



Spiritual Due Diligence

Exploring questions of eternal significance

Study 7 The invisible realm

presented by Links Players International

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Spiritual Due Diligence

Introduction to this study

WHEN A MAN OR WOMAN CONSIDERS making a significant financial investment, they normally do not rush into the decision. Rather, they begin a process commonly known as due diligence—a gathering of facts and considerations that will allow them to judge rightly whether this investment is appropriate for them.

Of course, due diligence does not guarantee success. However, if an investment fails and we ask the investors whether or not they did their due diligence, the most embarrassing answer they can give is, “No, we did not.”

While thousands of wise investors each year avoid that embarrassment by conducting due diligence in their financial endeavors, millions of people never take the same careful steps in their spiritual lives. While they have heard stories of God and the afterlife, and while they may have even toyed with such questions loosely in their minds, they have never set about the task of spiritual due diligence—considering the information that would support these eternally significant claims.

Intent of this series

The intent of this series, *Spiritual Due Diligence*, is to assist potential spiritual investors with regard to investigating the claims of the Bible, particularly as they point to a relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ. One study in this series focuses on the claims of other faith systems, but that is not our primary intent here. Instead, by a thorough examination of the Bible, you will have opportunity to study Christianity in depth, and thereafter you will have the tools necessary by which to measure other faiths and religions.

The audience for this series

At least three categories of readers should find great value in this series: those who are beginning their first serious investigation of the Bible, those who are desiring to increase their knowledge and understanding of the Bible, and those who may be speaking with others about their own established Christian faith.

Focus of this particular study

This study is the seventh in the series. Its particular focus is angels and demons as they are presented in Scripture, with consideration of so-called spiritual warfare included in the study. Angelic presence and demonic power have long been matters of interest to all who read the Bible, as well as to those who have heard of such beings through other sources. What is the difference between some of these popular presentations of angels and demons and how they are presented in Scripture? The answer to this question is important to those who wish to consider the Bible’s teachings in a serious and meaningful manner.

— Jeffrey Cranford and Jeff Hopper, for Links Players International



The Invisible Realm

Lesson One: The supernatural in Scripture

GOLF GODS. Of course, there are none. But you don't have to hang around golfers very long to hear tales of golfing exaltation and golfing catastrophe, both credited to the invisible hand of these legendary beings. Their "influence" on the game is judicious in the long run, perhaps, but utterly mysterious, always showing up in places and in ways you would not expect.

Many people regard angels in this same category of surprising, often invisible creatures—but without the bad bounces and lost balls in the middle of the fairway. Angels are here to help us, always help us. And they are normally given more credence than those golf gods because, after all, they are all over Scripture. Attend just one Christmas play, and the understanding that angels have a place in the Bible is forever implanted in your mind.

Yes, angels are in the Bible, along with demons (which are recognized as angels who chose to rebel against God upon the leading of Lucifer, or Satan). Together with God Himself, these beings comprise a world we call "supernatural"; that is, it originates outside of our common sensory experience—though our senses may indeed perceive the presence of angels. In this first lesson of our study of the invisible realm, let's survey the Bible and make notes about some of the places where angels and demons make prominent appearances.

Genesis 3

In this chapter, we are introduced to Satan, masquerading as a serpent. He lures Adam and Eve into eating from the one tree forbidden by God, thus leading them into disobedience against God, what we know as "sin." God responds by pronouncing judgments upon the man, his wife, and Satan. *Read Genesis 3:22-24* to find the conclusion of this incident and make a note about the presence of angels (cherubim) in this passage.

Job 1-2

In a cosmic conversation, Satan shows up in the presence of God to ask for permission to test the faith of Job, a man known for his diligent righteousness. *Read Job 1:6-2:10* and make a note about the "reach" of Satan into a person's life, considering as well why God might permit such influence by the enemy.

Isaiah 6 & Revelation

In these passages, we get a picture of the throne room of God, and the role of angelic beings (seraphim & the living creatures) in that room. *Read Isaiah 6:1-7 and Revelation 4:1-11* and make some notes about the actions and apparent purpose of these angels.

Luke 1

In this passage, Mary of Galilee is visited by the named angel, Gabriel, who tells her that she will be the bearer of Israel’s promised Messiah. *Read Luke 1:26-38* and make notes about how Mary interacted in a sensory way with a being with whom she would otherwise have had no sensory contact.

Ephesians 6

Here the apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians of the “spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms,” and of the battle that followers of Christ are engaged in against these forces. *Read Ephesians 6:10-20* and answer these questions: How might we recognize the existence of this battle against spiritual forces? What weapons are followers of Christ to employ in such a battle?

