

DAY  
11  
JAN

## New Year's Resolutions

I belong to a squash club, which is also a gym. Each year on 1 January they bring in extra gym equipment. The place is packed out. By about 7 January, they move all the extra equipment out again, as most people have given up their New Year's resolution, and the club returns to normal!

- Get fit
- Lose weight
- Reduce drinking
- Stop smoking
- Get out of debt

There is nothing wrong with making these common New Year's resolutions. Of course, all of us make resolutions that we fail to keep.

The good news is that each year is an *opportunity* for a fresh start. But then so is each week. Every Sunday is the first day of the week – a new beginning. Actually, every day is an opportunity for a new beginning.

The first three words in the Bible are, 'In *the beginning*...' (Genesis 1:1). Each of the passages for today tells us something about new beginnings and new opportunities, and suggests some possible New Year's resolutions.

## READING FROM PSALMS Psalm 1:1–6

<sup>1</sup>Blessed is the one  
who does not walk in step with the  
wicked  
or stand in the way that sinners take  
or sit in the company of mockers,  
<sup>2</sup>but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and who meditates on his law day and  
night.  
<sup>3</sup>That person is like a tree planted by  
streams of water,  
which yields its fruit in season  
and whose leaf does not wither –  
whatever they do prospers.

<sup>4</sup>Not so the wicked!  
They are like chaff  
that the wind blows away.  
<sup>5</sup>Therefore the wicked will not stand  
in the judgment,  
nor sinners in the assembly of the  
righteous.

<sup>6</sup>For the LORD watches over the way of the  
righteous,  
but the way of the wicked leads to  
destruction.

## 'Delight' in the Bible

If you are beginning the challenge to read the *Bible in One Year*, this psalm has encouraging words for you.

The promise is that if you 'delight' in God's word and 'meditate' on Scripture 'day and night' (v.2), your life will be blessed. *Happiness* comes from what *happens* to you. *Blessing* is what happens to you through knowing God and meditating on his words.

God promises you *fruitfulness* ('which yields its fruit in season', v.3b), *vitality* ('whose leaves do not wither', v.3c) and *prosperity* ('whatever they do prospers', v.3d), though not necessarily material prosperity!

This message is backed up by a glance across at the ultimate fate of 'the wicked'. The psalmist does not try to pretend that the wicked don't sometimes prosper. He simply reminds us of the transitory nature of that prosperity – 'they are like chaff that the wind blows away ... [they] will perish' (vv.4, 6).

The key to lasting – and ultimately eternal – fruitfulness and vitality lies in your relationship with God. As you seek to follow 'the way of the righteous', you are assured that the Lord himself will watch over you (v.6).

**Lord, thank you for your wonderful promises as I resolve to make a regular habit of delighting in your word and meditating on it.**

## NEW TESTAMENT READING Matthew 1:1–25

**The Genealogy of Jesus the Messiah**

**1** This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham:

- <sup>2</sup> Abraham was the father of Isaac,  
Isaac the father of Jacob,  
Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,  
<sup>3</sup> Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,  
Perez the father of Hezron,  
Hezron the father of Ram,  
<sup>4</sup> Ram the father of Amminadab,  
Amminadab the father of Nahshon,  
Nahshon the father of Salmon,  
<sup>5</sup> Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,  
Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,  
Obed the father of Jesse,  
<sup>6</sup> and Jesse the father of King David.

- David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,  
<sup>7</sup> Solomon the father of Rehoboam,  
Rehoboam the father of Abijah,  
Abijah the father of Asa,  
<sup>8</sup> Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,  
Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,  
Jehoram the father of Uzziah,  
<sup>9</sup> Uzziah the father of Jotham,  
Jotham the father of Ahaz,  
Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,  
<sup>10</sup> Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,  
Manasseh the father of Amon,  
Amon the father of Josiah,  
<sup>11</sup> and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.  
<sup>12</sup> After the exile to Babylon:  
Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,  
Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,  
<sup>13</sup> Zerubbabel the father of Abihud,

- Abihud the father of Eliakim,  
Eliakim the father of Azor,  
<sup>14</sup> Azor the father of Zadok,  
Zadok the father of Akim,  
Akim the father of Elihud,  
<sup>15</sup> Elihud the father of Eleazar,  
Eleazar the father of Matthan,  
Matthan the father of Jacob,  
<sup>16</sup> and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.

<sup>17</sup> Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.

**Joseph Accepts Jesus as His Son**

<sup>18</sup> This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: his mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

<sup>20</sup> But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.'

<sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: <sup>23</sup> 'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' (which means 'God with us').

<sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. <sup>25</sup> But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

**Focus on Jesus**

Resolve to focus your life on Jesus. The Bible is all about Jesus. The New Testament opens with his family tree.

As we read the list of Jesus' ancestors it is encouraging to see that they include Tamar (the adulteress), Rahab (the sex worker), Ruth (the non-Jewish Moabite), Solomon (who was conceived after King David's adulterous affair with Bathsheba), as well as many others. Thankfully, God uses sinful human beings and, therefore, can use us. Whatever your past, however broken your life may seem right now, God can use you to do something great with your life.

God can use you  
to do something  
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life.

The very name 'Jesus' means, 'he will save his people from their sins' (v.21). Every time we use the name Jesus it reminds us that our greatest need is not for happiness or contentment (although these may be by-products). Our greatest need, as with Jesus' ancestors, is for forgiveness. Therefore, we need a Saviour.

The beginning of Matthew shows us that Jesus is the completion of all that is recorded in the Old Testament:

- **Jesus is the climax of history**

Matthew opens his Gospel by summarising the Old Testament story in terms of Jesus' ancestry (vv.1–17). The Old Testament tells the story that Jesus completes. Matthew sets out the history of the people of God in terms of three equal periods: fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile and fourteen from the exile to Christ (v.17).

