

Common Entrance

Religious Studies

Revision Notes

(2011 Syllabus A)

By

Edmund Lovatt

CONTENTS

Section One: Interpreting the Old Testament (Set Texts and Contemporary Issues)

Group 1: God, Human Nature and Covenant

1. The Creation Accounts	3	<i>Genesis 1:1-2:25</i>
2. The Garden of Eden and The Fall	7	<i>Genesis 3</i>
3. Cain and Abel	10	<i>Genesis 4:1-16</i>
4. The Near Sacrifice of Isaac	12	<i>Genesis 22:1-19</i>
5. The Exodus and Passover	14	<i>Exodus 12:1-13</i>
6. The Ten Commandments	16	<i>Exodus 19:1-8; 20:1-17</i>

Group 2: Leaders and Prophets of the Old Testament

7. Moses	18	<i>Exodus 3:1-17</i>
8. David: David and Bathsheba	20	<i>2 Samuel 11:1-17</i>
9. Nathan	20	<i>2 Samuel 12:1-14</i>
10. Solomon	23	<i>1 Kings 3</i>
11. Elijah	25	<i>1 Kings 18:19-46; 19:1-18</i>

Also on the Syllabus:

Isaiah

Isaiah 1:10-20; 5:1-7

Section Two: Interpreting the New Testament (Set Texts and Contemporary Issues)

Group 1: Jesus' Teaching

12. Zacchaeus	28	<i>Luke 19:1-10</i>
13. The Woman and Simon the Pharisee	28	<i>Luke 7:36-50</i>
14. The Good Samaritan	32	<i>Luke 10:25-37</i>
15. The Lost Son	33	<i>Luke 15:11-32</i>
16. The Sower	34	<i>Luke 8:4-8; 11-15</i>
17. The Paralysed Man	37	<i>Mark 2:1-12</i>
18. The Calming of the Storm	38	<i>Mark 4:35-41</i>
19. The Rich Young Man	40	<i>Mark 10:17-31</i>

Group 2: Jesus' Life, Death and Resurrection

20. The Birth of Jesus	42	<i>Matthew 1:18-25</i>
21. The Temptations	44	<i>Luke 4:1-13</i>
22. The Call of the Disciples	46	<i>Luke 5:1-11</i>
23. Peter's Declaration	48	<i>Mark 8:27-33</i>
24. The Transfiguration	49	<i>Mark 9:2-13</i>
25. The Sentence, Crucifixion and Burial	51	<i>Mark 15:6-47</i>
26. The Resurrection	53	<i>John 20:1-29</i>

Bible translation recommended by the ISEB: New International Version

Old Testament Set Texts

GROUP 1: GOD, HUMAN NATURE AND COVENANT

1. The Creation Accounts (Genesis 1:1-2:25)

The First Creation Account

In the beginning, God made the heavens and the earth. However, there was a lack of order: the earth was formless, there was darkness over the surface of the deep and God's Spirit was hovering over the waters. So God spent six days creating in order to perfect the world. At the end of each day, once God was satisfied with his creation, he rested.

Day One: God created light, night and day.

Day Two: God created the heavens/sky.

Day Three: God created and ordered the land and sea, and commissioned the earth to bring forth plants and trees to bear fruit.

Day Four: God made the sun, moon and stars.

Day Five: God created sea creatures and birds; they were told to multiply and to fill the sea and sky.

Day Six: God created land animals. Then God created man in his own image. Man was given power over all of the other creatures, blessed, told to reproduce and fill the earth and to rule over it.

Day Seven: God blessed the seventh (Sabbath) day and rested.

Themes

- All powerful God – Creation happened at God's will – he created and ordered the world in just six days, allowing him to rest on the seventh.
- Order out of chaos – The predictable language used to describe creation (repeated phrases – “*And God said...*”, “*God saw that it was good*”, “*there was evening and there was morning*”) and the logical sequence of the events themselves imply that chaos is being replaced by order. Imagine “Day 0” as being chaos and “Day 7” as being perfect order.
- Man given authority on earth – God created man in his own image and gave him power over all the other creatures on earth. He also blessed him, ordered him to have children, and told him to fill the earth with his descendants.
- God was pleased with his creation – he only rested at the end of each day when he was pleased with the work that he had done, and only rested on the seventh day when he had finished his work.

Contemporary Issues

- Genetic engineering/human cloning.
- Creation and science – big bang?
- Special *Sabbath* day, different from the rest – Sunday trading/working?
- Mankind's responsibility on earth – preserving creation and not ruining it (e.g. pollution, destruction of nature). Stewardship.
- Power of God at work in the world today, through his creation.
- Arguments between a “God” creator and other methods of creation.

The Second Creation Account

God formed man out of dust from the ground and put him in a garden in the east called Eden. A river flowed out of Eden in order to water the garden, and then divided into four separate rivers called the Pishon, Gihon, Tigris and Euphrates. God planted a whole variety of beautiful trees around the man – and in the centre, he placed the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God formed birds and animals from the ground then asked the man to name them. The man had total freedom in the garden, except he was not allowed to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil on pain of death. God then sent the man into a deep sleep and created a companion out of one of his ribs, and called her ‘woman’. The man and woman were both naked, but not embarrassed.

Themes

- Beauty – the garden is meant to represent paradise.
- One Rule – the man was given only one simple rule to follow.
- Freedom – apart from the one rule, the first man and woman had the freedom to behave however they wished.
- Naïve – the man and woman were inexperienced and innocent, without properly formed consciences.
- Authority – man was given authority, and was even asked to name the animals.
- Creation out of something – in the first account God created by commanding; in the second account God created out of the dust of the ground, and then created the woman from the man’s rib.

Contemporary Issues

- Differing roles taken by men and women in the world?
- What is true perfection?
- Do we need rules?

Revision

Make sure that you know what happened on each of the days of creation in the first account, and be careful not to confuse the two stories!

How were man and woman created in each of these two stories?

What phrases are repeated at the beginning and end of each day, in account one?

In account two, what instructions/responsibilities was the man given in the garden of Eden?

List three or four things that we do now which damage the world/environment, and explain what some people are doing to make the world a more pleasant place in which to live. Which charities might people support?

Explain the importance of the seventh day. What do you understand by the word *Sabbath*? How might Christians keep some kind of *Sabbath Day* today?

DO NOT COPY

2. The Garden of Eden and The Fall (Genesis 3)

There was a serpent in the garden that tempted the woman to eat the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge, telling her that it would open her eyes and make her like God – she would not die! So the woman ate the fruit, and gave some to the man. And then they realised that they were naked, so they sewed fig leaves together to make aprons for themselves. When they heard God walking through the garden they hid because they were afraid. But God questioned them about how they knew that they were naked – Adam blamed Eve and Eve in turn blamed the serpent.

