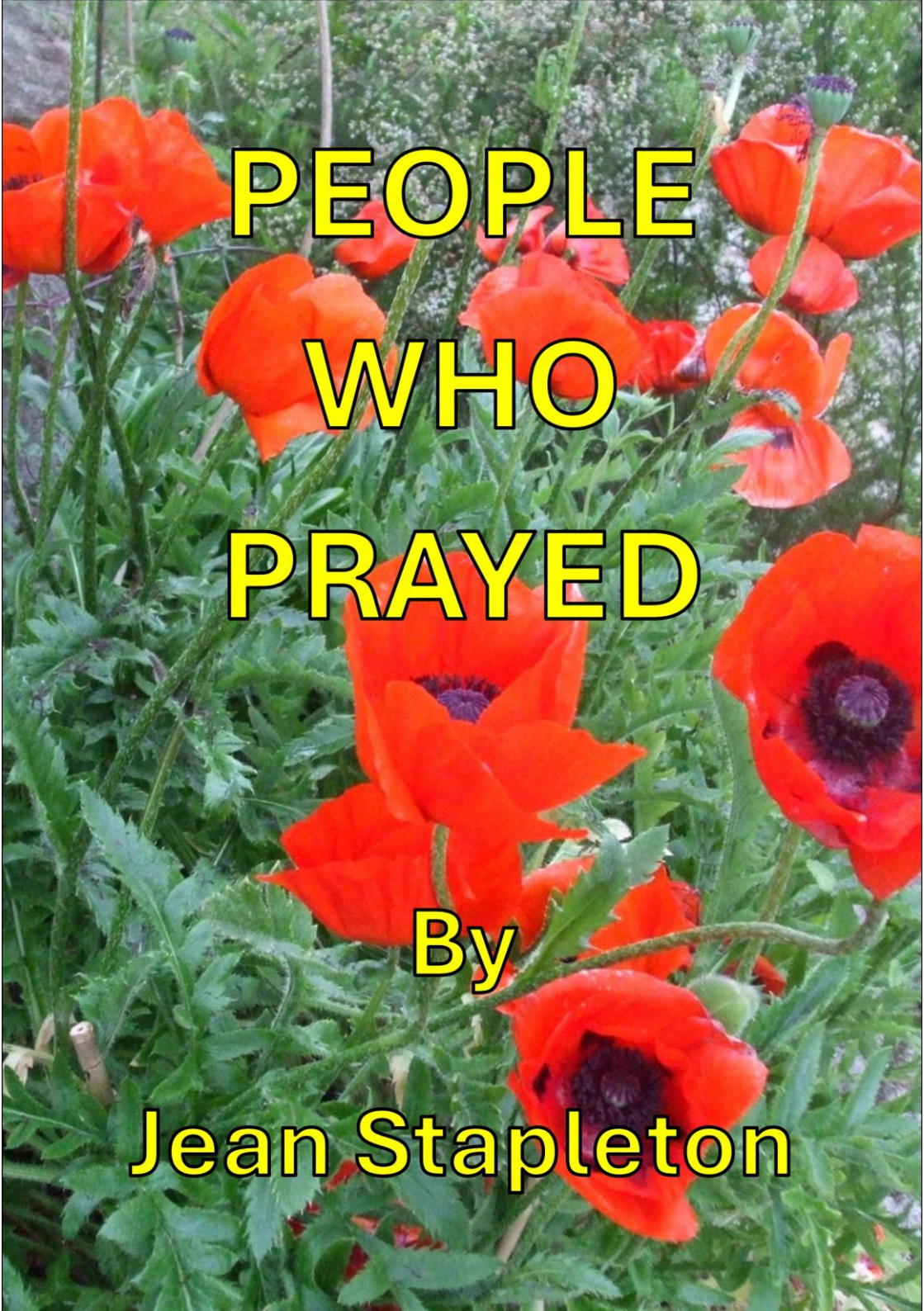




PEOPLE WHO PRAYED

By

Jean Stapleton

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INTRODUCTION

In the Bible we read about many people who prayed. There were some who prayed to thank God for His goodness to them. Others prayed for help in times of danger or difficulty. Some prayers are full of sadness because of sin. We read of King Solomon who knelt down and prayed in front of his people. We read of Hannah who told God all her trouble and went on her way no longer sad. Men and women, rich and poor, all coming to God in prayer because they believed that the great God who created everything, listens to the prayers of His people and will always answer.

God does not change. The God who answered prayer in Bible times still hears and answers prayer today. If we love and trust the Lord Jesus, we come to the God who is our Father and who knows what is best for us.

The Bible references are shown as the **Name** of the **Book**, then the **Chapter** in the book, then the **verse** or **verses** in the Chapter. For example – John 3: 16 means the **Book** of John **chapter** three, **verse** 16.

You can find a list of the names of the **Books** in the front of your Bible.

Chapter 1 - Abraham

Setting the Scene

We often think that people who lived many years ago were not as clever as we are. Of course this is not true at all. Four thousand years ago, the city of Ur where Abraham lived, was an important place, with comfortable houses and schools. There was a temple there, but it was used for the worship of false gods. The people of Ur who learned about many of the subjects that we study today, knew nothing of the God who created them.

While he was living in Ur, God spoke to Abraham and told him to leave his country. This was not an easy thing to do, especially as Abraham did not know where he was to live. But God gave Abraham a wonderful promise: from Abraham's family would come a great nation. Even more than that, from Abraham good would come to all the families of the earth.

Abraham left the city of Ur with his wife Sarah, his father Terah and his nephew Lot. They travelled north and settled in Haran until Terah died at the age of 205. After his father's death, Abraham, now 75 years old, took Sarah and Lot into the land of Canaan. Here God spoke to him again: this was the land that God would give to Abraham's descendants.

Abraham became a rich man and he and Lot both owned many animals. The men who looked after their flocks and herds began to quarrel over

the land. Abraham knew that they must separate and he gave the choice of direction to Lot. As Lot looked around, he saw the well-watered land near the River Jordan. This would be ideal for his many animals, so he moved East and then South towards the city of Sodom. Later, while Abraham and Sarah still lived in tents in the land of Canaan, Lot and his family moved into a house in Sodom.

Check the facts

1. Did God first speak to Abraham when he lived in Ur or Haran?

Read: Acts 7: 2-4

2. When Abraham left Ur, did he know where he would live?

Read: Hebrews 11: 8

3. Who came from the family of Abraham and brought good to people all over the world?

Read: Genesis 12: 1-7; Matthew 1: 1-2 and 16

You will notice that Abraham is called Abram in these verses. It was God who later changed his name, and we read about that in Genesis 17: 5 ("Abraham" means father of a multitude.).

Abraham's prayer for a wicked city

We all have choices to make in life. When we are quite young we begin to choose our friends. Then in teenage years there are choices about university, college or work. After this we must

decide where to live, and an especially important one – should we marry and if so, who should we marry?

Lot's choice of land seemed good to him at the time but led to great trouble for him and his family. The people of Sodom and the cities around it were so wicked that God decided to destroy them. God is very patient and only acts in this way when sin has become very serious – as when He sent the flood at the time of Noah (Genesis chapter 6).

One day, Abraham received three visitors. Two were angels appearing as men. The third visitor was the Lord Jesus Christ. (In Old Testament days, before the Lord Jesus came to live on earth, He did sometimes appear to people.) They had come to deal with the city of Sodom and the cities around it. As the angels went on their way, Abraham spoke to the Lord Jesus. What if there were fifty people who had not joined in the wickedness of Sodom – would God still destroy them all? The Lord Jesus promised to spare the whole city if there were just fifty people in it who still did right. Abraham continued praying. What if there were forty-five – or forty – or thirty – or twenty, or even just ten good people there? The Lord Jesus promised that Sodom would not be destroyed if ten people could be found there whose lives were different from the wicked people around them.

How Abraham must have thought about his nephew Lot and his family. He knew that God would keep His promise. If Lot and his family had all lived lives that pleased God, there could have

been ten good people in that family. Abraham must wait for God's answer to his prayer.

Check the facts

1. Were two of Abraham's visitors really angels?

Read: Genesis 18: 22; 19: 1

2. Did Abraham actually pray six times that God would not destroy righteous people along with the wicked?

Read: Genesis 18: 25-32

The Answer: not even ten

Abraham got up early the next morning and went to the place where he had prayed. He looked towards Sodom. The smoke he saw rising told its own story. The city had been destroyed. At that moment it must have seemed to Abraham that his own relations had died with the wicked people of Sodom.

When the two angels had left Abraham, they had gone on their way to Sodom. There they met with Lot, who took them to his house. They told him what was about to happen. They said he must gather his family together and take them out of the city. Lot had two unmarried daughters and other daughters who were married. He spoke to his sons-in-law, but they would not listen. Only Lot, his wife and their two unmarried daughters were willing to leave. Even then they did not hurry until the angels actually led them away.

The Bible tells us that God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of Sodom so that he would not be destroyed. This means that God did more than Abraham asked. There were not ten people living in Sodom who were living in a right way. But God sent the angels to rescue Lot and anyone in his family who listened to his warning. Four people were rescued, but sadly only three survived.

