



INTRODUCING

# THE GOSPEL

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God's plan





# Lesson 5: God's plan

## Introduction

When we look at the world, it is quite clear that there is something wrong with it. It is beautifully made and shows every sign of being the work of a designer, but it is full of wickedness, suffering and violence.

This, however, is not its purpose. The world was made good, but it was - and continues to be - spoiled by humans and their sinful state.

The Bible tells us about God's plan to restore the world to its intended state; a state of peace, harmony and justice.

In this chapter you will learn:

- God made the world good, but it was spoiled by man's sin
- What God needs to restore the world to its intended state
- What the Kingdom of God is, and when it is coming



## The fall of the world

The story of how sin entered the world and brought death with it is told in the early chapters of Genesis, but the Bible's authors return to this account over and over again across other books.

### Key chapters to read: Genesis 1-3

When God had made the world, and before mankind had sinned, it was very good. There was no death and no suffering; they had not yet come into the world. Look at this verse from Genesis:

**“And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.”**

Genesis 1:31

This is the world as God made it. His intention is to bring the world back to this state again; good, and full of people who understand God.

So where did it all go wrong? Well, God gave mankind - Adam and Eve - a rule to follow, and they broke that rule. Breaking God's rules is sin, and sin leads to death.

**“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.”**

Romans 5:12

The root cause of all suffering in the world is sin. We die because we sin - not because of a particular sin, but because the whole world is cursed with sin as a general matter.

The important point here is that sin acts indirectly. We live in a world cursed by sin, and it is this that causes death. This is why a sinless person like Jesus could die.

So, before the world can be set right, there needs to be a way that God can forgive sin, and therefore remove its effects on the earth.



## Forgiveness of sins

The forgiveness of sins is provided by the death and resurrection of Jesus:

**“And the free gift is not like the result of that one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass [sin] brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.”**

Romans 5:16-17

Jesus’ sacrifice has provided a means to escape from death, and forgiveness of sins. This means that the way is open for God to put the earth right.

There is no restriction on the number of people who can be saved. Jesus’ sacrifice has made this possible for everyone, not just a few:

**“Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.”**

Romans 5:18

But to make use of the sacrifice of Jesus, and therefore have sins forgiven and gain eternal life, a person must associate themselves with Christ’s sacrifice. Then, when the day of judgement comes, the world will be cleansed from sin. We will cover this in more detail in later lessons.

It is this sacrifice which removes sin and gives the possibility of a world where there is no need for the consequence of sin, and hence no death.

This world without sin, death of suffering is described in Revelation:

**“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.””**

Revelation 21:3-4



This is the Kingdom of God. It is one of the main points of the teaching of Jesus, which was carried on by the Apostles, and is still a core part of the Gospel.

## The return of Jesus

Jesus died, and rose again. Forty days later, he was taken up into heaven, but God promised that he would return. There are more than 400 verses in the New Testament alone that refer to this.

Here are just a few examples:

**“So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.””**

Acts 1:6-11

This conversation happened on the day Jesus was taken into heaven, and two angels - described as ‘men’ because they appeared like human beings - then come and talk to his disciples.

There are two key points we can learn from this passage:

- 1) Jesus will return in the same way as he came: physically, and visibly.
- 2) No one knows, or can know, when Jesus will return. This is knowledge that God has reserved for himself.



Here is another passage talking about that time:

**“For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.”**

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

This is a very clear statement about the return of Jesus. It reminds us that Jesus will return in a way that won't be unnoticed or ignored. It also gives us some more details about the dead being raised, and the living gathered for judgement. Other passages tell us that this will be the start of the Kingdom of God.

Let's look at just one more of the many passages talking about Jesus' return:

**“Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”**

Matthew 24:30-31

Again, this passage reaffirms that the return of Jesus will be seen by everyone. Here, we are also given some extra detail that angels will be sent out to gather the living faithful from wherever they are on the earth.

So when will this happen? We saw from the passage earlier in Acts 1:7 that it is not for us to know. In fact, not even Jesus himself knows, as he tells of in the book of Matthew:

**“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.”**

Matthew 24:36





This emphasises clearly that only God, Jesus' father, knows when he will return. Anyone who claims they've worked out when Jesus will return or asserts that he already has is contradicting this plain statement in the Bible.