Punishments:

Snake:

- Crawl on belly on ground
- Eat dust
- Enemy of humans

Woman:

- Increased pain in pregnancy and childbirth

Man:

- Ground cursed – have to work hard for food
- Weeds and thorns will grow to make this difficult
- Man will eventually die and return to the dust from which he was created

God clothed Adam and Eve then sent them out of the garden. He put a flaming sword in place to stop anyone from entering again in order to eat from the tree of life.

Themes

- Temptation – Adam and Eve were tempted by the serpent and gave in. Equally, with only one rule to follow, and without formed consciences, was it inevitable that they would fail?
- Selfishness – man’s wish to have his way, even though he is disobeying God.
- Punishment – this is to be expected if you don’t follow the rules.
- Free will – Adam and Eve made their own free decisions to be disobedient.

NB Do not mention an “apple”: there is no “apple” mentioned in the original text – simply call it a “fruit”.

Contemporary Issues

- Differing roles taken by men and women in the world?
- Advantages/disadvantages of the fall.
- Temptation in the world today.
- Rules and punishments in the world – especially in school.
- Euthanasia.
- Owning up.

Revision

What did the serpent promise Eve?

What did Adam and Eve do immediately after eating the forbidden fruit?

What punishments were given to Adam, Eve and the serpent?

What do we learn about God from this story (think about the whole story before answering)?

Why do you think Adam and Eve acted like this, and did they get what they deserved at the end?

3. Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-16)

Adam and Eve had two sons – Cain (a farmer) and Abel (a shepherd). In due course, they brought offerings to God. Cain brought an offering from the crops that he had grown; Abel brought the best parts of a first-born lamb. God accepted Abel's sacrifice and rejected Cain's. Cain was very angry. However, God warned Cain that he should persevere and do what was right, and not give in to his anger. He should overcome the (potential) sin that was crouching at his door. [God was testing Cain.]

Cain then suggested to his brother that they should go out into a field together, and there he murdered Abel. The Lord asked Cain where his brother was, to which Cain replied "Am I supposed to take care of my brother?" But God knew what Cain had done, and said that his brother's blood was crying out to him from the ground. God punished Cain.

Punishment:

- Ground would no longer be fertile
- Cain would become a restless wanderer on earth

However, God put a mark on Cain so that nobody could kill him. If they did, seven lives would be taken in revenge. Cain became a nomad and lived in the land of 'Wandering' [sometimes called 'Nod'], east of Eden.

Themes

- Jealousy – Cain was jealous of his brother Abel and gave in to this, which led to...
- Sin – Cain was taken over by anger and sin, despite being warned of this danger by God.
- Test – Cain was being tested to see how he would react. God even warned him to be careful, but still Cain got it wrong.
- Murder – the first murder in the Bible was committed as a result of religion!
- Lying – Cain lied to God and denied responsibility for his own brother – even though God gave him a chance to own up and apologise for what he had done wrong.
- Consequence - Punishment – Cain was punished for what he had done.
- The Ground – just as man had been created from the ground in the Garden of Eden, so Abel's blood cried out to God from the ground.
- Forgiveness – despite what he had done, God put a mark on Cain and protected him.

Contemporary Issues

- Murder. Is killing ever justifiable? Punishment for murderers?
- Punishment.
- Family relationships between brothers.
- Jealousy.

4. The Near Sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22:1-19)

Abram was descended from Adam and Eve. He was called by God, who made a covenant with him and his descendants. God said that he would be “father of a multitude of nations”. In recognition of this covenant, God re-named him Abraham. He was married to Sarah – and despite the fact that they were very old, God granted them a son, Isaac.

One day, God told Abraham to take his son to the land of Moriah and offer him as a burnt sacrifice on a mountain there. Abraham obeyed the Lord, and travelled to the place he was instructed, taking two servants with him, and also wood for the burnt offering. When the third day of travelling came Abraham left the slaves guarding the donkey, and went onwards with just his son. Abraham carried fire and the knife; Isaac carried the wood. Isaac asked his father where the lamb was for the burnt offering, to which Abraham replied, “God himself will provide the lamb”. When they came to the appointed place on the mountain, Abraham built an altar and bound his son. But as he was raising his knife to murder Isaac an angel called from heaven and ordered him to stop; he had proved his trust and faith in God by being prepared to obey his commands, even as far as sacrificing his only son. Having untied Isaac, Abraham found a ram caught by its horns in a thicket, and offered it as a sacrifice instead of Isaac. The mountain was re-named “The Lord Will Provide”.

Reward:

As a reward for his faith, God promised Abraham a great number of descendants, equal to the stars in the sky or the sand on the seashore. They would be blessed by God and be successful over their enemies. Abraham then went to live in Beersheba.

Themes

- Gift of God – Abraham and Sarah were granted a son by God even though they were both very old – and then God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac!
- Sacrifice – Abraham was being asked to sacrifice what was most dear to him as proof of his faith in God.
- Faith and Obedience – by his willingness to make this sacrifice, Abraham was showing supreme faith in, and obedience to, God.
- Covenant – God established another covenant with Abraham.
- Reward – the number and ability of Abraham’s descendents was his reward for his faith.

Contemporary Issues

- What does sacrifice mean in the modern world?
- Faith.
- Obedience.

Revision

What do you learn about the character of Abraham from this story?

Should Abraham be respected? Was his faith and determination to please God a good thing, or was he selfish in not thinking about Sarah? Surely, someone who was prepared to sacrifice his own child must be evil?

Why do you think that God tested Abraham in this way? Was this a harsh test, do you think?

Give a few examples of how someone might make a sacrifice in the modern world. Explain how each situation can be considered as a sacrifice.

5. The Exodus and Passover (Exodus 12:1-13)

God spoke to Moses and Aaron, announcing that the first month of their year had started. He instructed that, on the tenth day, a man from each Israelite household should take a lamb for his family. The size of the lamb should reflect how much the household would eat. Any household that was too small for a whole lamb was to share it with their nearest neighbour. The animals could be sheep or goats, and they had to be one year old. On the fourteenth day of the month, the lambs were to be slaughtered at twilight, and some of the blood put on the tops and sides of the Israelites' doorframes. The lamb was then to be roasted over a fire and eaten with bitter herbs and bread without yeast. Any leftover meat was to be burnt. The Israelites had to eat quickly with their cloaks tucked into their belts, sandals on their feet and staffs in their hands.

That night, God passed through Egypt killing the firstborn amongst all people and animals, bringing judgement on the gods of Egypt. However, he passed over the houses with blood on their doorframes.

Themes

- Passover – this is the first Passover.
- First day of the month – God is giving the Israelites a new beginning, freeing them from Egyptian slavery.
- Final plague – this is the last and most powerful of the ten plagues sent by God.
- Precise instructions – in order to be saved, the Israelites had to follow God's instructions to the letter.
- Speed – the Israelites had to eat quickly, dressed ready to leave, so that they could flee as soon as God ordered this.

Contemporary Issues

- Does God still care for his people?
- Power of God.
- Faith and trust in God.
- Judgement and punishment of God.

