

# Dual Citizens

I was born and raised in New Zealand, the land of the long white cloud and a ratio of nearly six sheep for every one person. I often remember as a child watching the sun in summer sink below the horizon late at night, and, in winter, layering up as warmly as possible through the short, dark, freezing days of relentless rain and, oftentimes, snow.

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## Believer's Baptism

*"And now, what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptised, and wash your sins away, calling on his name."* – Acts 22

Before Jesus came preaching 'the good news' and proclaiming that the kingdom was near, the gospels [of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John] record that his coming was announced by a messenger, one John the Baptist. *"Prepare the way of the Lord"*, he proclaimed, *"Clear the road for him."* (Matthew 3:3)

John was a rustic wilderness figure, a wild man clothed in garments made from camel's hair who ate locusts and wild honey. His message was singular and direct: *repent and be baptised; for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.*

People flocked from all over to see this enigmatic figure and to hear what he had to say. Those who were stirred in their hearts by his message confessed their sins and were baptised. Their baptism signified the rejection of their former way of living and repentance of their sinfulness.

Many Pharisees and Sadducees\* also joined the procession of people coming from Jerusalem, Judea, and all over the Jordan

Valley, keen to participate in “the baptism of John the Baptist”. Yet they viewed baptism as merely a hip life experience rather than a complete lifestyle change.

John castigated these leaders of the people for their lack of true repentance. “*Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins.*”, he proclaimed, without apology.

John the Baptist made it clear when addressing the crowds that a little water meant nothing if they weren’t prepared to change their lives. Baptism needed to ignite the kingdom life within a believer, changing a person from the inside out. If anyone wanted to be part of the Kingdom of God that was soon to arrive—that was indeed at their very doorstep—they would need to be truly born again, dying to their old life and being reborn as a new kind of human.

His words would be echoed years later by James, the brother of Jesus (also called James the Just). He was a leader in the early Christian church in Jerusalem and he would write specifically to Jewish believers on the topic of true, saving faith (of which repentance is a key ingredient). Faith without deeds, James would comment, is dead, and nothing more than a corpse.

Deeds do not save you: the work of salvation was accomplished fully and completely by Jesus on the cross and ratified by his resurrection from the dead. But your trust (faith) in that work is proven by your life of action.

We are made right with God by believing and professing our faith in His promises. Yet, it cannot be real faith, the faith that counts with God, unless it’s demonstrated by an active, loving response to God’s grace (James 2:17-24).

Repentance—true repentance—involves both a state of the heart and the action of the individual: faith, that is, *trust in God*, worked out in real and tangible ways in every detail of our lives.

# Get Up, Be Baptised, And Wash Away Your Sins...

The Book of Acts, which recounts the early days of the first-century church, tells the story of how the great commission of Matthew 28 was outworked, first in Jerusalem, then throughout Judea, in Samaria, and finally to the ends of the earth. Jesus had told his disciples, *"Go and make disciples, baptising them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."*

The same good news that Jesus preached—that through him, God is saving, rescuing, atoning, justifying, ruling, and reconciling people for the glory of His name and in pursuit of His purpose—was taken and preached by Jesus' disciples to all who would listen. This message was then followed by the directive: *"Repent of your sins, turn to God, and be baptised for the forgiveness of your sins."*

A 'baptism' without the repentance that precedes such an act would be a contradiction—in the words of John the Baptist, a little water means nothing if you aren't prepared to change your life. But 'repentance'—turning to God in faith—without the action that demonstrates that faith is, in the word of James, counterfeit faith, in reality dead and completely useless.

The full meaning of 'believe' in scripture includes action. The first *act of faith* by a person believing the good news about Jesus is to *be baptised*—a public declaration of a personal conviction.

The Bible knows nothing of baptism without repentance and it also knows nothing of repentance without baptism. They go together and are intrinsically linked. To separate them from each other is to destroy the power and significance of either.

# Baptism: Faith Expressed in action

Obedience to Jesus' commands—not just in verbal assent but in practical application—is proof your reorientation is genuine. The first step of obedience, the first *action of faith*, is the decision to be baptised. While the act of baptism doesn't contribute to God's saving work in Jesus, it does prove that your faith in that work is real. The kind of faith that makes us right with God does not remain alone but bears fruit.

Countless references are given throughout Acts and in the pastoral letters and epistles of the New Testament to this life-changing Christian ordinance which became one of the key practices of the early church.

Water baptism, then and now, represents significant truths of the Christian faith, the first of which is the identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus:

1. Paul the Apostle talks about this in his letter to the Romans, where he says that being baptised joins us to Christ and, in doing so, also joins us to his death. We die and are buried, with our old sinful life 'crucified with Christ'. In doing so, we are no longer 'slaves to sin', set free from its power in our lives. And just as Christ was raised from the dead, we too rise from the waters as a 'new creation', made alive in Jesus by the glorious power of the Father. Someone who has been baptised, Paul says, should consider themselves dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus. This, alone, is one of the most transformative, joyful, and incredible aspects that water baptism symbolises – the reality that sin no longer has power over us and that we have been set free!
2. While baptism itself doesn't contribute to the saving work accomplished by Jesus, it is God's

arrangement for a person to gain a clean conscience based on their faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ—an outward demonstration of an inward conversion. It represents a moment of crossing over, of rescue and redemption from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of God's love (Colossians 1:13). Just as the people of Israel were rescued from the darkness of slavery and bondage in Egypt, the finality of which was marked by 'baptism in the Red Sea' (1 Corinthians 10:2), so too a person's rescue by Jesus from the power of sin is marked by baptism in water.