CONCLUSION

While this lesson only briefly introduces the supernatural in Scripture—which can also be said to include all miraculous occurrences—you should leave with the understanding that there is much to be considered when it comes to angels, demons and their actions as described in the Bible.



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Lesson Two: The beginning and existence of angelic beings

UPON OUR WRITING OF THIS LESSON, a major motion picture series, which features the comic book heroes X-Men, will pick up in its “progression” by returning to the origins of the principal characters. That is, the series will go forward by going back. Something piques our interest about origins. Knowing where people came from often allows us an insight into who they are now—ask any of the thousands of adopted children who ache to know at least something of their real parents!

But such interest is not restricted to ourselves. The opening chapters of Scripture fascinate us because, whether or not we believe them to point to literal epochs of time or figurative ones, these passages give us key insight into how the world began and God’s very active role in that beginning.

Likewise, there is intrigue and value in knowing about where angels came from, and about something of the difference between angels and human beings.

Where did angels come from?

Angels, like all things, were created by God (Colossians 1:16). However, there is no record of their being birthed, as humans are birthed. Every indication of Scripture is that angels were created in one great act of God.

When were angels created?

We cannot know exactly, except to understand that they were made before the fall of man. At the end of His creative work, God pronounced all of it “good” (although there is the possibility that God was referring only to His “natural creation” of the universe, the earth, and everything on the earth). Satan, who would successfully tempt Adam and Eve, was created among the angels and rebelled against God, taking many other angels with him (Isaiah 14:12-14; 2 Peter 2:4). So our best reckoning places the creation of the angels before the sin of Adam and Eve, if not before their own creation.

What do angels look like?

As you probably noticed in the previous lesson, angels can present themselves in various forms. Those that attend God’s throne certainly display unique features, including six wings and numerous eyes. Such descriptions play into the mysterious aspects of angelic beings, but you certainly noted as well that angels can appear in human form, as did Gabriel when he arrived to speak to Mary (we will explore more episodes like this in the next lesson). We know as well that the Bible describes Lucifer, or Satan, as one quite beautiful and as an angel of light, so his own physical representation would be attractive to those who place special stock in such matters.

How holy are angels?

Those angels that did not choose to rebel with Lucifer remain as they have always

been: holy (Mark 8:38; Revelation 14:9-10). They do not give themselves over to sin, and they are able to reside in the presence of the thrice-holy God. It is the delight and the practice of angels to serve God and obey His commandments.

What role do angels play on earth?

The Hebrew and Greek words for angels, as they are used in Scripture, define angels as messengers. When an angel is sent by God to encounter human beings, he is sent as one who brings words from God. Sometimes this is done without doubt that an angel has come, as with the visitations to Mary and Joseph. Other times, angelic visitations may be more clandestine (Hebrews 13:2), and while we do not know for certain that we have encountered an angel, the message the angel brings is unforgettable and utterly significant. Additionally, angels minister to God's people on earth (Hebrews 1:14), a truth that has given way to the idea of "guardian angels."

Where do angels "rank" in accordance with human beings?

The Bible alternately says that we were created "a little lower than the angels" and that those who believe in Christ will one day rule the angels. This means that in terms of creation, angels are stronger and smarter than any human being. However, in terms of eternal authority, those redeemed by Christ will have enduring rule over the angels.

BIBLE STUDY

Read each of the passages provided. How do some of these passages clarify some cloudy understandings you had before about angels?

Previous understanding _____

Scriptural truth _____

Previous understanding _____

Scriptural truth _____

COLOSSIANS 1

¹⁶...because by Him everything was created, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.

ISAIAH 14

¹²Shining morning star,
how you have fallen from the heavens!
You destroyer of nations,
you have been cut down to the ground.

¹³You said to yourself:
"I will ascend to the heavens;
I will set up my throne
above the stars of God.
I will sit on the mount of the [gods']
assembly,
in the remotest parts of the North.

¹⁴I will ascend above the highest clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High."

2 PETER 2

⁴For if God didn't spare the angels who sinned, but threw them down into Tartarus and delivered them to be kept in chains of darkness until judgment...

MARK 8

³⁸"For whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

REVELATION 14

⁹And a third angel followed them and spoke with a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, ¹⁰he will also drink the wine of God's wrath, which is mixed full strength in the cup of His anger. He will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the sight of the holy angels and in the sight of the Lamb...

HEBREWS 1

¹⁴Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve those who are going to inherit salvation?