Revision

Why do you think God starts this story by telling the Israelites that the first month of their year has started?

Why do you think there is such an emphasis on eating the Passover meal quickly?

Explain what you think this story teaches about God's attitude towards the Israelites in Egypt.

Do you think that God still protects his people today? Give a few brief examples.

6. The Ten Commandments (Exodus 19:1-8; 20:1-17)

Three months after fleeing from Egypt, the Israelites came to the Sinai desert. They had just left the land of Rephidim, and camped in front of the mountain. God told Moses to address the house of Jacob and tell the people of Israel that they had seen what he had done to Egypt, and how he had carried the Israelites to himself “on eagles’ wings”. God said the Israelites would be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation if they obeyed him fully and kept his covenant. Moses passed these words on to the elders of the people, and they all agreed that they would do everything the Lord had said.

Moses then received the following commandments from God, and passed them on to the Israelites:

- 1 Have no other gods apart from the one true God
- 2 Do not make images to worship
- 3 Do not take the Lord’s name in vain
- 4 Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy

- 5 Honour your father and mother
- 6 Do not kill
- 7 Do not commit adultery
- 8 Do not steal
- 9 Do not bear false witness
- 10 Do not covet your neighbour’s possessions

Rules about man’s responsibilities to God

Rules about people’s responsibilities towards each other

Themes

- Four rules about responsibility towards God, six rules about responsibility towards each other.
- Authority – God starts by reminding the people exactly what he has done for them so far, and how he has rescued them from slavery.
- Covenant – God is making a new covenant with his people, giving them laws which will enable them to grow closer to him by observing them.
- Law – God is giving the people a set of rules which they must obey in order to keep their side of the covenant. Many (all?) are relevant today, and dictate how people still live their lives in relationship with each other – both Christians and non Christians.
- Rules are necessary in order to maintain order and fairness for all.

Contemporary Issues

- Most/least important commandments.
- Extra commandments for today’s world.
- Morals in today’s world.
- Are people more selfish and less selfless in the twenty-first century?
- Are the Ten Commandments still relevant today?

7. Moses (Exodus 3:1-17)

While Moses was looking after the flock belonging to Jethro (his father-in-law, and a priest of Midian), he found himself near Mount Horeb. An angel of God appeared to Moses in a burning bush (which wasn't burning up, despite the flames). Moses decided to inspect this strange sight, and God called to him from the bush telling him to take off his sandals because he was walking on holy ground; then he identified himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses covered his face in fright. God expressed concern for the plight of the Israelite slaves in Egypt and promised to rescue them and lead them to a land "flowing with milk and honey" – the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. God told Moses that he was sending him to the Pharaoh, and promised to be with him. He said that, once Moses had led the Israelites out of Egypt, they would worship God on the very mountain where he was standing.

Moses was worried that, if he told the people "The God of your fathers has sent me to you", they might demand to be told his name; God replied, "I am who I am". He instructed Moses to tell the people that "I am has sent me to you". God said that this was his name for ever, from generation to generation.

God told Moses to assemble the elders of Israel and explain to them God's knowledge of, and concern for, their present distress. He was also to pass on God's promise to free them and lead them to a new and better land flowing with milk and honey.

Themes

- Mountains – God often spoke to/via his prophets on mountains (e.g. Elijah).
- Miraculous sight – the bush appeared to be on fire, but it wasn't burning up.
- Fear and Respect – Moses removed his shoes as a sign of respect for God, and covered his face because he was afraid to look at him.
- God cared for the Israelites – he wanted to free them from slavery and lead them to a new and better land, the one to which Abraham had originally been led.
- I am who I am – God's name for himself seems mysterious and unfathomable. It suggests God's transcendence, eternal existence and other-worldliness.

Contemporary Issues

- God can be caring; God can also instil fear.
- Miraculous visions.

Revision

On which mountain did Moses talk to God?

What was unusual about the burning bush?

How did God describe himself?

How did God describe the land to where he would lead the Israelites?

What does this story teach you about the nature and character of God?

Do Christians in the twenty first century have a responsibility to help those who are suffering and oppressed? Explain your thoughts, briefly.

8. David: David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:1-17)

It was spring, and David's troops were at war (led by their commander Joab). They had destroyed the Ammonites and besieged the city of Rabbah. However, David stayed in Jerusalem. One day, when walking on the roof of his palace, he looked down and saw a beautiful woman called Bathsheba bathing below. She was the wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of David's soldiers. David sent for Bathsheba, slept with her, and made her pregnant. Then he summoned her husband Uriah to the palace. He told him to go home and sleep with his wife, sending a gift to his house in order to entice him there. This way, when Bathsheba's baby was born, people would believe it to be Uriah's and not David's. But for two nights, Uriah refused to sleep in his own house, saying that as his troops were camping in the open (with the Ark of the Covenant) he would not allow himself the luxury of sleeping with his wife at home; he slept at the palace gate. Even when David got him drunk on a third night he still refused to go home: he slept in the guard room instead.

So David sent him back to the troops, with a message to Joab asking for Uriah to be sent into battle in the front line, where the fighting was heaviest. Then, those around him were to retreat. David's plan was successful and Uriah was killed. David then took Bathsheba as his wife.

9. Nathan (2 Samuel 12:1-14)

God was not pleased with David's actions, and sent the prophet Nathan to tell him a parable. There were once two men in a town: a rich man with a great many sheep and cattle, and a poor man with just one little lamb. The poor man had nurtured the lamb like his own daughter – it shared his food, drank from his cup and slept in his arms. However, the rich man stole this lamb when he needed to provide food for a traveller, as he did not want to kill one of his own flock, even though he himself had many animals.

David burst out that the rich man should die for his actions, paying for the lamb four times over because of his lack of pity. Nathan said to him, "You are the man". He carried on to rebuke David, explaining that God had anointed him as king and given him everything that he could possibly want. Yet David had repaid this kindness by arranging for the death of Uriah the Hittite.

As a punishment, David and Bathsheba's son became ill and died within seven days of birth, and David's descendants would suffer public humiliation in the future [in contrast to David trying to conceal his actions]. However, God forgave David and did not kill him.

Themes

- Breaking commandments – don't commit adultery, don't kill, don't steal, don't be envious.
- Jewish religion – reference to Judaism and scripture: Bathsheba had just finished her monthly purification ritual; Uriah spoke of the Ark of the Covenant (i.e. 10 Commandments).
- David's cunning – David tried to make it seem that the child was Uriah's son, not his.
- Uriah's loyalty – Uriah refused to go home while the other troops were still sleeping outside.
- Punishment – Nathan was sent by God, to illustrate to David exactly what he had done wrong. He used a parable. As punishment, David's child died within seven days of his birth.
- Judgement – David, judge of Israel, inadvertently judged himself following Nathan's parable.