3. Baptism demonstrates the reality of our great adoption as true sons and daughters of God. And when we are saved by faith, we are also brought into family. Baptism is a sign of joining the family of God, the community of Christ's body. Other metaphors are given throughout scripture to describe the reality of this *belonging*, of the new identity which each person bears; we become citizens of heaven (Ephesians 2:19), we are a stone built into the holy temple of God (1 Peter 2:5), we are a branch, grafted into the great vine that is Jesus (John 15:1-7) and, collectively, we are part of what the Bible calls 'the bride of Christ', [a living, breathing woman of valour](#).

## Believer's Baptism

If repentance forms part of the equation [of baptism] and if belief must be personally affirmed (Romans 10:9), then it would seem that the practice of infant 'baptism' finds no place in the biblical narrative. While I don't personally believe it's 'wrong' or 'unbiblical' to dedicate a child, as part of a family's commitment to Jesus in some kind of

ceremonial way, this is not the baptism described by the Bible and we therefore ought not to confuse the two.

Baptism also requires full immersion in water, not merely a sprinkling. The symbolism commented on in Scripture in relation to water baptism, some of which I've touched on above, is compelling. Infant sprinkling is simply not 'baptism', in biblical terms.

The argument is sometimes made that baptism replaces the ancient Jewish custom of circumcision and therefore, just as infants were circumcised, so, too, Christian families can 'baptise' their children as a sign of their covenant with God.

While there are some similarities between circumcision and the ordinance of baptism—and baptism can be seen as 'the new circumcision' (as referenced in Colossians 2)—there are also key differences:

**Firstly**, circumcision required no faith, personal conviction, or agreement by the child. Circumcision was a rite undertaken without a child's knowledge and without their understanding. Their *belonging* to God's covenant people was therefore understood within a completely different framework. And while only males were circumcised, both male and female Israelites (and even Gentiles who had undertaken the rite) were taken to be fully included as God's covenant people (Exodus 12:48-49).

**Secondly**, baptism forms part of the new covenant, sealed in Jesus' blood. This new covenant, unlike circumcision, is not exclusive to Jews but, as Peter the Apostle came to learn, is offered to all people. "*In every nation, God accepts those who fear him and do what is right.*" (Acts 10:41). The great commission, which included the directive to baptise those who believed, was intended to encompass "*all the nations*". *Belonging*, as one of God's people, would no longer be defined by the rite of circumcision but rather by faith in the saving

work of Jesus, demonstrated to be genuine through baptism.

This particular issue caused some angst in the early church, with Jewish believers finding it difficult to accept circumcision was no longer required. This belief—that circumcision was still necessary—formed part of the ‘false gospel’ that Paul the Apostle tackles in Galatians 3 .

**Thirdly**, baptism is always linked with personal faith. The Book of Acts bears record to the necessary requirement for personal repentance, belief, and confession. There is no single occasion of someone ever undertaking baptism ‘on behalf of someone else’. When we read of ‘whole households and families’ being baptised (Acts 16:15, Acts 16:33), we should therefore infer, from what scripture teaches about baptism, that this generalisation necessarily excludes infants or very young children. They are not able to repent or believe, a key ingredient in the ordinance of baptism.

A word of caution, though—the gospel is profound and weighty, with far-reaching and transformative implications. As we journey through the Christian life, we uncover deep theological truths worth exploring.

Yet at its heart, the good news is simple—clear enough for a child to grasp. We shouldn’t assume that biblical baptism is ‘only for adults’. It is for believers, and often, children with their simple, trusting faith are the clearest examples of what a genuine relationship with God looks like.

Salvation is about faith, not intellectual ability. The ‘whole households’ could certainly have included children, whose faith, repentance, and baptism were equally as valid as their adult counterparts.

## **Inward Conviction = Outward Change**

The baptism that the Bible speaks about involves personal faith and conviction, a reorientation of one’s life

(repentance), and full immersion in water.

The word *baptism* comes from the original Greek word “**baptizō**” (**βαπτίζω**), which means “*to dip, immerse, or wash.*” It was used in ancient times to describe submerging something in water, often a cloth being dipped in dye or ceremonial, full body washing.

As with dying cloth or washing the body, some *change* is to be expected by the act of Christian baptism. While it is deeply symbolic, it is also physically and spiritually real. The person who rises from the water isn’t just *metaphorically* made new, but is *actually* changed. They are a *new person* in Christ, joined to God’s family, a precious stone added to the house that God is building.

Faith that convicts and faith that commits is like the meeting of two atoms. It is the spark that ignites the kingdom fire inside a person, but not to be merely contained within but radiating outwards, shining like the brightness of heaven, leading many to righteousness (Daniel 12:3).

## **“And now, What Are You Waiting For?”**

Are you someone who is convicted in your heart about the message of Jesus Christ? Have you decided to follow him, put your trust in God’s saving work, and reorient your life in his direction? If the answer is yes, *you should be baptised* (Acts 22:16).

Are you someone who was ‘baptised’ as an infant but now understands that faith must be personal, convicting, and demonstrated in action? If the answer is yes, *you should be baptised* (Mark 16:16, Hebrews 11:6).

Are you someone who would define yourself as ‘a Jesus follower’, whether for a little time or a long time, and yet have never been baptised? If the answer is yes, *you should be baptised* (Matthew 28:18-20).



# The Call To Obedience: A Faith That Acts

Baptism is not just a symbolic ritual—it is a declaration of faith, a step of obedience, and a testimony to the transforming power of Jesus Christ. Throughout Scripture, we see that true faith is not merely intellectual agreement but a conviction that moves a person to action. Repentance and baptism are inseparable in the biblical narrative, each reinforcing the reality of the other.

The act of baptism does not save, but it reflects the **faith that does**—a faith that turns from sin, trusts in Christ, and commits to walking in His ways. Just as John the Baptist warned against empty religious acts, so too must we ensure that baptism is not simply a tradition, but an outward expression of an inward reality: a life truly surrendered to Jesus.