Check the facts

1. Did some of Lot's family take no notice of the warning he gave them?

Read: Genesis 19: 14

2. Was even Lot slow to get out of the city?

Read: 19: 16

3. What was it that happened to one of the four escaping from Sodom?

Read: Genesis 19: 17 and 26

Chapter 2 - The Servant

Setting the Scene

We learned from Genesis chapter 12 that God had promised that Abraham's family would become a great nation. But Abraham and Sarah were growing old and they had no children, although God had promised that they would have a son. About ten years after they had moved to Canaan, Sarah had an idea. Maybe Abraham should take her maid Hagar as a second wife. This was not unusual in those days and Abraham agreed. Hagar did have a son who was named Ishmael. When Ishmael was thirteen years old, God told Abraham that he was not the child He had promised. God said that Ishmael's family would become a great nation, but the promises God had made to Abraham would not come about through Ishmael's family. Abraham and Sarah would have a son who they were to call "Isaac" (Genesis 17: 19).

When Abraham was one hundred years old and Sarah was ninety, Isaac was born. God had kept His promise and it would be Isaac, not Ishmael, who would be the head of this important family after his father Abraham. As Isaac grew up Abraham thought about the need for him to marry the right person. The people who lived in Canaan worshipped idols and did many cruel things. Abraham knew that one day God would punish them for their wicked ways. A wife for Isaac must come from his own relatives who lived in Haran.

Abraham had an old and trusted servant, and it was to him that he gave the task of travelling to Haran to seek a wife for his son. As he prepared for the long journey he would have remembered his master's words. Abraham had assured him that God would send His angel before him.

Check the facts

1. Does the Bible really say that Abraham was one hundred years old and Sarah was ninety when Isaac was born?

Read: Genesis 17: 17; 21: 5

2. Was it God who said that it was Isaac, not Ishmael, who was the son He had promised?

Read: Genesis 17:18-21. (The word covenant in verses 19 and 21 means God's promises to Abraham.)

3. Did the servant think of any problems before he set out on his journey?

Read: Genesis 24: 5-6

The servant's prayer for help

Abraham's brother Nahor had settled near Haran with his family. Abraham's servant had to prepare for a journey of about 500 miles. He loaded ten camels with everything needed for the journey and presents for the relations. Some of the other servants went with him. At last they came to the end of their journey and stopped by a well outside the city. The women would come from the city to

draw water during the evening. So, the servant made the camels rest beside the well. While he waited, he prayed.

The servant's prayer was quite simple. He would ask one of the young ladies who came to the well to give him a drink of water. If she then said she would also draw enough water for the camels, would God let her be the one He had chosen for Isaac to marry?

Ten camels would need a lot of water. A lady willing to draw all that water would be very kind. She would also be strong, filling the troughs with water for the camels.

Check the facts

1. Did Abraham trust his servant to make arrangements for the journey?

Read: Genesis 24: 10

2. Did the servant believe that God had chosen the right person to be Isaac's wife?

Read: Genesis 24: 14

Read the servant's prayer: Genesis 24: 12-14.

The Answer: a lovely bride

Before the servant had finished his prayer, Rebekah came to the well. She was a beautiful young woman, the granddaughter of Abraham's brother Nahor. She did exactly as the servant had prayed: gave him water and then gave the camels

water as well. When he found out that she was related to Abraham, he bowed his head and thanked God for leading him to the right person.

After their long journey, the men must have been so glad to be made welcome by Rebekah's family. The camels were fed and made comfortable. A meal was prepared for the visitors. But Abraham's faithful servant would not eat until he had explained why he had come. He had much to say about Abraham, Sarah and Isaac. He told the family all about his prayer at the well. Rebekah's father Bethuel and her brother Laban both agreed that it was God who had chosen Rebekah.

Abraham's servant gave gifts of gold, silver and clothing to Rebekah, as well as gifts to others in her family. The family wanted a little more time before Rebekah left them, but the servant wanted to return to his master the very next day. Rebekah was called: would she go? Her answer was given: "I will go", and so Rebekah set out on the long journey to meet the man she would marry. The last verse of this wonderful chapter tells us that Isaac married Rebekah, "and he loved her."

Check the facts

1. Did the servant really refuse to eat anything until he had explained his visit?

Read: Genesis 24: 33

2. Did the servant remember all that Abraham had said to him about his journey?

Read: Genesis 24: 40

3. Were Rebekah's family sure that it was God who had chosen her?

Read: Genesis 24: 50-51

Read all of Genesis chapter 24. If it is too much for 1 day, read –

Verses 1-14 – 1st Day

Verses 15-31 – 2nd Day

Verses 32-49 – 3rd Day

Verses 50-67 – 4th Day



Chapter 3 – Rebekah

Setting the scene

Sometimes people see a happy couple and say that their marriage was “made in heaven”. This should always be true for Christians who have been praying that God would show them the right person to marry. It was certainly true for Isaac and Rebekah. Isaac knew that God had chosen Rebekah to be his wife.

Knowing that God is guiding us through life does not mean that we will not have any troubles. As the years went by, Isaac and Rebekah had a disappointment: they had no children. Isaac knew all about God’s promise that Abraham’s family would become a great nation. How could this happen if he and Rebekah had no child to carry on the family? Just as Abraham had learnt to trust God as he waited for the birth of his son, now Isaac was learning the same lesson. He began to pray that Rebekah would have a child. God answered his prayer. They had been married for about twenty years and at last Rebekah knew that she was going to have a baby.

Check the facts

1. How old was Isaac when he married Rebekah?

Read: Genesis 25: 20

2. Which words in Genesis 25: 21 show us that Isaac really meant what he said when he

prayed?

Rebekah's prayer when she was puzzled

Waiting for the birth of a baby should be a happy time. This would be especially so for Isaac and Rebekah. They knew that God had a wonderful plan for their family. But as the weeks went by, Rebekah began to wonder if something was wrong. Usually it's quite exciting when a mother begins to feel the baby inside her moving. The trouble was, poor Rebekah seems to have felt there was too much movement going on. She did what we can always do when we are puzzled or perplexed. She asked God about it. The Bible does not tell us exactly what Rebekah said in her prayer, but it does tell us how God answered.

Check the facts

1. Why does the Bible say that Rebekah could feel a lot of movement going on inside her?

Read: Genesis 25: 22

2. Did she really think this was something she could ask God about?

Look again at Genesis 25: 22.

The Answer: not just one baby

God's answer made it clear that Rebekah was actually going to have twins. God did not speak to her about the two baby boys. He spoke about what

would happen when they grew up. Each one would become the head of a nation, but one would be stronger than the other. Rebekah understood that God was telling her that it would be the second twin to be born who would be the head of the family after Isaac.

Twins are almost always born on the same day, so we think of them as being the same age. But when Isaac and Rebekah lived, the first twin to be born would be looked on as the oldest. This was important because the first son to be born had a special place in the family. After the father died, the oldest son would own most of what belonged to his father. This was called his “birthright”. In Isaac’s family, it also meant that the promises God gave to Abraham would pass to him.

When Rebekah’s twins were born they were named Esau and Jacob. They were very different. When they grew up Esau liked to go hunting. Jacob cared much more about the family and especially about God’s promises to his grandfather Abraham. Esau showed how little he cared about his special rights as the oldest son. One day he sold his “birthright” to Jacob for a meal, because he had come in from the fields feeling hungry.

Rebekah never forgot God’s answer to her prayer. She was absolutely certain that God had chosen Jacob to be the head of the family after Isaac. She prevented Isaac giving his blessing to Esau because this would have shown that Isaac meant Esau to be head of the family after him. She did this by persuading Jacob to wear Esau’s clothes

and take his place when Isaac sent for him. Isaac was old by this time and had lost his sight. As he blessed Jacob, he thought he was speaking to Esau. Even though Isaac did not know he was speaking to Jacob, his words could not be changed. In fact he did repeat his blessing later, showing that he had accepted that Jacob was the son God had chosen to be the future head of the family.

You can read all about what happened and how angry Esau was when he found out, in Genesis chapter 27. Later in his life, God gave Jacob a new name, "Israel" which means "Prince with God". Jacob had twelve sons whose families became the twelve tribes of Israel. Esau's family grew and became the nation of Edom.

Check the facts

1. Were the twins very different as they grew up?
Read: Genesis 25: 27
2. How do we know that Esau did not care about the special rights of the oldest son?
Read: Genesis 25: 29 - 34

Read God's answer to Rebekah's prayer:
Genesis 25: 23.

Chapter 4 - Jacob

Setting the scene

Jacob had been away from home for twenty years. At last God told him that it was time for him to return to the land of Canaan. With his large family and his many animals – sheep, goats, camels, cows and donkeys – he set out on the long journey. He must have remembered that day, now so long ago, when he had to get away from his brother's anger.

There had been another reason for Jacob to leave home. Esau had more than one wife which was not unusual at that time. But his wives had grown up worshipping idols instead of the true God. This made Isaac and Rebekah sad. They decided that it would be good for Jacob to go to their relations at Haran. There he could find the right person to marry. And so Jacob had come to his Uncle Laban's house. There he married – like Esau he had more than one wife – and there he had eleven sons and one daughter.

Twenty years later, as Jacob came back into the land of Canaan, he heard that his brother was coming to meet him. But Esau was not alone – he had 400 men with him. When Jacob heard this, he was troubled and afraid. Was Esau still so angry that he planned to attack Jacob and his family?