Contemporary Issues

- Private lives of world leaders. Morality and leadership.
- Was David a good or a bad king?
- Abuse of Power.
- Qualities necessary for a leader in the modern world.
- Lust.
- Forgiveness.

Revision

In which city was David?

In which city was David's army?

Compare the characters of Uriah the Hittite, and David.

What did David do wrong in this story?

Why do you think the prophet Nathan used a parable to show David's guilt?

Explain the significance of David's reaction to the parable.

Do you think that David's punishment was appropriate?

10. Solomon (1 Kings 3)

Solomon (the second son of David and Bathsheba) lived in David's city. He built a palace, the Temple, and a city wall. He made an alliance with the Pharaoh (the King of Egypt) by marrying his daughter. Although Solomon was loyal to God, he also offered sacrifices on many different altars – most notably at Gibeon, where the most famous altar was. While he was there, he had a dream in which God asked him what he wanted; Solomon asked God for the gift of wisdom so that he might be able to tell the difference between right and wrong, and be a fair ruler of his people. Thanks to this honourable request, God also granted Solomon great wealth and a long life. Solomon returned to Jerusalem and made a sacrifice to God in front of the Ark of the Covenant; then he threw a feast.

One day, two prostitutes came to the king. Both lived in the same house and had given birth within three days of each other. However, when one of the children died in the night, the first woman alleged that this had happened when the other woman had rolled over and smothered it; then she had swapped the two babies around. However, the other woman refused to admit this, saying that hers was the living baby. To settle the argument, Solomon asked for a sword and said that he would cut the living baby in half – then each mother could have a share of the child. [He knew that the true mother would not allow harm to come to her child, whereas the other woman would not be concerned.] The dishonest prostitute thought that this represented a good solution, but true mother spoke up when she saw the sword and begged Solomon to give the child to the other woman rather than murder it. By this, Solomon recognised the identity of the true mother and returned the baby to her. The people of Israel respected Solomon all the more as a result of this.

Themes

- Successful king – Solomon was a good politician (marrying the King of Egypt's daughter in order to make an alliance with the country), he was religious, he was ambitious, but he was also humble enough to ask for the gift of wisdom (he was young – perhaps in his twenties).
- Reward – because Solomon asked for something selfless (wisdom to make him a fair ruler of his people) he was rewarded with wealth and a long life, too.
- Honesty – one mother was honest, the other dishonest. Solomon was able to verify which was which.
- Solomon never intended to kill the baby – he knew that simply threatening to do so would reveal the identity of the true mother.
- Popularity – his fair judgement made the young Solomon even more popular.

Contemporary Issues

- What is true wisdom?
- Role of the monarch today.
- Leadership.

The Prophets of Baal

Elijah devised a challenge in order to prove who was the true God – Baal or the real God. (King Ahab’s wife, Queen Jezebel, had persecuted many followers of the true God, as well as introducing hundreds of prophets of Baal from her hometown of Sidon.) Elijah asked Ahab to mobilise four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and four hundred prophets of Asherah, and lead them up Mount Carmel. The prophets of Baal chose a bull, cut it in pieces, and placed it on wood on their altar in order to sacrifice it. They then had to call upon their god to light the fire for them, to prove his power. They all cried Baal’s name from morning until noon. Elijah mocked them, suggesting that their god was asleep, was relieving himself, or gone on a journey. So they continued crying out, and even cut themselves with swords and spears in their agitation. But they had still received no sign from Baal by mid afternoon.

Then Elijah repaired the altar of the Lord (which had been torn down) by using twelve stones, which symbolised the twelve tribes of Israel. He dug a trench around the altar (large enough to hold almost fourteen litres of water), then he prepared the bull on the wood. Next, he asked the people to fill four jars with water, and tip it over the sacrifice and the wood – they did this three times over, and the trench was filled with water. Then Elijah prayed to God, who sent fire which not only burnt the bull and the wood, but also the stones, as well as consuming the water in the trench! The people all cried, “The Lord – he is God”. Then Elijah ordered that the prophets of Baal should be seized, and they were put to death at the brook of Kishon.

Elijah then went to the top of Mount Carmel and sent his servant to look out towards the sea, seven times. Until the final attempt the servant saw nothing. But the seventh time, he saw a small cloud rising out of the sea, and soon there were many rain clouds, signalling the end of the drought. He sent a message to Ahab telling him to return to his palace in Jezreel before the rain could stop him. Strengthened by God’s power, Elijah ran ahead of Ahab all the way.

Themes

- Drought – the drought symbolised God’s anger; it passed only when the people turned away from Baal and acknowledged faith in the one true God.
- Faith – Elijah showed great faith in standing up to the 450 prophets of Baal, as well as challenging Ahab and Jezebel.
- Peace – Elijah did not need noise and commotion in order to call on God.
- Punishment – the prophets of Baal were put to death for their beliefs.

Contemporary Issues

- False gods/influences in today's world.
- Standing up for what you believe to be right.
- Courage.

The Still Small Voice

Queen Jezebel was angry with Elijah because he had put so many of her prophets of Baal to death. She vowed to kill him. So Elijah fled south to the land of Judah. He went into the wilderness, and prayed that God would take his life from him. He slept under a tree, and was twice woken by an angel who gave him bread and water, then told him to journey on. He travelled for 40 days and nights to Mount Horeb. Elijah then took shelter in a cave. He was angry because the people of Israel had been disobedient to God, and he was the only prophet left.

While he was there, a great and powerful wind blew past Elijah, which shattered the rocks, but God was not in the wind. Then there was an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake. After that there was fire, but God was not in the fire. But then there was a gentle whisper – and this was the voice of God. Elijah stood at the mouth of the cave and spoke with God. God told him that there were others who worshipped him as the true God, and would not turn to Baal. He then told Elijah to anoint Elisha as his successor, who would continue to convey God's message to the people. He promised that there were at least seven thousand people in Israel who were still loyal to him.

Themes

- Escape – Elijah was fleeing from Queen Jezebel.
- The nature of God – the powers of nature bombarded the mountain where Elijah was sheltering, but the true God was to be found in the peace of the gentle whisper of a voice.
- The forgiveness of God – despite the fact that Elijah had run away to hide, God sought him out, reassured him and looked after him.
- Mountains – Moses and Elijah both talked to God on holy mountains.
- Biblical numbers – Moses spent 40 years in the wilderness; Elijah travelled for 40 days; Jesus will fast in the wilderness for 40 days.

Contemporary Issues

- Often, one finds what one is really looking for in the least predictable places.

New Testament Set Texts

GROUP 1: JESUS' TEACHING

Jesus and the Outcasts

12. Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)

When Jesus was travelling through Jericho, a man named Zacchaeus (who was a chief tax collector, and a Jew) wanted to catch a glimpse of him. However, he was not tall enough to be able to see over the crowd's heads, so he climbed a sycamore tree in order to get a better view. When Jesus passed by, he called Zacchaeus down from the tree and told him that he was going to be a guest in his house. The people were surprised that Jesus wanted to visit the house of a sinner, but it had a great effect on Zacchaeus himself – he promised to give half of his possessions to the poor, and to pay back four times what he owed to anyone whom he had cheated. Jesus concluded the incident by saying that salvation had come to Zacchaeus' house that day. Jesus said that the Son of Man had come to seek and to save what was lost.