So, what are you waiting for? If you have placed your trust in Christ, baptism is the next step—a public witness of your decision to follow Him. Whether you have recently come to faith, were baptised as an infant without personal belief, or have been following Jesus for years but never taken this step, the command remains the same: **“Get up, be baptised, and wash your sins away, calling on His name.”** (Acts 22:16)

**\*The Pharisees and Sadducees were two influential religious groups in first-century Judaism, often seen in the Gospels opposing Jesus. The Pharisees were a strict, law-keeping sect that emphasised obedience to the Torah (Jewish Law) and the oral traditions of their ancestors. They believed in the resurrection of the dead, angels, and the afterlife (Acts 23:8), making them more aligned with popular Jewish beliefs. The Sadducees, on the other hand, were an elite, priestly group who controlled the Temple in Jerusalem and rejected many of the Pharisaic traditions. They denied the resurrection, angels, and the afterlife, focusing only on the written Law of Moses. Though they were often at odds with each other, both**

groups resisted Jesus because His teachings challenged their authority, exposed their hypocrisy, and redefined what it meant to truly follow God.

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## The Dark Heart Of Christmas

Christmas is a unique time of year.

Traditionally, it's seen as a season of joy, hope, celebration, and family—a chance for many to unwind and find rest as the year draws to a close.

Yet, for others, the story is different. Christmas can be a lonely and isolating season, marked by fractured relationships, the pain of missing loved ones, or financial pressures that overshadow the festivities. It can feel less like a time of rest and more like a whirlwind of exhaustion and unmet expectations.

For many, Christmas is a complex mix of emotions—hopeful yet heavy, joyful yet sorrowful, warm and welcoming but also marked by loneliness and discouragement. It's a time that holds both the brightest lights and the deepest shadows, depending on where one stands.

It seems to me that all these emotions are deeply rooted in the true Christmas story—a story far removed from the sanitised, child-friendly version we often share. Yes, Christmas is a time of hope and celebration as we mark the birth of Jesus Christ. But it's also a season for introspection and solemnity as we reflect on why Jesus came and the profound purpose of His arrival.

Christians are often accused of being overly focused on [sin](#)—and it's true that we sometimes tend to emphasise sin more

than the grace that forgives those sins. But sin, and humanity's separation from God, are central to the Christmas story.

Without sin, there would be no need for redemption or reconciliation with God. Without sin, there would have been no need for Jesus Christ to come "to save his people" (Matthew 1:21). Without sin, Jesus would not have had to die. At the heart of the Christmas narrative lies a profound hopelessness—a darkness that calls us to pause and reflect.

## Jesus | The Hope Of The World

Before there was a baby in a manger, there was a crisis in a garden—a catastrophic severing of humanity's relationship with God. It was a moment that cast a long shadow of darkness over the world and which set the scene for the arrival, many centuries later, of a Saviour. Jesus came as the light that would pierce the darkness, bringing hope and redemption to a world in desperate need of reconciliation with God.

One of my favourite chapters in the Bible is the opening of the Gospel of John. John begins his account of Jesus Christ's origins with words that echo the first chapter of Genesis. He reflects on the darkness present in the beginning—a world without form and void—and reveals how light entered that darkness. That light, John tells us, is Jesus, through whom God's unfailing love and faithfulness has come to humanity. It is through him alone that God has been fully revealed to us.

*"Comfort, comfort my people," the prophet Isaiah would write, "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Tell her that her sad days are gone and her sins are pardoned. Yes, the LORD has punished her twice over for all her sins." Listen! It's the voice of someone shouting, "Clear the way through the wilderness for the LORD! Make a straight highway through the wasteland for our God! Fill in the valleys, and level the mountains and hills. Straighten the curves, and smooth out the rough places.*

*Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. The LORD has spoken!" | Isaiah 40:1-3*

## **It's Definitely Good News**

*"Keep it positive,"* my daughter urged when I mentioned I was writing about the deeper, darker side of Christmas. *"Not everything has to be a negative."* And I do understand her point. Christmas, with its twinkling lights, joyful songs, and festive feasts, is a season meant for happiness and celebration.

Do we really want to turn our thoughts to more solemn, existential realities? Do children really need to understand *why* Jesus came into the world? Some might say it feels like 'raining on the parade' or being a bit of a party pooper during such a joyful season.

But I think the answer should be yes.

Reflecting on the deeper meaning of Christmas doesn't take away from the celebration—it adds depth and significance. The joy and festivities are wonderful, but they become even more meaningful when we understand the "why" behind them: Jesus came into the world because of God's immense love, to bring light into darkness and offer hope and reconciliation. Christmas is definitely *good news*, but its true significance shines brightest when we understand just how broken things were before it.

For children, this truth doesn't need to feel heavy or complex. Instead, it can be shared as a simple, hope-filled message—that Jesus is the ultimate gift, given to bring peace, love, and joy to the world. Far from lessening the joy of the season, this understanding can make Christmas even more special.

# God-With-Us

Christmas celebrates the gift of grace found in Jesus, a gift that came at a great cost. While the festivities—lights, songs, and feasts—bring joy, they are merely the wrappings around this profound truth: Jesus Christ is the ultimate gift, the hope of the world, fulfilling God's mission to redeem humanity.

John tells us that the light that was in the beginning, the Word Himself, would step in the very creation He had made in order to save and redeem it. In his human body, the war against sin and death would be waged and won.

His name would be Emmanuel, that is, *God-With-Us*, and he would save us from our sins.

*"What gift of grace is Jesus, my Redeemer,  
There is no more for Heaven now to give,  
He is my joy, my righteousness, and freedom,  
My steadfast love, my deep and boundless peace" | City Alight*

As we celebrate Christmas, we can embrace both the joy and the meaning of the season. The twinkling lights, festive songs, and shared meals remind us of the happiness this time of year brings. But it's also an opportunity to reflect on the deeper story—the arrival of Jesus, the true light of the world, who stepped into our darkness to bring grace, redemption, and reconciliation.