Check the facts

1. How angry had Esau been with Jacob?

Read: Genesis 27: 41

2. Did Jacob know that he would return to the land of Canaan one day?

Read: Genesis 28: 10-16

3. How did Jacob know when it was the right time for him to set out for Canaan?

Read: Genesis 31: 3

Jacob's prayer when he was afraid

Jacob decided to divide his family, his servants and his animals into two groups. He thought that if Esau attacked one group, then the other would be able to escape. This shows us how afraid Jacob was of his brother. After this, Jacob prayed.

As he began to pray, Jacob did what we should do – he thought about the God he was speaking to. He remembered that God had been with his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac. He remembered how much God had given him since he left his parent's house with only his staff in his hand. He also remembered that it was God who had told him to return to Canaan and had promised to be with him.

Thinking of all that God had done for him and his family helped Jacob to trust God. But he did not pretend to be brave. He told God he was afraid that Esau would attack both him and his wives and his

children. He asked God to save him from his brother.

Check the facts

Read Jacob's prayer: Genesis 32: 9-12.

1. Did Jacob tell God straight away that he was afraid? (verse 9)
2. Did he think he deserved God's help? (verse 10)
3. Did he pretend that he was brave and strong enough to meet his brother? (verse 11)

The Answer: the brothers meet

Jacob sent a present of many animals to Esau, hoping that this would please his brother before they met. Then he spent the night on his own. That was the night when God met with Jacob and gave him a new name – Israel, which means “Prince with God”.

In the morning Jacob saw Esau and his four hundred men coming towards him. He went ahead of his family and bowed to his brother as he came nearer. Then a wonderful thing happened. Esau actually ran to meet Jacob. Instead of showing anger, he gave him a real brotherly hug. Then they talked together and Esau met Jacob's family. God had heard Jacob's prayer. After twenty years apart, the brothers had met without any anger on Esau's part.

At this time Jacob and Esau were both rich men.

They needed land for their many animals. So, they went their separate ways. Jacob remained in the land of Canaan. Esau and his family settled in the land of Edom, south of the land of Canaan. The only time we read of the brothers being together again was when their father Isaac died.

Check the facts

1. What was the present that Jacob sent to Esau?

Read: Genesis 32 13-15

2. How many times did Jacob bow to Esau as he went to meet him?

Read: Genesis 33: 3

3. Did the brothers meet peacefully and without any anger?

Read: Genesis 33: 4

Chapter 5 - Moses

Setting the scene

Moses was chosen by God to lead the Israelites out of the land of Egypt. There they had become a nation of slaves, but God promised to give them their own land, the land of Canaan. This was the land God had promised to give to Abraham's descendants.

After they left Egypt, God showed them the way to go by a pillar of cloud that went ahead of them by day and a pillar of fire by night. God guided them to the Sinai Desert where they camped for nearly a year. During that year, God taught the people His laws so that they would know how to live when they came into the land He had promised them.

The Israelites promised to obey God, but their promise was soon forgotten. God called Moses to come up into Mount Sinai. He stayed there for forty days while God spoke to him. The Israelites became impatient and asked Aaron to make a "god" for them. Aaron was Moses' brother and he had been left in charge of the people. He could have reminded the people of God's command not to make images, or idols. Instead Aaron asked the Israelites to give him their golden earrings. From this gold Aaron made a golden calf. He told the people that they would have a special feast day to worship God, but they actually bowed down to their idol.

God knew exactly what had happened and he

told Moses that he must go to the people. God even said that He would destroy the people and begin a new nation with Moses as its head.

Check the facts

1. Had God told the people that they must not worship idols?

Read: Exodus 20: 1-6

2. Did the people promise to obey God's commands?

Read: Exodus 19: 5-8

3. Did Aaron really do as the people asked?

Read: Exodus 32: 1-5

Moses' Prayer for the people

Moses knew that the sin of the Israelites was very serious. They had seen the great things God had done in the land of Egypt. They had walked on dry ground through the Red Sea when God made a path for them. God had given them food to eat and water to drink in the desert. He had led them by the pillar of cloud. After all these things, they had bowed down to an idol made from their own golden earrings.

Although God is very great and powerful, He wanted to hear what Moses would say to Him. Moses knew that he must plead for the people even though they had sinned. He gave to God two reasons why He should not be angry. First of all, the Israelites were still God's people who He had

brought out of Egypt. What would the Egyptians say if the people died there in the desert? They would be able to say that God had only brought them out to kill them. Then Moses reminded God of His promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He had promised to give the land of Canaan to their descendants for ever.

Does it seem strange that God waited for Moses to plead with Him for the people? God never forgets His promises and He always does what He has promised. But sometimes He wants us to bring those promises to Him, as Moses did. Moses' prayer showed that he cared for the Israelites. But it also showed that he cared even more that the people should see the greatness of God. He wanted the nations around them to see that there was nothing that could stop Israel's God doing what He had promised to do.

Check the facts

1. Moses' prayer seems quite short when we read Exodus 32: 11-13, but what did he say about it when he looked back at that time?

Read: Deuteronomy 9: 25-29

2. Find two things that Moses did not want the Egyptians to say about God.

Read: Deuteronomy 9: 28

The Answer: punishment and promise

God listened to Moses' prayer and said He would not destroy His people. It may be hard for us to understand just how serious the people's sin was. When idols were worshipped, all sorts of evil things were done. Some of the Israelites were not even sorry for what they had done: they were put to death. But God promised that He would still be with His people to lead them to their own land.

God's laws are good. God made us and He knows what is best for us. This is what the Israelites should have been showing to the nations around them. All the other nations worshipped idols and did evil things. God's people were to be different. They had failed, but God was patient and many of the people were truly sorry for their sin.

Check the facts

1. Find out what happened to the golden calf.
Read: Exodus 32: 20
2. Find out how many men died because of their sin.
Read: Exodus 32: 28
3. Find the special promise that God gave to Moses as he went on praying for the people.
Read: Exodus 33: 14

Chapter 6 - Hannah

Setting the scene

Elkanah had two wives, as men sometimes did in those days. God's way is always best: one man and one woman who marry and stay together all their lives. When a man married more than one woman, there was often unhappiness in the home.

Hannah was very unhappy. Her husband Elkanah loved her, but his other wife, Peninnah, was very unkind to her. Peninnah had children to care for: Hannah had no children. Once every year the family went to Shiloh to bring their offerings to God. At this time Peninnah made Hannah's life very difficult. One day when this happened Elkanah tried to comfort her, but Hannah cried and could not eat.

When the meal was over, Hannah went to the door of the tabernacle, the special tent where God had promised to meet with his people. Eli the priest was sitting there beside the doorpost. Hannah began to pray.

Check the facts

1. How often did Elkanah take his family to Shiloh?

Read: 1 Samuel 1: 3

2. Did Peninnah really want to make Hannah unhappy?

Read: 1 Samuel 1: 6

3. Find out how the tabernacle was planned.

Read: Exodus 25: 1-9

Hannah's prayer and promise

Tears still fell from Hannah's eyes as she stood by the tabernacle. She did not hide her sadness but brought it all to God. She made a promise. If God would give her a little boy, then she would give him to God.

Eli the priest was an old man. He watched Hannah and saw her lips move. He did not hear her voice because she prayed in her heart. He thought she had drunk too much wine and he told her so. Hannah explained that she had drunk no wine. She had been telling God all her trouble and sorrows. When Eli realised this, he asked that God would give her what she had prayed for.

Check the facts

1. Hannah's prayer was a promise to God. The Bible you are using may use another word for 'promise'. Can you find it in 1 Samuel 1: 11?
2. Did Eli really think Hannah had been drinking?
Read: 1 Samuel 1: 12-14
3. Find two things about Hannah that changed because she believed God had heard her prayer.
Read: 1 Samuel 1: 18

The Answer: Hannah's son

Hannah went home from Shiloh knowing that God had heard her prayer. She no longer looked sad as she waited for God's answer.

How glad and thankful Hannah must have been when her little boy was born. She named him "Samuel" which means "asked of God" or "heard by God". What a very special baby he must have seemed to her, as she cared for him each day. We can be sure that Hannah loved Samuel very much, and yet she did not forget the promise she had made to God.

While Samuel was still a baby, Hannah did not go to Shiloh with Elkanah. She waited until Samuel was just old enough to manage without her. Then, although he was still very young, she took him to Eli the priest. She explained to Eli that Samuel was the child she had prayed for. She had promised to give him to God, so now she would leave him at the tabernacle. Samuel would stay in Shiloh and learn to help Eli.

As time went by, Hannah had other children to care for, but she did not forget Samuel. Each year she made new clothes for him and took them when the family went to Shiloh.

The answer to Hannah's prayer brought her great happiness. But it did more than that. Hannah could not have known that the child she prayed for would become God's chosen leader of the Israelites for many years. He also became a prophet: someone God spoke to so that he could pass on

God's messages to others.

Check the facts

1. Did Samuel really stay at Shiloh and learn to help Eli?

Read: 1 Samuel 1: 26-28 and 2: 11

2. Did the Israelites know that God had chosen Samuel to be a prophet?

Read: 1 Samuel 3: 19-21



Chapter 7 - King David

Setting the scene

David was a shepherd boy who lived in Bethlehem about one thousand years before the Lord Jesus was born. His father's name was Jesse and he had 7 brothers. Probably, the thing that people remember most about David is his victory over the giant, Goliath. No-one in Israel's army was brave enough to fight Goliath who was almost three metres tall. David was just a young man, but he had learnt to trust God when wild animals attacked the sheep. When he saw Goliath he believed that God would help him in the fight. In fact he killed the giant with a stone from his shepherd's sling.