13. The Woman and Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50)

When Jesus was eating a meal in Simon the Pharisee's house, a woman (who had led a sinful life) burst into the house, wet Jesus' feet with her tears then dried them with her hair. She then kissed his feet, and broke an alabaster flask of perfume over them. Simon was surprised; he felt that if Jesus really was a prophet then he should have known that the woman was a sinner, and wouldn't have let her touch him. But Jesus told a parable about a man who was owed money by two different people – one owed him five hundred denarii, the other fifty. He forgave them both their debts. Jesus asked Simon which of the two debtors would love the money lender the most; Simon replied (correctly) that it was the one who had the bigger debt forgiven. Jesus said that because the woman had shown such great love and care towards him (in contrast to the care shown by Simon himself) that her many sins were forgiven. The other people questioned amongst themselves who Jesus could be, as only God could forgive sins; Jesus said to the woman that her faith had saved her.

Themes

- Clean/Unclean – at that time, you could become “unclean” through sin, through failing to follow Jewish rituals and laws, or even by coming into contact with someone or something that was already classed as being unclean. The greater the extent to which someone was considered unclean, the less likely they were to be allowed into the temple in order to make themselves clean again. It was a vicious circle. Jesus was giving people a second chance, bypassing the power of the temple, and leading them directly to God.
- Show that you mean it – It isn’t enough simply to *say* that you are sorry, but you must prove that you mean it by your actions, and earn your forgiveness.
- Tax collector – tax collectors were outcasts and they used their positions to cheat people. They worked for the Roman government and were considered unclean, representing a shady part of ‘the establishment’.
- Faith and Forgiveness – because she showed such an abundance of faith and love at Simon’s house, Jesus forgave the woman’s sins. The way to God is through genuine faith, rather than superficial actions which are not sincerely meant. And anyone – even the greatest of sinners – can grow close to God in this way, no matter what they have done in the past.
- The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost
People were surprised that Jesus would want to associate with outcasts and sinners, but he said that his mission was towards those who were lost, not those who knew the way. He came to minister to precisely those outcasts who could not get help anywhere else, and who needed his aid in order to find God.

Contemporary Issues

- Outcasts in today’s society. Who are they?
- Prejudices in the modern world.
- Supporting charities.
- Being a “good Christian” – even towards those you dislike.
- Forgiveness.
- Priorities, commitments and values.
- Is true faith about rituals, ceremonies and rules? Or sincere belief and a wish to please God?

Revision

These two stories are about people who were rejected by society. What made them outcasts?

Zacchaeus:

The woman in Simon the Pharisee's house:

Was simply "saying sorry" enough? Explain – give examples.

Why were the Jewish authorities critical of Jesus' attitude towards outcasts?

List three or four people/groups that might be considered to be outcasts now, and explain why:

14. The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

A lawyer questioned Jesus over what he must do in order to inherit eternal life – he wanted to test him. Jesus asked him what was written in the law, and he replied that one must love the Lord with all one’s heart, soul, strength and mind; and love one’s neighbour as oneself. Jesus told him that he was correct (“do this and you will live”). The lawyer then asked “who is my neighbour?” so Jesus told the following parable:

There was a man travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho. He was robbed and abandoned by the roadside. A priest travelled along the road, but passed by on the other side. So did a Levite. But a Samaritan went to his aid, bound his wounds (pouring oil and wine on them) and transported him to an inn on his own donkey. There, he paid two denarii and asked them to care for the man, promising to pay the remainder if anything extra was spent.

Jesus questioned the lawyer, asking him which person represented the man’s neighbour. The lawyer answered correctly that it was the Samaritan. Jesus then commissioned him, “Go and do likewise”.

Themes

- A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It has a moral, and is used for teaching. It is not literally true (allegory). It is designed to make people think, then pass judgement on their own lives.
- Eternal life – i.e. salvation, being judged well by God. Initially, Jesus pointed the lawyer towards what the Jewish law dictated. This shows that the law was still important.
- Trap – the lawyer was trying to test Jesus. Jesus answered with questions. By doing this, Jesus ensured that he couldn’t be accused of anything bad. With the help of the parable, the lawyer answered his own question correctly.
- Neighbour – The Samaritan (from a different country, and someone whom the Jews would have considered unclean, an outcast, and avoided) seems the least likely person to come to the man’s aid when compared to the religious priest and Levite. This illustrates that one’s neighbour is not dictated by religion, nationality, family, or anything else for that matter, but simply by the fact that they are there. In Jesus’ church, anyone can be a neighbour to anyone else.

Contemporary Issues

- Charitable work.
- Prejudice and discrimination.
- Ways that one could be a “good Samaritan” in the twenty first century.
- Judging others before you know them.

15. The Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32)

There was a man who had two sons. The younger son asked for his share of the inheritance, gathered up his belongings, and went to live in a far away country. However, he was foolish with his money and squandered it all. A famine then overcame the country where he was living and he took a job feeding pigs. He would happily have eaten the pigs' food, but nobody gave him anything. He thought that even his father's servants were treated better than him, so resolved to return to his family and offer himself as a slave, as he was ashamed of what he had done and felt that he was not worthy to be called his father's son.

But his father saw him approaching when he was still a way off, and ran and embraced him. The son apologised to his father, but the father clothed him in the best robe, put a ring on his finger, shoes on his feet, and ordered his servants to kill the fatted calf so that they could all celebrate his son's homecoming. The other son (who was coming home from the field) heard of this and refused to go into the house, complaining to his father that despite his many years of faithful service, he had never been given a party – but that the rebellious son, who had wasted the family money, was being given a great feast. The father said to his elder son that he was always with him and that they shared their possessions, but that the younger son had been dead but was now alive again, had been lost but was now found – and that this called for a celebration.

Themes

- Trust – the father trusted his younger son to use his inheritance wisely. Was the father too trusting?
- Foolishness and Jealousy – the younger son was foolish and squandered his inheritance. The elder son was jealous when his brother was welcomed back home with a great feast.
- The younger son sank as low as he could get – he even fed the pigs (unclean).
- Forgiveness – the father forgave his son, throwing a party in order to welcome him home. He was still his son, and he loved him as such, no matter what he had done.
- Remorse – the younger son was sorry for what he had done, but before he had time to express this, his father had already welcomed him back with open arms.
- God's Love – the father represents God and, like the father's love, God's love is unconditional, like parents' love for their children.
- Dead but now alive, lost and now found – the younger son was spiritually dead and lost, and he would have had no contact with his family since leaving for the far away country.