At its heart, the Christmas story contains both joy and sorrow, loss and restoration, light and darkness. Christmas is about this extraordinary gift—freely given—and a hope that continues to shine brightly today.

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# Heaven + Earth: The End Of The Story

Inarguably, it's the end of any story that's the most important part.

While the beginning of a tale gives context and setting, and the middle gives the story its shape and drama, it's the ending that provides meaning and gives resolution to the narrative. It's the ending that makes sense of everything, that allows all the intersecting threads of drama, intrigue, risk, loss, joy, and homecoming to find their place and purpose within the story and, particularly, in its overarching conclusion.

Humanity's story; an ongoing tale of love and war, victory and defeat, joy and tragedy, has not yet reached its conclusion, but, surprisingly, its ending *has already been written*.

While scientists and philosophers have had much to offer to the conversation about our origins and humanity's remarkable traverse through history, with all of our astonishing achievements, they have little to offer on the subject of where we might all be going or how our story finishes. When it comes to science, we are left largely in the dark about the questions that matter the most.

*What are we here for?*

*What is the purpose of life?*

*Where will we end up?*

## Life's Most Profound Questions

It's to the Bible alone that we can turn for answers to life's most profound questions. It has much to say about not just how

we supposedly got here and why, but also how humanity's story will reach its epic conclusion.

The Bible is the living, Spirit-breathed Word of God, the written revelation of what God has been doing in the past, what He is still doing right now, and what he has intended for the future of humanity.

The Word of God is like a vast tapestry, its main theme interwoven with many sub-plots and side stories that run like golden threads through an intricate design. Each of these threads complements the complete telling of God's story and confirm again and again to us the way in which God views the world, the people who inhabit it, and how important each one of us are to Him.

Far from being just black text on white pages; this book unveils the purpose, intentionality, and creative action of the Eternal One; breathed out, captured by way of quill and scroll by the faithful scribes who heard 'the voice of God', recording the Eternal's story for all to read.

What we also learn about God's story is that the master storyteller hasn't been absent or detached from His story, but fully present and, in fact, His full, enveloping presence, His close and intimate dwelling with humanity was actually the point of the story all along. What began in a garden, where God once [walked with us](#), will find its epic conclusion in a 'new creation', in a restored and regenerated earth where God at last dwells with His people.

The end of our story will actually be *our new beginning*. The conclusion of our story doesn't end with us going to be with God; but *with God coming to earth*, returning, at last, *to be with us*.

God's story has a conclusion, an ending, a moment when all the loose strings are neatly tied up and we'll sit back, with a sigh of satisfaction at a tale well told and an ending more

glorious than we could ever have imagined.

## The Purpose Of God

Much of scripture is given to expressing the heart of the Creator and what His hopes and dreams were for this place we call Earth, along with us, its inhabitants, as His intended image-bearers.

*“Then God said, “Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.” | Genesis 1:26, CSB “Yet as surely as I live and as surely as the whole earth is filled with the glory of the LORD.” | Number 14:28, ESV “And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all humanity together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” | Isaiah 40:5, ESV “On that day the LORD will become King over all the earth – the LORD alone and His name alone.” | Zechariah 14:9, ESV “And blessed be His glorious name forever: and let the whole earth be filled with His glory; Amen, and Amen.” | Psalm 72:19, ESV*

It was always the purpose of the Eternal to fill this good earth with His glorious presence, as deep and as expansive ‘as the waters cover the sea’. Despite human failure and many, many detours in this story, God has declared that His purpose will not be thwarted. He will accomplish what He intended for His creation, even to [His own personal cost](#), as it turns out.

*“I declare the end from the beginning and ancient times from what is still to come. I say, ‘My purpose will stand, and all My good pleasure I will accomplish.’” | Isaiah 46:10, ESV*

## The Kingdom Of God

This glorious and absolute rule and reign of the wise and



faithful king is what the New Testament terms the 'kingdom of God'.

[The gospel](#) is the good news that in Jesus, who is both saviour and king, God is saving, rescuing, atoning, justifying, ruling, and reconciling people for the glory of His name and in pursuit of His purpose.

What many people think of as 'the gospel' – being '[saved](#)' – is actually only just one aspect of a much larger story, *the full gospel* ('good news') story of God's will and purpose for the earth and how humanity is part of that.

*"To grasp the significance of the message of the kingdom in the ministry of Jesus, we can also resort to statistical analysis. The term basileia (kingdom) occurs 162 times in the New Testament and 121 of those are in the Synoptic Gospels where the preaching of Jesus is recorded. The formula "kingdom of God" or the "kingdom of heaven" occurs 104 times in the Gospels. This message is not only the inaugural message of Jesus and the focus of His great Sermon on the Mount, it is his final message. "After he had suffered, he also presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). The gospel of the kingdom includes the necessity of salvation since the very message begins with the call for repentance, but it goes beyond the call to salvation and includes the demand for kingdom-focused living. It insists that we are saved for a purpose." – SBC Life*

The kingdom of God is more than social justice or personal salvation. 'The kingdom of God' is the promise of God from the beginning to fill the earth with His glory, essentially, all of Himself, and to rule justly in the hearts and lives of all of humanity. It also includes the promise of total reconciliation with humanity; only made possible in Jesus

(Ephesians 1:11-12, 1 Timothy 1:16-17, 2 Timothy 4:18, 1 Peter 4:11, Romans 11:36, Revelation 1:16).

## Heaven + Earth

God didn't just create humanity with purpose, He also created the earth with purpose. He cares deeply about what happens to this place we call home and all that He intended it to be.

A critical and essential reality of the kingdom of God includes its physicality. 'The kingdom' is not just an individual, spiritual, Christian *experience* but a literal reality that will be fully expressed and outworked *on the earth*.