God chose David to be Israel's second king. When he was thirty years old, David became king over Judah, the southern part of the land of Israel. Then after seven years, he became king over the whole land. David loved God and he wanted to build a temple where God would meet with His people. Now that the Israelites were settled in their own land, God's special tent, the tabernacle, no longer needed to be moved from place to place. David was keen to build, but God sent Nathan the prophet to him with a message. God said that David should not build the temple but that this would be done by his son who would be king after him. God gave David a wonderful promise that there would always be a king from his family: this Royal family tree would be for ever.

Check the facts

1. Did David really go against Goliath with only his shepherd's sling and stones?

Read: 1 Samuel 17: 40

2. Why was David not afraid to fight against the giant?

Read: 1 Samuel 17: 45-47

3. Was David really just a shepherd boy when God chose him to be king?

Read: 1 Samuel 16: 10-13

David's prayer of thanksgiving

David could have felt very disappointed when Nathan gave God's message to him. It was good that he cared so much about a building where God would be present with His people. David accepted what God said without questioning, and he did not give way to disappointment at not being chosen to build the temple. Instead he praised God for His greatness and for His goodness in making him king over Israel. He thanked God for His promises and prayed that Israel would always have a king from the family of King David as God had said.

Check the facts

1. Did David speak to God as if he was proud of being a king?

Read: 2 Samuel 7: 18-22

2. Did David ask God to do as He had promised?

Read: 2 Samuel 7: 25-29

The Answer: a King who reigns for ever

If you look in your Bible at Matthew chapter 1, you will find the Lord Jesus called “The Son of David” (verse 1). Following all the names in this chapter, you will find that the Lord Jesus was born into the family of King David. This was a thousand years after David lived. In the book of The Revelation, Jesus is called the “King of Kings” and because He is God, He reigns for ever.

King David showed his thankfulness to God in his prayers and also in his life. He cared very much that the temple should be built, even though he would never see it. He saved many things – gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, marble and precious stones. He prepared all these things to help his son when he would begin the work of building the Temple. God also made known to David the plans for the building.

Check the facts

1. Is the Lord Jesus Christ the King who will reign for ever?

Read: Revelation 11: 15

2. Did David lose interest in the Temple, because he was not chosen to build it?

Read: 1Chronicles 29: 1-5

3. Was David proud of his gifts for the Temple?

Read: 1 Chronicles 29: 14-16

4. Did Solomon complete the building of the temple?

Read: 2 Chronicles 5: 1

Chapter 8 - King Solomon

Setting the scene

When David was old, he made his son Solomon King. He knew that God had chosen Solomon and that he would have the important task of building the temple. Solomon set many people to work quarrying the stone that would be needed. He also sent to the king of Tyre for wood from the trees of Lebanon. This wood was cut and loaded on to rafts so that it came by sea to Joppa in the land of Israel. King Solomon had everything made for the temple as his father David had instructed him. When the building was completed, many people gathered at the temple. Solomon stood on a platform and spoke to the people and then he knelt to pray.

Check the facts

1. To find out how many men Solomon set to work,
Read 2 Chronicles 2: 2.
2. Did David give the instructions for building the temple, to Solomon?
Read: 1 Chronicles 28: 11-12
3. Did King Solomon pay for the wood from Hiram, King of Tyre?
Read: 2 Chronicles 2: 10, to find out how he paid.

Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple

We learn from Solomon's prayer that he understood how great God is. He knew that God doesn't live in a house. But he asked God to always have the temple in His mind and to hear the prayers of His people there. He asked God to forgive the sins of the people and to help them when they had to fight against their enemies. Solomon knew that if the people disobeyed God and began to worship idols, God would allow their enemies to take them captive. If this did happen, but in their captivity the people became truly sorry for their sin, Solomon asked that God would hear their prayers and forgive them.

Check the facts

1. Did Solomon really kneel down when he prayed in front of all the people?

Read: 2 Chronicles 6: 12-13

2. Did Solomon think that God would live in the temple, like the idols of the nations around Israel?

Read: 2 Chronicles 6: 18

3. Did Solomon believe that God would allow His people to be taken captive because of their sin?

Read: 2 Chronicles 6: 36

4. Did Solomon ask God to forgive His people when they repented?

Read: 2 Chronicles 6: 38-40

The Answer to King Solomon's Prayer

The Bible tells us that when Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and God's glory filled the temple. The people bowed down and worshipped God when they saw this. Then one night, God spoke to Solomon. God told him that He had heard his prayer and that He would always hear the prayers of the people from the Temple. When they had done wrong, God would be ready to forgive them if they turned away from their sin and turned to Him. God also had a promise and a warning for Solomon himself. If Solomon obeyed God's commands, then there would always be someone from his family to be king over Israel. But if the people disobeyed God and turned to idols, the Israelites would be removed from their land and the temple destroyed.

God always does what he says He will do. There did come a time when, because of their disobedience, the people were taken captive to the land of Babylon. We know that God did hear their prayers, and they were able, after seventy years of captivity, to return to their own land.

Check the facts

1. Did anyone pray when the Israelites had been taken away from their own land?

Read: Daniel 9: 1-3 and 19

2. Did God bring the Israelites back to their own land after they had been captives in Babylon?

Read: Ezra 1: 1-5. (After the Babylonian empire came to an end, the Persian empire arose.)

Chapter 9 - King Asa

Setting the scene

After the reign of King Solomon, the land of Israel was divided into the Northern Kingdom, called Israel, and the Southern Kingdom, called Judah. Israel's kings set up idols and encouraged the people to worship them. Judah had some Kings that turned to idols, but they also had kings who loved and worshipped God. The kings of Judah all came from the family of King David, as God had promised.

Asa was the great-grandson of King Solomon. He did what was right: he took away the idols that people had set up in Judah. He told the people that they should worship and obey God. For the first ten years of his reign the land was peaceful. Then an army of a million men came from Ethiopia to fight against Judah. Asa had 580,000 soldiers and he prepared them for the coming battle. Before any fighting began, Asa prayed.

Check the facts

1. Was Asa a good king?
Read: 2 Chronicles 14: 2-3
2. What sort of weapons did the army of Judah use?
Read: 2 Chronicles 14: 8
3. Did the Ethiopian army really have many more soldiers than Judah?

Read: 2 Chronicles 14: 8-9.

King Asa's prayer before the battle

Asa's prayer is quite short, but it shows his faith in God. He believed God could help whether the army was large or small. He asked God for His help and He said they would face their attackers in God's name. This meant that if Judah was defeated, it would be as if their attackers had defeated God Himself. It was important to Asa that people should see the power of God. He was not just praying for the people of Judah. He was praying that their enemies would see how great God is.

Check the facts

Read Asa's prayer in 2 Chronicles 14: 11.

1. Did Asa believe that God could give him a victory even if Judah's army was not as powerful as the Ethiopians?
2. Did Asa believe that an attack on God's people was an attack on God Himself?

The Answer to Asa's prayer

God gave the army of Judah a great victory over the Ethiopians, because they trusted in Him. The Ethiopian army had such a defeat that they were not able to recover their strength. Judah's army

took a lot of animals and other things from the cities they went through.

God sent Azariah the prophet to meet King Asa. He told the king that God had helped the people because they turned to Him in their trouble. He warned Asa not to turn away from God, but to be strong. Asa was greatly helped by the prophet's words. He continued taking away any idols that had been set up. Then he called the people together to make an offering to God. At that time the people made a promise that they would seek God with all their hearts. The land of Judah then had twenty years of peace.

Check the facts

1. Did such an enormous army run away from Judah's smaller army?

Read: 2 Chronicles 14: 12-13

2. **Read** the words of the prophet who encouraged King Asa to be strong. 2 Chronicles 15: 1-7.

3. How do we know that Judah had twenty years of peace?

Read: 2 Chronicles 15: 10 and 19

Chapter 10 - King Manasseh

Setting the scene

Manasseh's father, Hezekiah had been a good king over the land of Judah. He loved God and taught the people to obey God's laws. Hezekiah died when his son Manasseh was only twelve years old. So, Manasseh became king of Judah when he was very young. His reign lasted fifty-five years, but he was not a good king. In fact the Bible tells us that he "did evil".

Manasseh worshipped idols: he even set up an idol in the Temple. He became involved in witchcraft and did many other wrong things. He encouraged the people of Judah to take part in evil things, and to be worse than the nations who had lived in their land before them.

God caused the Assyrians to come to Jerusalem, and they took Manasseh as a prisoner to Babylon. While he was there he began to pray to the true God.

Check the facts

1. How old was Manasseh when he became king and how long did he reign?
Read: 2 Chronicles 33: 1
2. Did Manasseh really place an idol in the Temple?
Read: 2 Chronicles 33: 7
3. How did the Assyrians treat Manasseh?

Read: 2 Chronicles 33: 11

Manasseh's prayer when he was in Babylon

We all like things to go well with us and we don't like troubles and difficulties. But it is often when God sends some trouble into our lives, that we realise how much we need His help.

The Bible tells us that when Manasseh was in Babylon he "humbled himself". To be humble is the opposite of being proud. Instead of being full of his own importance because he was a king, Manasseh realised how sinful he had been. He also realised how useless his idols were: they could not help him in his trouble. So, as captive in a strange land, Manasseh began to pray to the true God.