Contemporary Issues

- Forgiveness – what is it? It is always the right thing to do? When is it hard to do?
- Jealousy.
- Conflict within families.

16. The Sower (Luke 8:4-8; 11-15)

A large crowd gathered, and Jesus told a parable about a farmer who sowed seed. Some fell on the path and was trampled on and eaten by birds. Some fell on rock and could not take root because there was no moisture. Some fell among thorns and was choked by them. And some fell on good soil so was able to grow – a hundred times more than was sown. And Jesus concluded by saying, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear”.

Jesus explained that the seed represented the word of God. The seed which fell on the path was like those who heard the word, but it was then taken away from them by the devil so they couldn't be saved. The seed which fell on rock represented those who received the word with joy, and believed for a while, but they turned away when the going got tough. The seed which fell among thorns was like those who heard the word, but were then distracted by the cares, riches and pleasures of the world. And the seed which fell on good ground represented those who heard the word, took it to heart, and persevered.

Themes

- Seed – this represents the word of God. All the seed is the same, but its fate depends on where it is sown. In the same way, God's word is available to everyone, but people receive it (or not) in different ways.
- Persevere and don't give up – everyone can hear the word, but not all persevere, take it to heart and act on it.

Contemporary Issues

- In what ways are we distracted by our worldly cares, so forget to do what is right, in our preoccupation with less important issues?
- Does God still speak to people today?
- Are people today like the path, the rock, the thorns or the good soil?

Revision

Between which two places was the man travelling, when the good Samaritan helped him?

Why might people hearing this story at the time have been shocked?

Explain the meaning of the parable.

Why do you think that the elder brother was annoyed with his younger brother when he got home, in the parable of the lost son? Can you understand his point of view?

Why do you think that the parable has been given the title 'the **lost** son'? What do you think 'lost' means in this context?

What does the parable teach about Jesus, and his attitude towards those who ask for forgiveness?

17. The Paralysed Man (Mark 2:1-12)

When Jesus was in Capernaum, many people gathered in order to hear him speak. Four men brought a paralysed man to him, but they were unable to get near because of the size of the crowd. So they climbed onto the roof of the house, made an opening, and let the paralysed man down through this on his mat. Jesus was so impressed by their faith that he told the paralysed man that his sins were forgiven. But some teachers of the law questioned how Jesus was able to do this; this was blasphemy as only God could forgive sins. Jesus asked what was easier: to forgive sins or to make the paralysed man walk. So, to prove the Son of Man's authority on earth, Jesus commanded the paralysed man to stand up, pick up his stretcher and walk. When he did so, everyone was amazed by the miracle that they had witnessed, and they praised God saying that they had never seen anything like it.

Themes

- A miracle is something that is scientifically impossible, but happens anyway.
- Great crowd – many people wanted to hear Jesus' teaching.
- Illness – people in Jesus' day believed that illness was caused by sin, and so they would have perceived the paralysed man not only as a cripple, but also as a sinner. The sin kept him apart from God. Most would have refused to associate with him at all.
- Faith – it was because of the strong faith held by the man and his friends that Jesus forgave the paralytic's sins.
- Miracle – when the people wouldn't believe his authority to forgive sins, Jesus performed a miraculous deed, by commanding the paralysed man to stand up, pick up his stretcher, and walk. They could hardly doubt him then!
- Proof – people needed to see proof before they would believe.
- Which was actually the greatest miracle though? – the people around were most impressed by the healing, but surely forgiving sins is even more significant? After all it was the sin, not the paralysis, which separated the man from God.

Contemporary Issues

- Forgiveness.
- Faith.
- Forgiveness through faith?
- Seeing is believing?

18. The Calming of the Storm (Mark 4:35-41)

Jesus had been teaching by a lake. When evening came, he decided that he and his disciples should cross over to the other side, leaving the crowd behind. His disciples took him in the boat just as he was, and there were other boats with him. However, a storm blew up; waves broke over the side of the boat and it was nearly swamped. Jesus was asleep on a cushion in the stern. His disciples woke him up and challenged him: “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”. Jesus rebuked the wind and ordered the waves to be still – and everything became calm. He then questioned his disciples, asking them why they were so frightened. He enquired, “Do you still have no faith?”. The disciples were terrified and questioned amongst themselves who Jesus could be, because even the wind and the waves obeyed him.

Themes

- Power over the wind and the waves – mere humans have no control over these.
- Confidence of Jesus – in contrast to the disciples’ fright.
- The disciples still didn’t understand – even after Jesus had performed the miracle and calmed the storm, they were terrified and discussed with each other who Jesus could possibly be.

Contemporary Issues

- Faith.
- The power of the forces of nature compared to the power of God.
- Sometimes things are hard to understand/believe.

Revision

What is a miracle?

What did Jesus show about himself when he forgave and healed the paralysed man?

Why do you think that Jesus forgave the man's sins before healing him?

In the second miracle, what did Jesus mean when he asked the disciples whether they still had no faith?

Should we still expect miracles like these to happen today? Explain your thoughts briefly.

19. The Rich Young Man (Mark 10:17-31)

A man ran up to Jesus, calling him “Good Teacher”, and asked him what he had to do in order to inherit eternal life. Jesus replied that only God was good, and then quoted from the Ten Commandments. The man replied that he had kept these all of his life. So Jesus gave him the most difficult of instructions – in order to have treasure in heaven, he had to sell all he had and give the money to the poor. But the man was too attached to his many earthly possessions and went away from Jesus upset, unable to fulfil this command. And Jesus felt sorry for him. He then explained how hard it would be for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven (easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle) and that following God would result in persecution, hardship and a need to leave family and possessions behind – but the eventual rewards would outweigh this. “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Themes

- Wealth – in the first century, this was a status symbol. People believed that it was a reward for living a good life, and would make it easier for you to get to heaven.
- Keep the commandments – this is part of being a good follower of Jesus.
- There’s more to it than simply commandments, though... – to be a true follower of Jesus required a lifestyle change. Keeping the commandments was a good start, but in order to follow Jesus most effectively, sacrifices had to be made – actions as well as words. Here, it involved the sacrifice of wealth and possessions, in the hope of a future reward in heaven.
- It’s not meant to be easy – nobody ever said that following Jesus would be a picnic! The sacrifices which the followers had to make were not meant to be simple – they gave up important parts of their lives in order to pursue what they believed to be right. After all, Jesus’ life was not an easy one either...

Contemporary Issues

- Danger of wealth – then and now.
- Necessity of sacrifice in order to follow one’s beliefs.
- Challenges.

Revision

What did the rich young man mean when he talked about “eternal life”?

What did Jesus mean when he referred to “treasure in heaven”?

Why did Jesus tell the man to sell his possessions and give the money to the poor? Why wasn't it enough for him simply to follow the commandments?

What does this story teach about Jesus?

Give one or two examples of people who have been prepared to suffer for their beliefs.

Can rich people go to heaven? Briefly explain your thoughts.

