

St James & St Christopher

The Bible Explained

1. The Old Testament

The Old Testament describes events from the creation of the world and looks forward into the future. It explains how God called 'a people' to belong to him as his treasured possession. Jesus often talked about the Old Testament and showed how important it is for those who follow him.

God

The Bible presents one God who exists as three distinct persons; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This belief is called the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. The Bible also shows that God is love; that he is eternal; that he is hidden and revealed; that he speaks and makes promises.

Creation

The universe and everything in it was created by God. Genesis describes the creation of the world in six days, but Christians often differ in how they understand this. Everything that God created was very good and he rested on the seventh day and made it holy.

Human Beings

Human beings were made in the image of God. Genesis chapter one says, *'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them'*. Human beings were also given permission to rule over everything that God had made.

The Fall

Though God made human beings good, we decided to disobey him. As a result, we became separated from God and deserve his judgement. This development is often known as 'The Fall' and disobedience to God is called Sin.

2. The New Testament

The New Testament teaches the foundations of the Christian faith and the normal pattern for the Christian life. What Christians believe and how they behave is described in the different books that were written by the early disciples after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus

The Bible tells us that God became the man Jesus to teach us how to live, to die on the cross for our sins, and to rise again. This message is known as the good news or 'the gospel'. It is often summed up by the following verse:

'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life'. (John 3:16, NIV)

The Church

God calls each believer into a relationship with other believers. As we become united to God, we also become united to one another. The disciples of Jesus became part of a visible and organised Church that worked together.

The Holy Spirit

Along with the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit forms part of the Holy Trinity. The Holy Spirit enables 'fruit' to grow in the character of a believer and also gives the believer spiritual 'gifts' to help strengthen God's Church.

Judgement

The Bible teaches that Jesus will return again to judge the living and the dead at the last day. Those who believe in Jesus as their Lord and Saviour will inherit eternal life and those who reject Jesus will receive eternal punishment.

3. Using the Bible

We believe that God speaks to us through the Bible. When we read the Bible, it can be helpful for us to divide the things that we read into three main groups:

a) Primary Issues

These are matters that the Bible mentions that we consider essential to the Christian faith. They include what we believe about God and Jesus, what we believe to be right and wrong, and how we are accepted by God.

b) Secondary Issues

These are matters that the Bible mentions, but on which we may hold different views without this affecting our unity. They include for example, how we understand the creation of the world, the use of spiritual gifts, the roles of men and women, the age of Christian baptism, and the details about the end of the world.

c) Matters of Freedom

These are matters that either the Bible does not mention specifically, or leaves for us to follow our own conscience. They are neither commanded nor forbidden and are matters of personal choice. They include for example, drinking alcohol, celebrating certain days, what foods can be eaten, lighting candles when praying, and the different styles of worship used in services.