We do not have the actual words of Manasseh's prayer but we read that he "implored God" – pleaded with Him. No doubt he asked God to rescue him from his enemies and allow him to return to his own land.

Check the facts

Read: 2 Chronicles 33: 12

1. Can you find the word that the Bible uses to describe Manasseh's trouble?
2. Can you find the word that tells us the way in which Manasseh prayed?

The Answer to Manasseh's prayer

Manasseh's sin was very serious. He had done wrong himself and he had taught the people to do wrong. In his trouble, Manasseh was sorry for his sin. God heard his prayers and brought his captivity to an end. He was able to return to Jerusalem.

Had Manasseh really repented or was he just sorry that his sin had brought trouble? To repent means to change: to be so sorry for past sins that there is a real wanting to live to please God in future. If someone says "I am sorry for my sin" but continues to do the same wrong things, that is not true repentance.

We know that Manasseh did change. He removed the idol from the temple and took away the altars he had made for the false gods. He began to make offerings to God and taught the people that they should serve God.

Check the facts

1. When God answered Manasseh's prayer, what did Manasseh know?

Read: 2 Chronicles 33: 13

2. Was Manasseh truly sorry for his sin?

Read: 2 Chronicles 33: 15-16

3. How did Manasseh's idolatry affect his son?

Read: 2 Chronicles 33: 21-23

Chapter 11 - Ezra

Setting the scene

Because of their sin, the people of Judah were taken away from their own land, to the land of Babylon. After seventy years of captivity, they were allowed to return to Judah and rebuild the temple, which the Babylonians had destroyed. A man named Zerubbabel, who came from the family of King David, led about 50,000 people back to their own land.

Some years later, Ezra the priest led another group of people back to Judah. Ezra had studied the law and he wanted to teach the people so that they would know God's law and obey it. He had silver and gold to take to the temple and he also had a letter from King Artaxerxes saying that Ezra should be given all that he needed. The journey took four months and the gold and silver were safely delivered to the temple.

Some bad news came to Ezra after his long journey. He was told that many of the people, including the priests and the leaders, had married women from the nations around them. God had told His people not to do this because of the idolatry of the other nations. It was this very thing that had led the people of Judah to worship idols before they were taken captive by the Babylonians. God had promised that all would go well with them whilst they obeyed Him. Ezra knew that it was because of

their idolatry that they had been taken into captivity. Now that God had brought them back into their own land, he was very troubled to find that the people had done the same wrong things again.

Check the facts

1. When the Babylonian empire came to an end, the Persian empire became a great power. Find out which King said that the people could return to Judah.

Read: 2 Chronicles 36: 22 - 23

2. How do we know how long it took for Ezra to reach Jerusalem?

Read: Ezra 7: 8 – 9

3. Had God already told the people how long their captivity would last?

Read: Jeremiah 29: 10

Ezra's prayer to confess the people's sin

Ezra was distressed. He sat until the evening and could not eat. Many people gathered around him. At the time of the evening sacrifice, he fell on his knees and began to pray. Ezra told God how ashamed he was. God had been good to His people, bringing them back to their own land, but they had again disobeyed His commandments. Ezra bowed his head and wept because he felt the sin of the people so keenly. As the people around him realised how serious it was to disobey God as they had done, they also wept.

A man named Shechaniah spoke to Ezra. He said that although they had done wrong, there was hope for them if the matter was properly dealt with. He asked Ezra to help them to do what was right.

Check the facts

1. What does the Bible say about how foolish it is to worship idols?

Read: Psalm 115: 4-8 and Isaiah 44: 14-17

2. Had the Israelites been warned many times about idolatry?

Read: Exodus 20: 4-6

Deuteronomy 4: 12-20

Deuteronomy 7: 3-6

1 Kings 9: 6-7

3. Are there some people we read about in the Bible, who came from other countries and turned from idols to the true God?

Read: Ruth 1: 16-17, Joshua 6: 25, Matthew 1: 5-6.

The Answer to Ezra's Prayer

Ezra's prayer caused the people to realise that they must put things right. They knew that Ezra understood God's law and that he would be able to tell them what they must do. All the people who had returned to Judah were called to gather together at Jerusalem.

As Ezra spoke to the people, it rained heavily, making it difficult for the people to remain long

without shelter. At last it was agreed that they would have to make appointments for Ezra and their leaders to see them in turn. So many people had married pagan wives that it would take many days to deal with each family.

It is not easy for us to understand the things that are done by those who worship idols. To pray to something made out of wood or stone, gold or silver, seems so foolish. Sadly it also involved doing many wicked things, even people sacrificing their own children to the false gods. God knew that marrying those who worshipped idols would cause His people to join in many evil practices. God's commandments are good, obeying them leads to happy homes and strong and peaceful nations.

Ezra's task was not easy and would mean for some families much sadness. Wives who would not give up their idol worship and turn to the true God, would have to leave their husbands, but they would have to be properly provided for. The Bible tells us that God hates divorce. But it was better for these husbands and wives to be separated than to draw the people of Judah into idolatry.

This was a very sad episode in the life of the returned captives, However, when it was put right, the people could make a new beginning. So, Ezra's prayer led to action, as the people set themselves to live in obedience to God's commandments in future.

Check the facts

1. Were the people of Judah willing to do as Ezra told them?

Read: Ezra 10: 9-12

2. It took three months for Ezra to see all the people. How do we know this?

Read: Ezra 10: 16-17

3. Who did the men have to confess their sin to?

Read: Ezra 10: 11



Chapter 12 - Nehemiah

Setting the scene

Nehemiah belonged to the people of Judah but he was living in Persia. Even though some of the captives had returned to Jerusalem with Ezra, many Jews remained in the land of Persia. Nehemiah had been given an important job to do: he was the King's cupbearer. This would mean that he not only served the King's wine, but he would also have to taste it in the King's presence. In this way the King would know that the wine had not been poisoned by anyone plotting against him.

One day Nehemiah had news from Judah. He was told that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down and its gates had been burned. This made Nehemiah very sad, as he thought of the city as it had once been. Even King Artaxerxes noticed the sad expression of Nehemiah's face.

Check the facts

1. What exactly was Nehemiah told about Jerusalem?

Read: Nehemiah 1: 3

2. Nehemiah had quite an important job at the Palace. Did he really care about the city of Jerusalem?

Read: Nehemiah 1: 4

Nehemiah's prayers for Jerusalem: A long prayer and a short prayer

As soon as he heard the news about Jerusalem, Nehemiah began to pray. He prayed in the day time and he prayed at night. He confessed the sin of the people of Judah, that they had not obeyed God's commandments. He asked God to remember His people, and also that God would help him when he stood before the king.

When King Artaxerxes asked Nehemiah why he was so sad, Nehemiah told him the reason. The king understood that Nehemiah wanted to ask for something so he asked him what it was he wanted. Even as he began to answer the king, Nehemiah sent a silent prayer to God. We do not know the words of this short prayer, but we know that Nehemiah would have asked for God's help, so that he would know what to say to the king. We do know that kings in those days had great power and care was needed when speaking to them.

Check the facts

1. Did Nehemiah spend a lot of time praying?
Read: Nehemiah 1: 4-6
2. Did Nehemiah know that it was dangerous to appear sad in the presence of the king and to make requests?
Read: Nehemiah 2: 1-2

The Answers to Nehemiah's Prayers

God answered Nehemiah's prayers by causing the king to grant his requests. Nehemiah asked to be allowed to spend some time in Judah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. He also asked for letters, one to allow him to travel through the country on his way to Jerusalem and another granting him wood from the king's forest. The king agreed to all that Nehemiah asked and also sent a guard with him so that he would travel safely.

Nehemiah was able to organise the people of Judah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. He continued to pray while the work was being done. Enemies of the Jews tried to stop the work, but they failed to do so and the rebuilding was completed in just fifty-two days.

Check the facts

1. Did the king agree to the time Nehemiah thought he would need to be away from the palace?

Read: Nehemiah 2: 6

2. Did the king provide the letters that Nehemiah asked for?

Read: Nehemiah 2: 7-8

3. What sort of guard did the king send with Nehemiah?

Read: Nehemiah 2: 9

Chapter 13 - Jonah

Setting the Scene

Jonah was a prophet, chosen by God to take His message to the people of Nineveh. Nineveh was a city of great wickedness and cruelty. Jonah knew that if the people who lived there became truly sorry for their evil ways, God would forgive them. He did not want this to happen. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, a powerful country and a threat to the land of Israel.

Jonah decided that he would not take God's message to Nineveh. He set off in a ship going in the opposite direction. Whilst Jonah was on board ship, God sent a strong wind and a tremendous storm arose. Even the sailors became afraid and wondered if it was someone's fault that this was happening. When they found out that Jonah was running away from God, they became even more afraid and asked him what they should do. Jonah told them to throw him into the sea. The men did not want to do this and tried hard to control the ship. At last they prayed that God would not blame them, and they threw Jonah overboard. The sea immediately became calm and the men realised that the God of Jonah was the true God.

God sent a very large fish to swallow Jonah. He was inside the fish for three days and three nights. In this strange and frightening situation, Jonah prayed.