Interestingly, intrinsic in the idea of 'kingdom' are the following five things: King + Rule + Realm + Law + Land. You can read more about these different aspects in the articles. '[The People Of The Kingdom](#)' and '[The Kingdom | Now, But Not Yet](#)'. However, the particular focus in this article is the reality of 'land' or physicality. This reality, when compared against many different passages in the Bible informs our understanding of what, or more specifically, where, this physical reality is intended to be.

Contrary to what many people may think, *going to heaven is not a Christian's final ending or God's promise*. Resurrection and *life* – heaven's own eternal life – on a regenerated and restored earth, is the hope for every [person of the kingdom](#).

*Earth* is the place where God's will is to be done (where His kingdom will be fully revealed) in the same way as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10), *earth* is the intended inheritance of those who have been faithful, (Psalm 37:11, Matthew 5:5), *earth* is the place where peace and safety will finally reign supreme (Isaiah 2:4, Ezekiel 34:25) and where righteousness will take up residence (2 Peter 3:13), and *earth* is where all creation will finally be set free from its bondage and brought

into the glorious freedom that God always intended for it (Romans 8:21).

*Earth* is the place where the curse of Eden will finally and completely be overthrown and God will return and take up residence amongst His people. Our long exile will be over.

*“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God.” Revelation 21:3, BSB*

“As N.T Wright and other New Testament scholars have shown, it’s important to understand that kingdom terminology refers not to some faraway paradise filled with disembodied souls, but rather to the will and reign of God, unleashed into the world through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.” (Rachel Held Evans). N T Wright puts it this way: *“Jesus’ resurrection is the beginning of God’s new project not to snatch people away from earth to heaven but to colonize earth with the life of heaven. That, after all, is what the Lord’s Prayer is about.”*

The life of heaven – the “life and light of mankind” came to earth in the person of Jesus, shining brightly and giving hope in a damaged and disordered world. In Jesus, we can see the intention of God all along for His creation. In Jesus, all the fullness of God’s glory was displayed in human form and we can see the kind of life God has intended for us.

What God began in the resurrection of Jesus is what He intends to do for all of creation; to regenerate, to restore, and to fully dwell with His creation in all His glory.

The earth, renewed with heaven’s own life, is the epic conclusion to the story, and the final pages close with this promise: *“The angel showed me a river that was crystal clear, and its waters gave life. The river came from the throne where*

*God and the Lamb were seated. Then it flowed down the middle of the city's main street. On each side of the river are trees that grow a different kind of fruit each month of the year. The fruit gives life, and the leaves are used as medicine to heal the nations.*

***God's curse will no longer be on the people of that city. He and the Lamb will be seated there on their thrones, and its people will worship God and will see Him face to face. God's name will be written on the foreheads of the people. Never again will night appear, and no one who lives there will ever need a lamp or the sun. The Lord God will be their light, and they will rule forever.*** (Revelation 22:1-5, CEV)

*"One day the veil will be lifted; earth and heaven will be one; Jesus will be personally present, and every knee will bow at his name; creation will be renewed; the dead will be raised; and God's new world will at last be in place, full of new prospects and possibilities." | N T Wright*

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What happens after the end? Well, the short answer is *we don't know*. We're told so much in the Bible about God's purpose, His original intention for creation, and the lengths to which He has gone to get that story back on track. (Although, side-note, was it really ever truly off-track...?). We're also told how this particular story will conclude.

But what comes after? As it is written, "No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). The great Christian author, C S Lewis, puts it this way: "All their life in this world and all their adventures had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before." (The Last Battle)

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# An Argument For The Trinity

If you're an orthodox Christian, already familiar with the doctrine of the Trinity, you might like to head somewhere else right now. This article will probably be, as they say, preaching to the converted.

But if that's not you, and the idea of the Trinity is new, challenging, confronting, downright heretical, or, as far as you're concerned, completely unbiblical...just hear me out.

I grew up being told all these things about the Trinity. I can confidently say now that not only do I believe I was misinformed about what the doctrine endeavours to articulate, I was also misinformed about the historical background and context of this doctrine, what the early church taught regarding the nature of Jesus, and what scripture itself teaches.

Several things resulted in a massive shift in my perspective, understanding, and belief of this doctrine, which I'd like to share in this article and which I hope will be helpful to anyone wrestling with this topic. It's not necessarily everyone's conversation of choice, but it's come up several times with different individuals in the past few months, and so now seemed like the right time to share some thoughts on this one.

# The Context Of The Council Of Nicea

In the spring of 325AD, a council of Christian bishops convened in the city of Nicaea (now known as the town of İznik, in modern-day Turkey). They met to deliberate over a theological dispute that had arisen concerning the nature of Jesus, his origins, and his relationship to God the Father.

Known as the Arian controversy – named for the presbyter and priest (Arius) to whom the controversy is attributed – the gathering was not so much an argument about whether Jesus was *God*, but rather, a dispute over whether Jesus *was eternal*; and therefore *without beginning*, or whether he had been created *before time* and was therefore subordinate to the Father.

This is an important distinction: the Council was not arguing over whether ‘*Jesus was God*’ (God the Son), as I had always been taught. This was a dispute over whether he had always existed (and was therefore of *the same substance* as the Father) or whether he had been begotten/created (and was therefore *similar but not the same* as God the Father).

*“Arian theology holds that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who was begotten by God the Father with the difference that the Son of God did not always exist but was begotten/made before time by God the Father; therefore, Jesus was not coeternal with God the Father, but nonetheless Jesus began to exist outside time.”*

This was an ontological argument. Who was Jesus before he was Jesus, did he *always exist* before time or was he *created* before time? Was the Son *equal* with the Father or *subordinate*? Was he *the same as* or *different* from the Father?

## What Did The Early Church Teach?

The reason the Arian theology was so controversial is because it was *a change to the status quo*. The early church taught and

believed in the divinity of the Son, and that his nature was the same essence and substance as God the Father. They believed that Jesus, as the Word of God, was eternal, was from God Himself, and therefore was of the same substance as God.