In the genealogy, biological generations are skipped over (as was quite common in Old Testament family trees). Matthew was pointing out that Old Testament history falls into three approximately equal spans of time between crucial events. Jesus is the end of the line as far as the Old Testament story goes – the climax has been reached.

- **In Jesus, all the promises of God are fulfilled**

Jesus is not only the completion of the Old Testament story at a historical level, he is also the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies and all of God's promises.

Matthew concludes each of five scenes from the conception, birth and early childhood of Jesus by quoting the Hebrew Scriptures that have been 'fulfilled' by the events described (Matthew 1:22–3; 2:5–6, 17–18, 23; 4:14–16).

The first one is the fulfilment in the conception of Jesus: 'All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us")' (1:22–3).

All of history, prophecy and promise, is completed in Jesus. Your whole life is completed in Jesus. Every part of your life: your work, family, relationships, friends, memories and dreams are completed in Jesus.

**Your whole life is completed in Jesus.**

**Lord, thank you for this promise for the new year – that, in Jesus, you are with me. Help me to focus my life on you in the year ahead.**

## OLD TESTAMENT READING Genesis 1:1–2:17

### The Beginning

**1** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup>Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

<sup>3</sup>And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. <sup>4</sup>God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.

<sup>5</sup>God called the light 'day', and the darkness he called 'night'. And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

<sup>6</sup> And God said, 'Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.'

<sup>7</sup>So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. <sup>8</sup>God called the

vault 'sky'. And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

<sup>9</sup>And God said, 'Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.' And it was so. <sup>10</sup>God called the dry ground 'land', and the gathered waters he called 'seas'. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>11</sup>Then God said, 'Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.' And it was so. <sup>12</sup>The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. <sup>13</sup>And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

<sup>14</sup>And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, <sup>15</sup>and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.’ And it was so. <sup>16</sup>God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. <sup>17</sup>God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, <sup>18</sup>to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. <sup>19</sup>And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

<sup>20</sup>And God said, ‘Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.’ <sup>21</sup>So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. <sup>22</sup>God blessed them and said, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.’ <sup>23</sup>And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

<sup>24</sup>And God said, ‘Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.’ And it was so. <sup>25</sup>God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>26</sup>Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’

<sup>27</sup>So God created mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup>God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over

every living creature that moves on the ground.’

<sup>29</sup>Then God said, ‘I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. <sup>30</sup>And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.’ And it was so.

<sup>31</sup>God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

**2** Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

<sup>2</sup>By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. <sup>3</sup>Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

### Adam and Eve

<sup>4</sup>This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.

<sup>5</sup>Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, <sup>6</sup>but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. <sup>7</sup>Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

<sup>8</sup>Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. <sup>9</sup>The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

<sup>10</sup>A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. <sup>11</sup>The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. <sup>12</sup>(The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) <sup>13</sup>The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land

of Cush. <sup>14</sup>The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

<sup>15</sup>The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care

of it. <sup>16</sup>And the LORD God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; <sup>17</sup>but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.'

## Enjoy God's creation

You are not here by chance. This universe is God's creation. You are made in his image.

Genesis gives an account of the beginning of the universe. It goes way beyond the scientific theories of '*how?*' and '*when?*' It answers the questions of '*who?*' and '*why?*' Scientific theories do not prove or disprove this explanation. Rather, they are complementary.

Reading this passage through the lens of the New Testament we see the whole Trinity involved in creation. The Hebrew noun for God (*Elohim*) is a plural noun. The Holy Spirit was involved in creation (1:2). It was through Jesus that creation came into being: 'And God said...' (v.3a). Jesus is God's Word and through him the universe was created (see John 1:1–3).

In the midst of this account of the creation, there is an amazing throwaway line showing the immense power of God: '*He also made the stars*' (Genesis 1:16). We now know there are probably between 100 and 400 billion stars in our galaxy alone, and our galaxy is but one of around 100 billion galaxies. He made them all, *just like that!*

The pinnacle of his creation was human beings. You are made in the image of God (v.27). If we want to know what God is like, it is men and women together ('male and female', v.27b) who reflect his image.

Every human being is created in his image and should be treated with dignity, respect and love. Your ability to communicate with God is a reflection of the fact that you are made in his image.

God approves of all that he created. He said, 'It is good.' Many people feel worthless, insecure and of no value. But God did not create rubbish. God created you. He loves you and approves of you. He may not approve of everything you do, but he loves you unconditionally, wholeheartedly and continually.

We see in this passage that *work* is a *blessing*: 'The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden *to work it and take care of it*' (2:15). Work is part of God's good creation – not a result of the fall. This passage also reminds us that taking care of the environment is right at the heart of God's plan for human beings.

Rest is not an optional extra. It is what God did ('he rested', v.2). These days of rest are days of special blessing: 'God blessed the seventh day and made it holy' (v.3). Holidays are holy days. They point to the fact that life is primarily about *being* rather than doing. Don't feel guilty about taking time off. Holidays are good in themselves. They are also a time to recharge spiritually.

Don't work too hard. God took time to rest and enjoy what he had made. You are not supposed to work constantly. You are created with a need for relaxation and rest – taking the time to enjoy your work and the fruit of your work.

In Genesis 2:16–17 we see that God gave Adam and Eve far-reaching *permission* ('you are free to eat from any tree in the garden', v.16), with one *prohibition* – 'but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil' (v.17a). He warned them of the *penalty* if they disobeyed ('when you eat of it you will surely die', v.17b). You do not need to know and experience evil. God wants you to know only good.

**Lord, thank you for this universe that you have made. Help me to keep well away from evil and to enjoy all the good things you have given us to enjoy.**