Check the facts

1. Did Jonah really try to run away from God?

Read: Jonah 1: 3

2. Did the sailors believe in the true God or false gods? Did this change?

Read: Jonah 1: 5 and 14-16

3. Was Jonah really willing to be thrown overboard?

Read: Jonah 1: 12

Jonah's prayer from inside the fish

Jonah's prayer gives us an amazing description of what he felt like when he was thrown into the sea. He speaks of water surrounding him and of weeds being wrapped around his head. He felt that the earth was closed to him for ever: he really thought he was drowning. Just at this point, God sent a large fish (possibly a whale) to swallow Jonah. Then he "remembered God" and he prayed. Even though he had been disobedient, he believed that God still heard his prayer and still speaks of Him as "my God".

We might wonder if this is the strangest place that anyone ever prayed from. We know that what happened to Jonah is absolutely true because the Lord Jesus spoke about Jonah being inside the fish.

Check the facts

1. Did the Lord Jesus confirm that Jonah really was kept alive inside a very large fish?

Read: Matthew 12: 40

2. Did Jonah think he was going to drown?

Read: Jonah 2: 5-6

3. Did Jonah believe that God heard his prayer, even though he had been disobedient?

Read: Jonah 2: 7

The Answer to Jonah's prayer

After Jonah prayed, we read that God spoke to the fish and Jonah was soon safe on dry land. God spoke to Jonah again. For the second time God told him to take His message to Nineveh. This time Jonah obeyed and told the people of Nineveh that the city would be overthrown in forty days time. God had not only rescued Jonah from the sea, he also still used him as His prophet: God forgave his disobedience.

The King of Nineveh and his people believed that God had sent Jonah to them and they were sorry for their evil ways, God heard their prayers and did not bring disaster upon them. Instead of being glad that the people had listened to the message he brought, Jonah was sorry that God had forgiven the people. When Jonah prayed again, it was to ask God to end his life. God was very patient with this unhappy prophet. He helped him to understand that He did not only care for the people

of Israel. He had pity for the Ninevites, even though they were a violent and cruel people. Even the people of Nineveh were given time to repent and change their ways.

Check the facts

1. What did Jonah tell the people of Nineveh?

Read: Jonah 3: 4

2. Did the people, including the King, believe the message Jonah brought?

Read: Jonah 3: 5-9

3. Was Jonah really angry because God forgave the Ninevites?

Read: Jonah 4: 1-3

Read how God taught Jonah that He could even have pity for the people who lived in Nineveh.

Read: Jonah 4: 4-11

Chapter 14 - Daniel

Setting the scene

Daniel's life began in the land of Judah but everything changed when, as a young man, he was taken from his home to the land of Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar wanted some of the finest young men brought to Babylon where they could be trained to work for him. He gave instructions that the most intelligent and good-looking of the young men of Judah should be brought to Babylon and given three years training.

When special food and wine was ordered for these students, Daniel asked permission to eat a plain diet and to drink water. He was allowed to do this as long as he continued to look fit and well. The Bible does not tell us exactly why Daniel acted in this way. It could have been so that he could keep the laws about food in the Book of Leviticus or he may have had reason to believe that the Babylonians' food would have been offered to their idols. It is clear that he was determined to remain true to God even as a captive in a strange land.

As the years went by, Daniel held very high positions in the land of Babylon. He became the most trusted advisor of King Darius, who reigned after the Babylonian empire had ended and the Persian empire had taken over. Some of the other important men in the land did not want Daniel to have a higher position than theirs. They tried to find something about him that they could complain

about to the King. Daniel was so honest and careful in all that he did that they could not find anything wrong. At last they thought of a way to trap Daniel. They would ask the King to make a law which they knew Daniel would not be able to obey. The law would make the king feel how great he was: no-one was to ask any god or man, except the King, for anything for thirty days.

Check the facts

1. How did Daniel persuade the man in charge to allow him to eat simple food?

Read: Daniel 1: 8-16

2. What important position did King Darius want Daniel to have?

Read: Daniel 6: 3

3. Did the other rulers try to find something to complain about in Daniel's life?

Read: Daniel 6: 4-5

4. Did Daniel know about the new law when he prayed with his window open?

Read: Daniel 6: 10

Daniel keeps on praying

Daniel prayed three times every day. This was what he always did and the new law made no difference to him. The Bible tells us that we should obey the laws of the land we live in, except when obeying a law would mean disobeying God. Daniel knew that it is always right to pray to God. He did

not pray in secret but kept his window open and knelt down facing the direction of the city of Jerusalem. We do not know all the words that Daniel prayed, only that he prayed and gave thanks to God. Of course there was a punishment for anyone who broke the new law. Such a person would be put into the lions' den.

Check the facts

1. Did Daniel really find time to pray three times each day?

Read: Daniel 6: 10

2. Did Daniel try to hide when he prayed?

Read: Daniel 6: 10

3. Was there anyone in New Testament days who had to choose between obeying the rulers or obeying God?

Read: Acts 4:18-20 and 5: 28-29.

The Answer to Daniel's Prayers

The men who had persuaded the King to sign their law soon came to tell him that Daniel still prayed to his God three times a day. The King quickly realised that the law had been made to trap Daniel and he was very sorry. In that country, any law signed by the King could not be altered. Although the King tried to find a way to save Daniel, he finally had to give the command to take him to the lions' den. King Darius had a sleepless night wondering what was happening to Daniel.

Very early next morning, the King went to the den and called out to Daniel. How amazed he must have been to hear Daniel's voice as he answered. Daniel told the King that God had sent an angel to shut the mouths of the lions. Daniel was unhurt, because God had protected him. King Darius was really glad that Daniel was alive. He commanded that the men who had plotted against Daniel should be thrown into the lions' den. They were immediately attacked by the lions.

We can learn from Daniel that wherever we are and whatever is happening to us, we should always have times during each day when we can pray to God. Daniel had not just started praying when things were difficult. The Bible says that this was "his custom": something he always did.

Check the facts

1. Did King Darius know that Daniel loved and trusted in God?

Read: Daniel 6: 16

2. Were the lions unable to hurt Daniel?

Read: Daniel 6: 22-23

3. Did King Darius believe that it was God who had kept Daniel safe?

Read: Daniel 6: 25-27

Chapter 15 - The Apostles

Setting the scene

The Lord Jesus chose twelve men to be His disciples: those who learned from Him by listening to His words and seeing the things that He did. In the book of Acts we read about some of these men, now called the “apostles”, a word that means “sent out to do a particular work”. The work of the apostles was, of course, to tell people about the Lord Jesus Christ.

One day, the apostles, Peter and John went to the temple. Beside one of the temple gates they saw a lame man who sat there every day. Peter told him that he had no money to give him. He then told him, in the name of Jesus Christ, to get up and walk. As Peter took him by the hand, the man got up and not only walked but leapt for joy and praised God for what had happened to him.

People recognised the man who they had seen sitting begging and they crowded round to find out what had happened. Peter was able to tell the people that it was the Lord Jesus who had healed the lame man. Then he spoke to them about the crucifixion and the resurrection. He also told them that they must turn from their sins.

While Peter was talking, the priests and rulers of the temple came along. They did not like to hear anyone speaking about the Lord Jesus being raised from the dead. They had Peter and John put in prison for the night. The next day Peter and John

were brought to the rulers and questioned about what had happened. Eventually the rulers decided to let them go, but they were ordered not to speak or teach about Jesus.

Peter and John went to meet with their friends. They knew that they must obey God and teach people about the Lord Jesus. They told their friends what the priests and temple rulers had said to them. Then they prayed together.

Check the facts

1. Had the lame man ever been able to walk?

Read: Acts 3: 2

2. How long did it take for the man to get enough strength to walk?

Read: Acts 3: 7-8

3. Were Peter and John really put in prison for speaking about Jesus?

Read: Acts 4: 1-3

The prayer of the apostles and their friends

Their prayer began by remembering how great God is: it always helps us to pray when we remember what a great and powerful God we are coming to. After this were some words from the second Psalm, as the Christians remembered something else: that God knew there would be a time when the rulers would plot against Him and against the One He had promised to send into the world. The apostles asked God to look at the

threats that had been made against them. They did not ask that the Jewish leaders would stop threatening them. Instead they asked for “boldness” to speak to the people. They also asked God to continue to do wonderful things so that men and women would see the power of the Lord Jesus.

Check the facts

1. King David wrote the Psalm 2 about 1000 years before the birth of the Lord Jesus. Did Peter believe that David was writing about the things that would happen to the Lord Jesus?

Read: Psalm 2: 1-3 and Acts 4: 25-27

2. What did the apostles pray for?

Read: Acts 4: 29-30

The Answer to the apostles' prayer

When the apostles and their friends ended their prayer, the place where they were was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. In Acts chapter 2 we read about the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Now the Holy Spirit came to them to give them renewed courage to speak about the Lord Jesus. We read that they spoke with great power about the resurrection. This was important because you will remember that the Lord Jesus told His disciples that they would be His witnesses: they would tell others what they had seen and heard. Especially they could tell people that they had seen the Lord Jesus after He rose

from the dead. The resurrection proved that Jesus was the Son of God and that God had accepted His perfect sacrifice for the sins of everyone who believes in Him.

Check the facts

1. Find the way the apostles' prayer was answered in Acts 4: 31 and 33.
2. Which word in Acts 4: 32 tells us that a lot of people had become Christians?