20. The Birth of Jesus (Matthew 1:18-25)

Mary was engaged to be married to Joseph, but before the time of their marriage she found that she was pregnant through the Holy Spirit. As an upright man, and in a wish to spare Mary any kind of public disgrace, Joseph planned to divorce her quietly. However, an angel appeared to him in a dream, addressing him as “Joseph son of David”. The angel explained the matter to Joseph, saying that Mary was pregnant from the Holy Spirit and that she would give birth to a son. He was to be called Jesus, because he would save people from their sins. This was to fulfil the prophecy [of Isaiah] that a virgin would conceive, give birth to a son, and that he would be called Immanuel (which means “God with us”). When Joseph woke up he followed the angel’s instructions and married Mary. And Mary and Joseph did not have intercourse until after Mary had given birth to this son, whom they called Jesus.

Themes

- Jesus – means “The Lord Saves” or “The Lord Heals”: an appropriate name for the Messiah.
- Prophecy – Jesus’ birth is predicted by the prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament, rooting him firmly within Jewish scriptures.
- King David – Joseph (and therefore Jesus) is a member of the Davidic line, like many Israelite rulers in the past. Jews believed that the long-awaited Messiah would be descended from the great Old Testament king, David.
- Miraculous birth – the fact that Mary and Joseph did not sleep together until after Jesus’ birth is emphasised.
- Danger of having a child outside marriage – Mary could have been stoned to death for having a child without first being married.
- Joseph needs to be convinced – Joseph is described as being an “upright man”, and so it is unlikely that he would have wanted to adopt a child with an “unknown” father. He only agrees after an angel appears to him in a dream.

Contemporary Issues

- Doing the right thing, even if this is difficult.
- Following instructions.
- Radical/extreme views.

Revision

What is the significance of Mary’s son being given the name “Jesus”?

Name two ways in which Jesus is linked, in this birth narrative, to Old Testament scriptures.

Explain what this account teaches about the character of Joseph.

The fact that Mary could have been put to death simply for having a child before getting married seems highly extreme to us in the twenty-first century. Outline and explain a couple of views held nowadays (perhaps those held by “extremist” groups) that you consider to be equally radical.

21. The Temptations (Luke 4:1-13)

Straight after Jesus' baptism in the River Jordan (by John the Baptist) he was led out into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit, and fasted for forty days. Whilst in the wilderness, he was tempted by the devil:

Firstly, the devil encouraged him to turn a stone into bread in order to satisfy his hunger, but Jesus replied that scripture said man did not live on bread alone.

Secondly, the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and promised Jesus power and authority over them in return for worshipping him, but Christ replied that scripture said that one must worship the Lord God, and serve only him.

Thirdly, the devil tried to persuade Jesus to throw himself off the highest pinnacle of the temple so that angels would come to his rescue (as it said in scripture), but Jesus replied that one must not tempt God.

Themes

- Wilderness, fasting and temptation – Jesus is preparing himself for his forthcoming mission by spending time in the wilderness fasting, praying to God and focusing his mind.
- Hunger – bread can satisfy human hunger, but Jesus came to relieve more than mere human cravings. You need more than simply bread in order to survive – what about the spiritual side of life? Jesus is using a metaphor.
- Power – Jesus knows that, as God, he already has power over all – the devil couldn't offer him anything that he didn't have already.
- Scripture – Jesus refers to Old Testament scripture in his responses in order to back himself up. Also note 40 days in the wilderness (Moses spent 40 years) and reference to the Temple.
- Temple – to jump off this and survive would have been an impressive feat, but Jesus was not going to submit to the devil and prove this. Later on, the temple in Jerusalem was huge: the platform on which it was built was the size of twenty football pitches, and the height upwards from its foundations was around fifty metres. It took forty years to build, and at the end of this time 38,000 workers were made redundant. It had ten bronze-clad gates, each of which required twenty men in order to be opened or closed. It was a massive, magnificent building, and represented Jewish power and authority.
- Jesus did not give in – giving in would have been an easy (and more comfortable) “way out” for Jesus. However, he didn't do so because he knew that he had such an important role ahead of him – his life must be dictated by God, not by the devil. All humans get tempted (and give in); to resist the devil's temptations shows that Jesus was divine.

Contemporary Issues

- Temptation in the world, and in school.
- Is it right to boast or show off if you have great skills in a particular area?

22. The Call of the Disciples (Luke 5:1-11)

When Jesus was by Lake Gennesaret, he got into Simon Peter's boat, sailed a little way from the shore, and taught a crowd of people from there. When he had finished, he told Simon Peter to sail into deeper water and to let down the nets. Simon Peter replied that he had worked hard all night and had caught nothing, but that he would do as Jesus asked. So many fish were caught that the nets were about to break. The catch was loaded into two boats – both of which began to sink under the weight. Simon Peter saw what had happened, fell at Jesus' feet, and confessed that he was a sinner, asking Jesus to depart. But Jesus called Simon Peter to follow him, along with his co-workers James and John (sons of Zebedee). So when they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed Jesus. He said that from then on, they would "fish for people".

Themes

- Teaching – Jesus' ministry involved teaching the people. In this particular instance, there were so many people on the shore who wanted to hear Jesus that he got into a boat and taught them from there.
- Miracle – Simon Peter (later called Peter) earned his money as a fisherman – he had been fishing all night, and caught nothing. When Jesus told him to cast his nets, he caught so many fish that the nets tore, and the weight of them almost sank two boats!
- Proof – this miracle convinced Simon Peter, James and John of Jesus' greatness, and they left everything behind in order to follow him.

Contemporary Issues

- Change of lifestyle in order to follow what one truly believes to be right.

Revision

Why were Simon Peter and his companions reluctant to let down their nets?

Why did Simon Peter fall at Jesus' feet and confess that was a sinner?

What is the significance of Simon Peter and his companions leaving everything behind in order to follow Jesus?

Should people in the twenty first century be prepared to make sacrifices in order to follow their beliefs? Explain your answer.

23. Peter's Declaration (Mark 8:27-33)

Jesus and his disciples were walking near Caesarea Philippi and he asked them who people said he was. They told him some thought that he was John the Baptist, some thought that he was Elijah, and others thought that he was one of the prophets. He then asked them directly who they thought he was. Peter responded that he was the Messiah. Jesus told them not to tell anyone about him, and continued that the Son of Man would have to undergo suffering and even death, but that he would rise on the third day. Peter rebuked Jesus [told him off] for saying this, but Jesus then rebuked Peter, saying "Get behind me, Satan". Jesus explained that Peter was simply concentrating on human concerns, and not thinking of the concerns of God.

Themes

- Who do people say I am? – Identity – Jesus knows full well who he is, but he wants to know what the people at large think about him.
- Prophets – people think that Jesus is one of the Jewish prophets. They don't realise his true identity, and even if they did they wouldn't understand the significance of this.
- Even the disciples don't understand – although Peter can give the correct title for Jesus ("Messiah") he shows that doesn't really understand what this means, and is told to keep quiet.