*"According to its [Arianism's] opponents, especially the bishop [St. Athanasius](#), Arius' teaching reduced the Son to a demigod, reintroduced polytheism (since worship of the Son was not abandoned), and undermined the Christian concept of redemption, since only he who was truly God could be deemed to have reconciled humanity to the Godhead."* | [Britannica](#)

We have not just the writings of well-known apostles like Paul and Peter and John, but also those who came after them – extra-biblical sources – who taught about Christ as the Word of God, the virgin birth, and the incarnation. Names such as Ignatius, Clement of Alexandria, Polycarp, and Ireneaus, many of whom were contemporaries and disciples of the apostles, wrote and taught extensively on this subject. You can read, for example, Ignatius' letter to the Ephesians (written some time between 107–110 CE) [here](#).

It is an egregious misrepresentation to say that the divinity of Christ was invented in the fourth century; what is actually true is that the accepted understanding of *the nature of Christ* was being challenged. The intention of the Council of Nicene was, therefore, to define, in written form, what the church *already believed and taught regarding Jesus*, binding Christendom together in unity across different traditions and practices.

The Nicene Creed used the same three-fold structure as the more simple and earlier creeds, such as the Apostles' Creed, which had touched very little on this topic, and, because of this particular controversy, went into more depth and detail in relation to Christology – that is, the nature and origin of Jesus Christ.

# Is 'Trinity' In The Bible?

The early church fathers taught and believed in the divinity of Jesus, his existence before time, and his incarnation as the Word-Made-Flesh. But perhaps they had deviated significantly in doctrine in the first few years of the church's existence?

This is often one of the criticisms leveled at the Trinity from those who reject it, a two-fold dismissal if you like; firstly, that the word 'trinity' isn't mentioned in the Bible and, secondly, that its 'official introduction' in the fourth century (a claim shown to be a misrepresentation, at best) was 'the great apostasy' the church had been warned about (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3).

It's suggested that as early as AD98, only a generation on from the incredible outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2), the church had veered wildly off-course and into heresy, even with the Holy Spirit as guide and teacher, the very recent reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the powerful witness of those who had walked with him, many of whom were still alive.

Honestly? I find that extremely unlikely.

I trust not only the teaching of the apostles themselves, who were radically transformed by their experience of the resurrection, but also the work of the Holy Spirit, active and powerful, in growing the church and supporting the new believers in their faith. It just doesn't seem credible to me that something so important, so vital, so life-changing could be corrupted and derailed so early on.

Certainly, the church began to face challenges as time went on, particularly as the apostolic age drew to a close. It experienced great periods of persecution, followed finally by a shift in fortune in the form of open favour from Rome's



pagan Emperor, Constantine, the emperor of the Nicene Creed. Yet it was during the early years of persecution and struggle that we find the orthodox doctrines being taught and written about, not formulated later under, as is sometimes asserted, pagan influences.

You can research any of the early church fathers and their teaching for yourself. Ignatius, for example, an early Christian writer and later Patriarch of Antioch, wrote many letters which serve as examples of early Christian theology. He, along with Polycarp, another apostolic father, are traditionally held to be disciples of John of the Revelation, and demonstrated their 'trinitarian' consciousness in their writings.

Just as the word 'omnipotence' isn't found in the Bible, and yet we understand the concept of God's supremacy and power to be taught throughout scripture, so, too, you won't find the word 'trinity', and yet the concept of One God, revealed to us in three distinct persons, completely unified with each other, can be found throughout the New Testament.

Here are several biblical passages which teach this concept regarding the Christology of Jesus. Take some time to read through them for yourself: John 1:1-5, John 1:1-5, John 5:17-18; John 10:33-38, Hebrews 1:1-4, Colossians 1:18-20, Colossians 2:9, 1 Corinthians 8:6, Philippians 2:6-11, John 17:5, 2 Corinthians 8:9, John 8:58.

While the word 'trinity' is not explicitly used in the New Testament letters and epistles, the *concept* of the trinity was certainly expressed by biblical authors and was the understanding of the early church, as can be seen by the extensive writings of the early church fathers. It was this understanding that the Nicene Creed attempted to articulate and document in 325AD.

# God Is 'One' So The Trinity – 'Three Gods' – Can't Be Right. Can It?

One of the huge misconceptions that non-Trinitarians hold to is the belief that the doctrine of the Trinity teaches there are three gods. In reality, the Trinitarian doctrine actually affirms biblical monotheism and rejects the heresy of 'three gods' (polytheism).

The Bible teaches that God is One, but not in the numerical sense that is often used by non-Trinitarians. God is One in the sense that there is no other. He, alone, is the singular God in all the universe.

The ancient Jewish prayer – known as the Shema – recites this truth *"Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one. And as for you, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength"*.

The meaning of this famous prayer is that the people of Israel were to learn to listen and love God fully, above all else, with all their hearts. The Shema wasn't making a statement about God's essence but rather His preeminence. It wasn't intended to function as a negation of the idea of the Trinity but as a statement of allegiance to the only true God, particularly relevant for a people who had been steeped in polytheism for generations.

*"This prayer has been one of the most influential traditions in Jewish history, functioning both as the Jewish pledge of allegiance and a hymn of praise."* | The Bible Project

Interestingly, Jesus quotes the Shema on two occasions in the synoptic gospels, in Matthews 22 and Mark 12. In Matthew, he follows up immediately with questions about the origins and paternity of the Messiah, the Messiah's relationship to the great king of Israel, David, and the title given to the Messiah of 'Lord'; an interesting progression of thought from

Jesus, and one which had the effect of reducing his audience to silence.

## Isn't The Trinity Doctrine 'Catholic'?

If, by 'catholic', you mean 'universal', then yes. For the first fifteen hundred years of the church's history, there was only one, 'universal' church and early creeds will often refer to the church in this way. The church's official position in relation to the nature of Christ had been documented in the Nicene Creed in 325AD and it remains the official, orthodox, (accepted) doctrinal position.