Chapter 16 - Stephen

Setting the Scene

In the book of Acts we read about the Christians caring for the poor, especially for widows who had no-one to provide the things they needed. The apostles knew that they should give their time to telling people about the Lord Jesus. They asked the Christians to choose seven men to take charge of caring for the poor widows. One of the seven who were chosen was a man named Stephen. He not only helped to provide food for the widows, but he also spoke to the people – the Book of Acts says he was “full of faith and power”. Lies were told about Stephen and he was brought before the Jewish rulers. He spoke to them about Old Testament days, about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses. He reminded them how badly the prophets God sent had been treated. Then he told them that they themselves had killed the One who God had promised to send into the world, when the Lord Jesus was crucified. The rulers became very angry and took stones to put Stephen to death.

Checking the facts

1. What sort of men were the Christians to choose to make sure the widows were cared for?

Read: Acts 6: 3

2. Did people actually tell lies about Stephen because they did not like to hear him teaching about the Lord Jesus?

Read: Acts 6: 11-14

3. What did Stephen say that made the Jewish rulers so angry?

Read: Acts 7: 52

Stephen's prayers whilst he was being stoned

While Stephen was being stoned, he prayed for two things. First of all, he asked the Lord Jesus to receive his spirit. He knew he was going to die, but he also knew that when his body died, his spirit would live on. His words showed his faith in the Lord Jesus. The second thing he prayed for was for those who were stoning him. He asked God not to charge them with the sin of what they were doing. This reminds us of how the Lord Jesus prayed when He was crucified, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23: 33-34). Stephen was the first Christian to be put to death because of his faith in the Lord Jesus.

Check the facts

1. Did Stephen really pray while he was being hurt by stones thrown at him?

Read: Acts 7: 59

2. Did Stephen pray for those who were killing him?

Read: Acts 7: 60

The Answer to Stephen's prayer

The Lord Jesus promised eternal life to those who believe in Him. We can, therefore, be quite sure that Stephen's first prayer was answered and he went to be with the Lord Jesus. His second prayer was for those who were actually killing him. We cannot know exactly how God answered this. But we do know that one young man who was there that day not only became a Christian, but became a missionary, travelling over land and sea to tell people about the Lord Jesus Christ. We will learn about him in another chapter.

Check the facts

1. Can we be sure that Stephen's first prayer was answered?

Read: John 3: 16 and 6: 40 and 47

2. Who was it who saw Stephen being stoned but later became a Christian missionary?

Read: Acts 7: 58; 9: 1-6 and 22: 20

Chapter 17 - Cornelius

Setting the scene

In New Testament days, the land of Israel was part of the Roman Empire. There were Roman soldiers who kept order in the land and dealt with any unrest or rebellion. Cornelius was a centurion who lived in Caesarea, a town on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. A centurion was an officer in charge of one hundred soldiers. It would have been possible for Roman soldiers to treat the people roughly and make it very clear that they were in charge. But Cornelius treated the Jewish people kindly and was generous to those in need. We read that he “feared” God, which means he believed in a great God who was to be looked up to with reverence.

Check the facts

1. Did Cornelius’s family also believe in God?

Read: Acts 10: 1-2 (The word “alms” means gifts to help people in need).

2. Did Cornelius pray very often?

Read: Acts 10: 2

Cornelius’s prayer

We do not have the words of Cornelius’s prayers: the Bible simply tells us that he “prayed to God always”. We would expect that he prayed for

help to know more about God and how he should live to please God. We would expect that he prayed for his family and his soldiers. Whatever words he used, God heard his prayers.

Check the facts

1. **Read:** Acts 10: 1-4. Which verse tells us that Cornelius was generous?
2. Which verse tells us how often Cornelius prayed?
3. Which verse tells us that God had heard Cornelius's prayers?

The Answer to Cornelius's prayers

God answered Cornelius's prayers by giving him a vision of an angel. The angel told him to send for Peter and even told him exactly where Peter could be found. Now Peter was a Jew and would have been taught that the Jews were God's special people. He would not have had much to do with people who were not Jews – they were known as Gentiles. A Jew would not even sit down to a meal with Gentiles. So, while Cornelius sent servants to find Peter, God made sure that Peter would be ready to go with them. Peter was feeling hungry as he waited for his mid-day meal. God sent him a very special dream: read about this in Acts 10: 9-16.

In the book of Leviticus we can read God's instructions about food for the people of Israel.

Food that they were told not to eat was called “unclean”. The Gentiles did not follow these rules and the Jews looked on them as “unclean”. Now God was teaching Peter that he must not think in this way about people from other lands. When the messengers arrived from Cornelius, Peter was ready to go with them.

Cornelius collected his family and friends together and they were all ready to listen to Peter when he arrived in Caesarea. Peter told them about the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. As the people listened eagerly to all that Peter said, God sent His Holy Spirit to them. Some friends who had come with Peter were amazed that God had given His Holy Spirit to Gentiles. This was the beginning of the gospel (the good news about the Lord Jesus) going into all the world, not just to the Jewish people.

Check the facts

1. Were many people waiting for Peter when he arrived at Cornelius’s house?

Read: Acts 10: 24 and 27

2. Did Peter tell the people how their sins could be forgiven?

Read: Acts 10: 43 (Your Bible may use the word remission which means forgiveness).

3. Had Jesus told His disciples to tell people all over the world about Him?

Read: Matthew 28: 19; Acts 1: 8

Chapter 18 - The Church

Setting the Scene

In the New Testament, the word 'church' does not mean a building, it means people who have become Christians. Since the Day of Pentecost when three thousand people became Christians, the church had continued to grow, as more people believed in the Lord Jesus.

King Herod, the grandson of the King who reigned when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, was a cruel man as his grandfather had been. He had James (the brother of John) put to death and realised that the Jewish people were pleased that he had done this. So, he then had Peter put in prison. Knowing that King Herod might do to Peter what he had already done to James, the church met to pray.

Check the facts

1. Why were the Jews pleased when the King treated Christians in a cruel way?

Read: Acts 12: 1-3; Acts 4: 5-10 and 18

- 2 Was Peter put in prison because he had done anything wrong?

Read: Acts 12: 1-4

The Church's prayer for Peter

The Book of Acts tells us that prayer was made “constantly” for Peter. This means that there were Christians praying at all times for him. We also read that many of them met together to pray. We do not have the words of their prayers, but they must have prayed that Peter's life would be spared so that he could once again tell people about the Lord Jesus.

Check the facts

1. How often did Christians pray for Peter?

Read: Acts 12: 5

2. Were there many people or just a few praying for Peter?

Read: Acts 12: 12

The Answer to the church's prayer

In the prison cell, Peter was chained to two soldiers, while other soldiers guarded the door. While Peter was sleeping, God sent an angel into the prison. He woke Peter up and told him to get up and put his sandals on. His chains fell off and he did as the angel told him. Then the angel told Peter to follow him and they went past the guards right up to the gate leading to the road. The gate opened to them and Peter found himself in the street, and then the angel left him.

Peter had thought he was seeing a vision when the angel came, but, alone in the street, he realised

it had actually happened: God had sent the angel to set him free. He knew whose house to go to and it was the very place where the Christians were praying together for him. Peter was able to tell them that God had heard their prayers and rescued him from prison.

Check the facts

1. How did Peter get out of the prison and into the road?

Read: Acts 12: 10

2. At first, did the Christians believe that Peter was really free?

Read: Acts 12: 13-16

3. Did the soldiers who had been guarding Peter know what happened?

Read: Acts 12: 18

Chapter 19 - Paul

Setting the scene

In the early part of his life, Paul was called Saul. Saul was born in the city of Tarsus in the country we now know as Turkey. He was brought up in the Jewish faith and knew the Old Testament well. He became a Pharisee, strictly keeping the law of God as he understood it. He did everything he could to stop Christians teaching people about the Lord Jesus. He had them put in prison and even agreed to some Christians being put to death. As a young man he had been present when Stephen was stoned (Acts 7: 59-60).

One day Paul set out on a journey to Damascus in Syria. He had permission from the High Priest to bring Christians from Damascus to Jerusalem. But on the road to Damascus his whole life was changed. A bright light shone around him and he heard the voice of the Lord Jesus speaking to him. Saul the persecutor of Christians became a Christian himself. He also became a missionary, travelling many miles by land and sea, to tell people about the Lord Jesus.

When people who heard the gospel became Christians, they began to meet together. This is how churches began. We often think of a church as a building, but the Bible never uses the word in that way. When we read about the church in the New Testament, it means a group of Christians in a particular place. The only other way the word is

used is when it means Christians all over the world and in heaven: the whole church.

In the New Testament we have some letters that Paul wrote to the churches. In these letters we read of how he prayed for these groups of Christians scattered throughout the Roman Empire.

Check the facts

1. Did Saul really hate Christians?

Read: Acts 9: 1-2 and Acts 26: 9-11.

2. Did Saul really hear the Lord Jesus speaking to him?

Read: Acts 9: 3-6

3. How did Saul know that God wanted him to be a missionary?

Read: Acts 13: 1-4

Paul's prayer for the Christians at Philippi

Paul travelled to Philippi, a city in the country we know as Greece, with Silas, Timothy and Luke. While they were there Paul and Silas were falsely accused of wrong-doing and put in prison. The jailer and his family became Christians. A woman named Lydia had already become a Christian when she heard Paul and Silas speak about the Lord Jesus. The church in Philippi grew and later Paul wrote a letter to the people there. In his letter he tells us that he had been praying for them. First of all he thanked God for the Philippian Christians. He knew that God would keep them true to Him right through

their lives. He prayed that their lives would show that they belonged to the Lord Jesus, that they would have loving hearts and understanding minds.