## The Kingdom of God

The return of Jesus to the earth will mark a great change. It is the start of a process where the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of God, the curse of sin will be removed, and eternal life with God becomes possible.

The coming of the Kingdom of God is a teaching which appears frequently in the Bible. The phrase 'Kingdom of God' or 'Kingdom of Heaven' - an alternative title for the same thing - appears 83 times in the Gospels as a summary of the teaching of Jesus.

**"Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.""**

Mark 1:14-15

The Kingdom of God is so central to the message of Jesus that it is used as a summary of that message. **Acts 28:30-31** uses a similar summary for the teachings of the Apostle Paul.

The prophet Daniel wrote a very neat summary of the Kingdom of God in one of his prophecies:

**"And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever."**

Daniel 2:44

This describes the Kingdom of God as a rule which brings an end to the kingdoms of men, and replaces them with direct rule from God. Unsurprisingly, this is not going to go down well with many world rulers, as passages in the Bible predict:



**“Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, “Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.””**

Psalm 2:1-3

Many world leaders are going to seek to defy God, but their efforts will be useless. God’s Kingdom won’t come into place instantly, but will instead be met with resistance.

So who will rule over this Kingdom? Well, at first it will be Jesus, while the task of dealing with rebellions from the world’s leaders is ongoing. We get a little detail of this in Corinthians, when the Apostle Paul is talking about the resurrection:

**“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.”**

1 Corinthians 15:22-28

So Jesus will rule until death itself has been destroyed. Then he will hand the Kingdom over to God.

There are many pictures of what this final Kingdom will be like in the Bible, each of which paints a picture of a world at peace, a world where there is no more death, a place without stress, illness or violence, and where there is enough for everyone.

One of the most famous verses about this is in the prophecy of Isaiah:

**“The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The**





**infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."**

Isaiah 11:6-9

But this isn't the only description. Have a look at **Psalm 72, Isaiah 35, Isaiah 65:17-25, Joel 3:17-21** and **Micah 4:1-5**, just to name a few examples.

Of course, human beings have often sought to create this sort of world by human means, but have always failed. This is because of human nature: people naturally act in their own interests, with the ones who are the most ambitious and ruthless seizing power for themselves. The result is never good, and attempts end in bloodshed and oppression.

The difference with the Kingdom of God is that it is not governed by human nature. The person in control is God, who is just, merciful, and has our best interests at heart. This is why the Kingdom of God is our hope for the future.

#### **Lesson summary:**

1. The world is spoiled by sin. The consequence of that sin is that the world is a place full of suffering, disease and death.
2. The death and resurrection of Jesus provides a way for the world to be renewed by the removal of sin, and offers us a chance at true forgiveness.
3. The future will bring the Kingdom of God, a period when the earth will be put right, and death will be destroyed.



## Lesson 5 summary questions:

1: Read **Romans 5:18-21**, **Romans 6:23** and **Ezekiel 18:4**. What was the original cause of death in the world?

2: Read **1 Thessalonians 5**.

- a) How many references to the return of Jesus appear in this chapter?
- b) What warnings are given us about the timing of Jesus' return?
- c) What are we told to do as a result?

3: Look at **Matthew 25:31-34**.

- a) Where is Jesus in verses 31 and 32? Compare this with Luke **1:32**.
- b) What is Jesus doing in this passage?
- c) What are the outcomes of the process? (Matthew 25:46)

4: Read **Isaiah 65:17-25**.

- a) What city is mentioned here?
- b) How might you describe the kingdom talked about in this passage?
- c) Does everyone in this kingdom have eternal life?

5: How can we calculate when Jesus will return?

(Matthew 24:36, 42-44, Mark 13:32, Acts 1:7, 1 Thessalonians 5:2)

### Deeper dive questions

6: Was there a kingdom of God in the past?

(1 Chronicles 28:5, 1 Chronicles 29:23, Amos 9:11, Ezekiel 21:25-27)

7: Look at **Isaiah 2:1-3; 11:1-9; 35; 65:17-25; Amos 9:11-15; Micah 4:1-5**.

Can you produce a description of what the conditions in the kingdom of God will be like from these passages?