However, I suspect what is actually being asked is, "*isn't the Trinity doctrine part of the Roman Catholic Church?*" (ie 'a Catholic thing') and the short answer is no. The Trinity isn't only specific to the Roman Catholic Church. All three branches of Christianity (Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Protestantism) subscribe to the doctrine of the Trinity.

Even after the Protestant Reformation swept through Europe, beginning with the nailing of Martin Luther's 95 Theses to the castle church in Wittenberg, the resultant split between the Catholic Church and its Protestant offspring largely revolved around the idea that people should be independent in their relationship with God, taking personal responsibility for their faith and referring directly to the Bible for guidance, instead of priests or popes. The Reformation rejected the doctrine of papal supremacy, among other things, and arrived at different views on ecclesiastical polity, apostolic succession, and the nature of salvation, however disagreement on the Trinity was not one of the areas of argument.

That being said, there are a few exceptions; some further religious movements arose out of the Protestant movement which rejected the doctrine of the Trinity; these branches of Christianity are known as 'Unitarian' but are [Socinian](#) rather than Arian in theology.

# What Does It Mean To Be God?

The Bible gives us many descriptions of Who and What 'God' is, endeavouring to help us understand the concept of God, as best we can, from our limited human experience.

The Bible teaches that God is the Creator of all things, the source of all life, sovereign over all, powerful, and perfect. Without beginning and without end, He is eternal, holy, clothed in light, glorious as the sun. Yet He is also tender, loving, forgiving, as compassionate as any mother to her children, and as protective as any father defending His family.

We are created in His image, bearing many of His attributes, yet because of the fall, bound by mortality and constrained by sin. The fall in Eden resulted in brokenness in our relationship with God, creating an impenetrable barrier that we couldn't cross (Exodus 33:18-23). As the popular worship song, 'Jesus, My Living Hope' laments, *"How great the chasm that lay between us, how high the mountain I could not climb."*

Until Jesus came, no one had ever seen God face to face. Yet as Timothy writes (1 Timothy 3:16), the invisible God was made visible in Jesus, *"this is, without question, the great mystery of our faith; God was revealed in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory."*

If we could not come to God (and we couldn't – see below: 'God Does The Saving'), then God would come to us.

*"The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish."* | [John 1:14](#)

John, writer of the fourth gospel, offers a more insightful

perspective, opening with the otherworldly prologue regarding Jesus and his origins; specifically, the identification of Jesus as the Word, who was with God and was God in the beginning.

Through Jesus, he says, all things have been brought into being; he is the light and life of humanity, who became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen his glory – face-to-face at last – as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

God came to us, wrapped in the perishable, temporary covering [of flesh and bone](#), the full intensity and glory hidden within Jesus. We have a hint of what that glory was like in Luke 9:29-32, where the veil was lifted momentarily and his appearance was altered, an event the Bible calls ‘the transfiguration’.

Jesus himself declared that only he could reveal God fully, in his words, “no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matt 11:27b) and that “the person who has seen him [Jesus] has seen the Father.” (John 14:8-9).

The gospel of John offers more: seven ‘signs’ culminating in the resurrection of Lazarus (proof of Jesus’ power over even death itself), and seven ‘I am’ discourses, culminating in the declaration by Thomas concerning Jesus as “my Lord and my God”. The first instance, in John 8:58, leaves no doubt that Jesus’ claimed to be God incarnate, because the Jews were infuriated by his reply and took up stones to kill him.

*“John’s “high Christology” depicts Jesus as divine and preexistent, defends him against Jewish claims that he was “making himself equal to God”, and talks openly about his divine role and echoing Yahweh’s “I Am that I Am” with seven “I Am” declarations of his own.” | Stephen L Harris, Understanding the Bible*

Jesus was fully God; the invisible God made visible in a way that we could draw near to, touch, walk with, and eat with. Yet Jesus didn't count his equality with God as something to be held onto, but rather something to be set down, for our sakes, and did so 'by becoming a man like other men' (Philippians 2:7-9, Weymouth NT).

## Nothing Is Impossible With God

Those who reject the doctrine of the Trinity often do so on the basis that it's impossible; how could God become human or how could God die? And who was 'left in heaven' if God came to earth? (yet another misunderstanding about who was sent and who was the sender: "And we have seen and testify that *the Father* has sent *His Son* to be the Savior of the world.")

Yet we also accept many other impossibilities in scripture: that life can be created from nothing, that sickness can be completely healed, that water and wind can be controlled, that time can be stopped, that water can be turned into wine, that bread and fish can be multiplied, that death itself can be overcome and vanquished.

Nothing, literally, nothing is impossible with God and if we learn anything from scripture, it's that we should be ready to entertain any possibility and expect any outcome. Though we might not always understand how something could be possible, that shouldn't stop us from believing that it could. Our cry should always be, 'Lord, I believe, help me in my unbelief.'

God is Spirit. He is not limited by shape, force, boundaries or time. The same, however, cannot be said of humanity. We *are* limited; by time, by physicality, by mortality, by sin. There are things we simply cannot do.

What shifted in my perspective in this particular area was the realisation that without the doctrine of the Trinity, the concept of redemption becomes humanly impossible.

While Jesus had to be truly human – atonement was required on behalf of humanity and only a human could make this restitution (and I've [written about Jesus' humanity elsewhere](#)) – if he had been *only human*, it would have been impossible for him to have overcome sin.

Limited in the same way that we are, even with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, he couldn't have lived a perfect, sinless life and, therefore, successfully 'made atonement' for sin, or have overthrown the greatest enemy, death itself.

This was the entire point of the giving of the Old Covenant; it was intended that humanity should realise through their failure to keep the Law, despite even the best of intentions, their complete inability to atone for or redeem themselves and restore their relationship with God.