Contemporary Issues

- Hopes/expectations for the future.
- Difficulties that the future holds.
- How other people see you.

24. The Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-13)

Jesus went to the top of a high mountain with Peter, James and John, and he was transfigured in front of their eyes. His clothes turned glistening white – so white that it would have been impossible to bleach them such a pure colour. Moses and Elijah also appeared, and talked with Jesus. In his fright at the vision, Peter offered to make three tents – one for Moses, one for Elijah and one for Jesus. A cloud then rested over them, and God’s voice spoke out of it. He said, “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him”. The vision then passed, and the disciples were left alone with Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain Jesus told them not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead – but they did not understand what he meant when he talked of rising from the dead. Jesus then explained that Elijah the prophet had come first, as the teachers of the law had said, in order to restore all things. He said that, in keeping with the scriptures, the Son of Man would now have to suffer much and be rejected.

Themes

- Supernatural sight – as part of an amazing vision, Jesus’ clothes turned whiter than they could have been bleached by any earthly person.
- Links to Jewish history – Elijah and Moses are present, and Jesus refers both to the teachers of the law and to the scripture.
- Voice of God – God spoke out of the cloud and confirmed the identity and power of Jesus (like at the moment of his baptism in the River Jordan).
- Disciples still didn’t understand – Peter, James and John didn’t understand what was going on at the transfiguration. Neither did they know what Jesus meant when he talked of rising from the dead. This is why they were instructed to tell no one – if they themselves didn’t understand then people at large would have no chance!

Contemporary Issues

- Jesus’ identity and message in the twenty first century.
- Visions – do they happen today?
- How does God speak to his people today?
- What makes us sit up and listen?
- Difficulties of receiving information ‘in confidence’, and keeping a secret.

Revision

Why was Jesus concerned with who people thought he was?

Who was the “Son of Man”? Why did he use this title?

Why do you think that Jesus was so stern with Peter in the first story? Why might he want his true identity to be kept secret?

What is the significance of Moses and Elijah appearing on the mountain?

Why do you think that Jesus talked so much about what was going to happen to him?

25. The Sentence, Crucifixion and Burial (Mark 15:6-47)

Jesus was brought before the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate. It was the time of the Passover, and the Jews traditionally released one prisoner as part of the festival. But the crowds requested the release of Barabbas (a murderer), clamouring for the crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus was beaten and handed over to soldiers in order to be crucified, and they dressed him in a purple cloak, put a crown of thorns on his head, and mocked him shouting “Hail, king of the Jews”. After this, Simon of Cyrene was made to carry the cross to Golgotha (which means the place of a skull) for him. When they arrived, Jesus refused to drink wine mixed with myrrh. The guards then cast lots for his clothes, and at the third hour, they crucified Jesus. There was an inscription attached to his cross which read ‘The King of the Jews’. Two robbers were crucified with him – one on either side. Passers-by jeered at him, and the chief priests mocked Jesus while he was hanging on the cross. At the ninth hour, Jesus called out “My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?” and some bystanders thought that he was calling Elijah. He was offered a sponge soaked in vinegar to drink, then uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last.

At that time, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, and the centurion who was standing guard over Jesus proclaimed “Surely this man was the Son of God”. Some female followers of Jesus were present at his crucifixion, witnessing it from a distance – Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. Because it was Preparation Day (the day before the Sabbath), when evening came Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate to ask for Jesus’ body. The centurion confirmed that Jesus had died, so Pilate agreed to this request. Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus’ body, wrapped it in linen, and placed it in a tomb.

Themes

- By his crucifixion, Jesus acts as a sacrifice for all people’s sins.
- Humiliation – Jesus felt rejected, and he was jeered at by the priests and the bystanders.
- Abandoned – Jesus even cried out that he had been abandoned by God.
- Crucifixion – this represented an incredibly painful and long-drawn-out death.
- Things are beginning to change – Jesus’ female (not male) followers witness the crucifixion, and a Roman centurion is the first to acknowledge Jesus’ true identity.
- Curtain in the temple – previously God was believed to be behind the curtain and almost unreachable; now he is everywhere.
- Judaism is still important though – the body must be buried before the Sabbath.

Contemporary Issues

- Suffering for a belief.
- What do we need to be saved from in this day and age?
- Is there anyone/anything that you would be prepared to die for?

Revision

Which Jewish festival was being celebrated at the time of Jesus' death?

Who sentenced Jesus to death (name and position)?

Who was released instead of Jesus (name and crime committed)?

Who carried Jesus' cross for him?

What was written on the notice nailed to Jesus' cross?

Explain the part played by Joseph of Arimathea, in the burial of Jesus

What significance does Jesus' crucifixion hold for Christians today?

26. The Resurrection (John 20:1-29)

Mary Magdalene went to Jesus' tomb early in the morning on the first day of the week, and found that the stone over its entrance had been rolled away. She ran to tell Simon Peter, and the disciple whom Jesus loved most, and they ran back to the tomb with her in order to investigate. The other disciple arrived first but didn't go in; he bent over and looked in, and saw the strips of linen lying there. Simon Peter then went into the tomb and saw the linen, and also the burial cloth that had been folded neatly. The other disciple then also went inside, and believed. However, they still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead. The disciples went back to their homes leaving Mary weeping outside the tomb. When she looked in, she saw two angels in white, sitting where Jesus' body had been laid. They asked her why she was crying. She replied that Jesus' body had been taken away, and she didn't know where it had been put. Mary then turned around to see Jesus himself (whom at first she believed to be the gardener). Mary asked him if he had taken the body, but Jesus called her by name – “Mary” – and she suddenly recognised his true identity. Then Jesus sent her to tell the disciples “I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God”.

On the evening of the first day of the week, the disciples were together in a room and the door was locked (because they were afraid of the Jews). Jesus appeared to them, saying “Peace be with you”. He showed them his hands and his side, breathed on them and said “Receive the Holy Spirit” – giving them power to forgive sins. Thomas was not with them, and he refused to believe until he had seen Jesus' wounds with his own eyes, and touched them with his own hands. A week later, Jesus appeared to the disciples again – and this time Thomas was present. Thomas was able to touch Jesus' wounds and he believed. Jesus said “Because you have seen me you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”.

Themes

- Resurrection – as he had predicted, Jesus rose from the dead.
- Power – Jesus appeared first to a woman – Mary – and then made himself known to his disciples. He had shown power over all human constraints – even death.
- Proof – the disciples saw the risen Jesus with their own eyes, and believed.
- Doubt – it's human to doubt (like Thomas); central to the Christian faith is the fact that you might not be able to see visual proof, but you believe anyway.

Contemporary Issues

- Life after death and attitudes to death.
- Do you think that Jesus really did rise from the dead?
- Was this “the most important event of all time”?
- How important is the resurrection story for Christians, and why?