Check the facts

1. Did Paul begin his prayers with thanksgiving to God?

Read: Philippians 1: 3

2. Who did Paul think would help these Christians to go on in their Christian lives?

Read: Philippians 1: 6

3. We can recognise a tree by the fruits that grow on it. Can you find the word in Philippians chapter 1 verse 11 that tells us what sort of “fruit” should show that we are Christians?

The Answer to Paul’s prayer

Paul told the Philippians that he prayed for them always. He prayed that he would see by the way they lived that they truly loved and trusted in the Lord Jesus. In chapter 4 of the letter he wrote to them, Paul writes about their generosity. They had sent gifts to Paul to help him in his work and especially when he had difficult times. Paul tells them that it was not that he wanted anything from them, but he was so thankful to see their love and concern. This was the “fruit” that he longed to see in their lives. He knew that God had heard his prayers for these Christians at Philippi. Their lives showed that they were genuine Christians.

Check the facts

1. What was very special about the Christians at Philippi?

Read: Philippians 4: 15

2. Did the Philippian Christians send help to Paul more than once?

Read: Philippians 4: 16



Chapter 20 - Lydia

Setting the scene

Thyatira was quite an important city in the country we know as Turkey. Dyes were made there, and a purple dye was much sought after. This dye was made from the shells of the murex shellfish. Thyatira was the home of a woman named Lydia who we read was a “seller of purple” which could mean that she sold the purple dye or that she sold material which had been dyed that colour. She must have had to travel in the course of her work. When we read about Lydia in the Book of Acts, she was in Philippi which was in the country we now know as Greece (Macedonia in New Testament times).

On the Sabbath day, a group of women from Philippi met to pray beside the river outside the city. Lydia met with them there.

Check the facts

1. Was Philippi an important city in New Testament days?

Read: Acts 16: 12

2. Why did Paul and his companions leave the city on the Sabbath day?

Read: Acts 16: 13

Lydia's prayer

Lydia believed in God. We know this because the Book of Acts tells us that she worshipped God and that she met with other women to pray. We do not know what these women prayed for. We would expect them to have prayed for their families, for God's help each day and that they might learn more about God Himself.

Check the facts

Find some promises for those who really want to know more about God.

Read: Deuteronomy 4: 29: Proverbs 8: 17 and Hebrews 11: 6.

The Answer to the prayers of Lydia and the other women at Philippi

Paul and Silas were travelling to many towns and cities, telling people about the Lord Jesus. They came to Philippi, and on the Sabbath day they spoke to the women who had met to pray. Lydia listened carefully to all they said and God helped her to understand. She believed in the Lord Jesus and was baptized. God had heard the prayers of this group of women, and He sent Paul and Silas to tell them that the Lord Jesus had died and risen again. Through believing in Him their sins could be forgiven and God would give them eternal life.

Lydia showed that she had become a Christian by inviting Paul and Silas to stay at her house. She showed kindness to those who God had sent to bring the good news about the Lord Jesus to Philippi.

Check the facts

1. How do we know that it was God who helped Lydia understand what Paul and Silas said?

Read: Acts 16:14

2. Was Lydia quick to show kindness to Paul and Silas?

Read: Acts 16: 15

Chapter 21 - The Lord Jesus Christ

Setting the scene

God is eternal: He had no beginning and He will have no end. The Bible teaches us that there is one God who exists in three persons. We use the word “trinity” to describe this, but we do not actually find this word in the Bible. God the Father is eternal, God the Son is eternal, God the Holy Spirit is eternal.

The Lord Jesus, who had always been with the Father and the Holy Spirit, became a man and came to this world. This does not mean that He was no longer God, but that He added human nature to all that He was as God. He did this so that He could take the punishment for the sin of everyone who believes in Him. This is what He did when He died on the cross.

It should not surprise us that while He lived on earth, Jesus spent much time praying to His Father. We read about Him going out early in the morning to pray and going often to a place where He could be alone to pray. We read of Him praying all night and praying in the garden of Gethsemane before He was crucified.

In John chapter 17 we have the words that Jesus prayed after eating the Passover meal with His disciples.

Check the facts: the Lord Jesus Christ

1. Do we read that Jesus spent a whole night praying?
See Luke 6: 12.
2. Did the Lord Jesus often find somewhere to be on His own to pray?
See Luke 5: 16.
3. Did Jesus get up very early so that He could pray?
See Mark 1: 35.

Jesus' prayer for everyone who would believe in Him

The Lord Jesus knew that He would soon return to His Father. He prayed for those who had been with Him and who had believed that He had been sent by God into the world. He prayed that God would keep them from evil. He then went on to pray for others who would believe in Him in the years ahead. Many would hear or read the words of those who had been with Jesus and would become Christians. It is wonderful to know that Jesus prayed for all His people, knowing each one who would one day put their trust in Him. He prayed that His people would be "one": that there would be such loving agreement between them that others would see this. He also prayed that His people would be with Him, to see Him in the glory which God had given Him.

Check the facts

1. Did the disciples believe that Jesus had come from God?

Read: John 17: 8

2. Did the Lord Jesus pray for everyone who would become Christians?

Read: John 17: 20

3. Did Jesus actually pray that His people would go to be with Him?

Read: John 17: 24

The Answer to Jesus's prayer

Some people think that Jesus's prayer would be answered if everyone who says they are Christians would come together in one big "church". The truth is that many people who say they are Christians do not really believe what the Bible says and have never asked God to forgive their sin.

The prayer of Jesus has been answered even though Christians may be in different churches and in different lands. Whenever those who are trusting in the Lord Jesus meet, they know that they are brothers and sisters who belong to God their Father. Whenever Christians in a country are suffering in some way, Christians in other parts of the world send help to them. We know that His prayer for His people to be with Him will also be answered. In the Book of Revelation we read how John was shown people out of every tribe and nation praising God in heaven.

Check the facts

1. Do we find in the New Testament the beginning of the answer to Jesus's prayer for His people to be "one"?

Read: Acts 2: 41-47

2. Do we read in the Bible about people from every nation praising God?

Read: Revelation 7: 9-10

3. Does the Bible tell us of a time when the prayer of Jesus for His people to be with Him will be answered?

Read: Revelation 21: 1-4

Chapter 22 - A prayer not yet answered

John and his brother James were fishermen, when Jesus called them to follow Him. They became His disciples and after the resurrection were known as apostles, sent out to tell others about the Lord Jesus. James was put to death by King Herod, but John lived to be an old man. In John's old age, there were still rulers who persecuted Christians and John was sent to a small island called Patmos (off the west coast of Turkey). This was probably to stop him teaching people about the Lord Jesus. But while he was there, Jesus spoke to him and told him to write the things that he saw. We can read what John wrote in the Book of the Revelation, the last book of the Bible. So, the rulers could not stop John teaching about Jesus: the words he wrote on Patmos have been read by millions of people over nearly two thousand years.

In the last chapter of Revelation (22), the promise that Jesus will come again is given three times. Then in the next to last verse we read the very short prayer – “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

Whose prayer is it?

First of all, it must be the prayer of the apostle John who wrote the words. Living in days when Christians were persecuted, how he must have longed to see the Lord Jesus return as king over

everything. Also he had been a faithful follower of Jesus and could look forward to meeting Him.

This prayer should also be the prayer of every Christian young or old. Those who believe that the Lord Jesus loved them so much that He gave His life for them, will want to see Him. Also, Christians look forward to the time when sin and sadness and illness and death will all be over. They know this can only happen when Jesus comes again.

Who cannot pray this prayer?

There are many people who do not believe in the Lord Jesus. They may say they do not believe there is a God, but this is because they do not want a God who tells them how they ought to live their lives. They laugh at the idea that Jesus will come again and would certainly not pray that He would come. Sometimes even Christians feel that they have not done all that the Lord Jesus would want them to do. They then feel that they will be ashamed to meet Him. There are two parables in Matthew chapter 25 that remind us that we need to be ready to meet Jesus whenever He returns.

The Prayer that will be answered

There is no doubt that the prayer for Jesus to come will be answered at exactly the right time. We do not know when that time will come, but God knows. For those who love the Lord Jesus, it will be a wonderful day. For those who have not believed

in Him it will be a day of great fear. They will see Jesus as King over the whole world and they will see His great power as the Son of God. Too late, they will know how wrong they have been.

Are you looking forward to the time when Jesus will come again? Can you really say – “Come, Lord Jesus”? If not, you need to make sure that you are trusting in the Lord Jesus to forgive your sins and make you one of His own people.

When Jesus died on the cross, He took the punishment for the sins of everyone who will believe in Him. Those who refuse to trust in the Lord Jesus, must bear the punishment for their own sin. This means being shut out of heaven and away from everything that is good. The Bible tells us that there is a place of punishment that is called hell. The Lord Jesus invites us to come to Him. Ask Him to accept you, forgive your sin, and make you His child.

Look up some of the promises that tell us Jesus will come again –

- John 14: 3
- Acts 1: 9-11
- 1 Thessalonians 4: 15-17
- Revelation 22: 7, 12 and 20

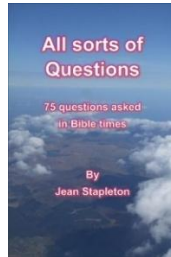
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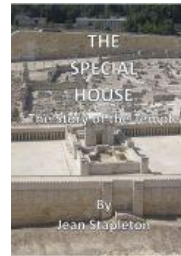
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