Humanity was in an awful bind, a catch-22 situation of epic proportions: atonement must be made by a human...but no human perfect enough or powerful enough existed to make such an atonement. That is the very definition of humanly impossible.

*"But behold", God says, "I will make a way in the desert. I am about to do something new. Prepare the way of the Lord..."* While impossible with humanity, nothing was impossible with God.

The Word Who was in the beginning, Who called life into being, Who is the source of life and light of humanity stepped in the very creation He had made in order to save and redeem it. The Word – truly God – became human, He became the representative of us all and in his human body, the war against sin and death would be waged and won.

What was impossible for us became possible with God. Jesus Christ – truly human and truly God; the One and Only Begotten Son of the Father had come to save the world and reconcile us back to God.

# God Does The Saving

It seems to me that once you start paying attention, you realise the Bible is telling the same story over and over again, but just in different ways, and it can perhaps be summarised in one simple sentence: "God Does The Saving."

*"Praise the Lord, who carries our burdens day after day; he is the God who saves us. Our God is a God who saves; he is the Lord, our Lord, who rescues us from death." | Psalm 68:19-20*

At every turn, humanity's inability to overthrow the curse of Eden is demonstrated, as chapter after chapter of the Bible lays out the moral bankruptcy of the human race. Humans were unable to wage war against sin and win, or to overthrow death. The separation that had resulted from the fall in Eden couldn't be healed just by human power, it needed divine intervention.

It would be God, and it was always going to be God, who would do the saving.

I think this raises another significant point, and one which is worth spending some time on: the difference between a grace-framed salvation theology and a works-framed salvation theology.

Grace tells us that God saves because of Who He is, not because of who we are. We are *saved by grace through faith* – and this is not of ourselves – it is a gift of God. Human endeavour played no part in the work of saving or redeeming humanity back to God. (Ephesians 2:4-10). And this 'work of saving' took place long before we ever turned to God, even, as Romans comments, "*while we were still sinners.*"

Jesus showed us the kind of human we were intended to be, and the kind of holy life we were purposed for, an exact



representation of the divine. He didn't achieve this through grit, sheer willpower, or determined asceticism, but because he *was also truly God*. Nothing of his life should convince us that we can ever be like him, *by our own resolve, strength, or determination* or that by doing good we are *contributing to our salvation*.

Even the most steadfast, committed, faithful Christian does not add anything to the victory won by Jesus and it is only the work of *Christ-in-us* that we are able to become more like God (our works, however, *do* prove our faith is real – and I've written [more about that here](#)).

Irenaeus, an early church father, puts it like this: "*For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God.*"

I think the problem with making Jesus human *and only human* is that we are making the work of salvation a human endeavour. We are in danger of seeing Jesus' life as a model for good behaviour (that will somehow make us right with God), and we are framing our Christian life as an exercise of our own determination and willpower which will enable us to overcome. Unspoken but implicit in this theology is the idea that "if you try hard enough, *you too* can overcome like Jesus".

But it is only in *Christ* that we are more than conquerors; we are graciously invited into his victory, and it is only because, in Christ, *who was divine*, God raising us up to partake in the divine nature (*theosis*) becomes possible.

## **In Conclusion (And Not To Be Considered Exhaustive!)**

If you've been wrestling with this topic, the best place to start is always, of course, with scripture. And the best way to start is by asking questions.

I would suggest you take some time to read through the New Testament letters and gospels and notice what the writers are telling you about Jesus. If the idea of 'the Trinity' is new or challenging for you, simply set that aside for now; you're not seeking to prove or disprove the doctrine, only to hear what scripture has to say. Begin the exercise with a willing mind, an open heart, and a prayer for God to reveal Himself.

Read about church history, particularly the first 300 years, for yourself, and seek out the writings of the early church fathers (pre-Nicene era). Is the language used or are the concepts described by them compatible with scripture? Or do they introduce ideas thoroughly at odds with the Bible?

Familiarise yourself with the background and context of the Council of Nicea. What was the reason they gathered? Does this reshape your understanding of the creed and provide better explanation to the language used within it? Are the conclusions of the Council (irrespective of their 'wordiness') consistent with your journey through scripture and history?

Consider the reason for Jesus' coming: why was he sent and what did he accomplish? Jesus himself told us when only just a young boy that "he must be about His Father's business" (Luke 2:49). What was "this business"? Of particular relevance to these questions is Jesus' discourse in John 8:12-58.

Don't try to arrive at a resolution or conclusion in a single moment and allow yourself the freedom to acknowledge that there are things you may not know or understand now, or ever. Our hope rests not in our complete comprehension but in our posture of trust in the One who saves.

And finally, I would respectfully encourage you to consider this: our theology – what we think about God – is important. How can we begin to know and understand ourselves and our place in this expansive creation if we have no sense of the One who made us and the purpose for which we've been made?

However, a robust and living theology will spring from understanding and experiencing who God is and what He has done for us, in Jesus, not simply by giving agreement to a statement or creed of 'theological beliefs'.

To know God is to know Jesus, whom He sent ([John 17:3](#)), and, therefore, the true starting point of our theology as Christians is looking to Jesus and, fundamentally, to God, in Jesus, crucified. It is in this that we see the extent to which God was prepared to go in order to rescue and redeem us.

Although deeply theological in its language, I believe the Trinity doctrine boldly endeavours to affirm and clarify this reality, underscoring the deep commitment of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit to rescuing, redeeming and restoring creation.

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## Women + The Church

There is a great deal of evidence of women's participation in the early church and the role they played in early Christianity.

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## In Him Was Life

New Testament holiness is a joyous privilege, not a heavy burden and duty.

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# Keeping The Faith

The question isn't "do you truly believe" but, "who do you trust"?

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# Crossing Over

There are many crossings a human will make in a lifetime. Our introduction to life is just the first.