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Lesson Three: Angels in Scripture

LET'S ALLOW ONE THING TO LEAD TO ANOTHER. In the last lesson, we examined some of the basic questions about and characteristics of angels as Scripture reveals them to us. In this lesson, we will take some time to read passages in both the Old and New Testaments to discover angels in action.

The angels with Lot in Sodom

Read *Genesis 19:1-11* to discover how two angels interacted with Lot. Make some notes about this occurrence, including the human nature the angels occupied, the righteousness of God they represented, and the power they exhibited.

Balaam's donkey and the angel of the LORD

Read *Numbers 22:22-35* (you may begin at verse 1 to capture the context of the account if you are unfamiliar with this passage). Again make notes about this "angel of the LORD," including his separate interactions with the donkey and with Balaam. Why do you think that the donkey was initially more cognizant of the angel than Balaam?

Angels and "the angel of the LORD"

Throughout the Old Testament, we find a differentiation between "normal" angels and "the angel of the LORD." The latter is regarded as the direct representative of God, speaking God's very commands. By presenting Himself in this way, people could see and hear God and still live (refer to Deuteronomy 5:24-26). Additionally, there is a

strong line of theological reasoning that asserts that, at least in some cases, the angel of the Lord is a pre-incarnate Jesus Christ (that is, Christ in angelic/human form before He later came to take on human flesh and live among us).

'Guardian angels' in the book of Daniel

Read Daniel, chapters 3 and 6 to refamiliarize yourself with two of the Old Testament's most well-known accounts. In chapter 3, note how an angel came to the rescue of the three young men sentenced to the furnace, as well as how Nebuchadnezzar credited this angel with saving the men. In 6:22, note as well how Daniel identified an angel as the one who saved him from the lion's mouths. How do these passages support the notion of guardian angels, at least in the gravest circumstances? In what way do these passages demonstrate God's caring interest in His people?

The words of the angel for Zechariah

Read Zechariah 1:7-17 to discover how God used an angel to equip Zechariah with prophecies. The next several chapters (at least through 6:8) unveil a running conversation between Zechariah and the angel. How does such a conversation inform your perspective on the prophecies of the Old Testament? In what way would you expect a person today to hear from God? Why do you think we would be likely to discredit one who said that they had conversed with an angel?

The host of angels announcing Christ's birth

Read Luke 2:8-15, especially looking for fresh perspective into this "old story." Whereas other biblical accounts usually feature only one or two angels, here we see a multitude. Why do you think so many angels were assigned to the task of heralding Christ? What was the initial response of this audience to the proclaiming angel, and why do you think they responded in this way? To whom did the angels appear—and does the nature of this audience tell us anything important?



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Lesson Four: Demons in Scripture

SOME TOPICS WILL JUST NEVER BE POPULAR. Demons are one of these. Those who speak seriously of demons are considered slightly “off.” They are said to find demons “behind every bush,” like witch hunters of old, and dismissed as judgmental at best, strange at worst. So nearly everyone else steers clear of conversation about these evil forces.

Of course, there are those who are both judgmental and strange. But Jesus, who could be classified as neither, spoke not only *of* demons but *to* them. The Savior did not discount their presence, their knowledge, or their power—all of which they possess as former God-praising angels now fallen with Satan. In many places throughout the Gospels and Acts, demons showed themselves and were handled spiritually by Christ and His apostles. Let’s examine some of these accounts:

The source behind Jesus’ power over demons

Read Matthew 12:22-28. For the Pharisees, what was at issue behind this healing of a demon-oppressed man? How did Jesus show their reasoning faulty? How did Jesus’ authority over demons point to His greater work as the Son of God?

Ministry of casting out demons and restrictions on their knowledge

Read Mark 1:32-39. The casting out of demons is listed with what other aspects of Jesus’ ministry?

Why did Jesus restrict the demons’ voice? (Compare with Luke 4:41.) Why do you think this was important to Jesus at this time?

Tackling demons: Beyond Jesus alone

Read Mark 9:38-41. How does this passage show that others besides Jesus are enabled to cast out demons? In what ways does this change your perspective on the need to be aware of demonic presence?

A frightening and heart-turning encounter

Read Acts 19:11-20. Begin by noting that demons here are referred to as “evil spirits,” and that God was doing “extraordinary miracles” through Paul, including the casting out of these evil spirits. What great power do the demons demonstrate in this passage? What responses did this encounter cause in the residents of the region (don’t miss verse 20: “*In this way the Lord’s message flourished and prevailed*”)?

Even the demons believe!

Read James 2:18-20. What amazing reminder does this passage give us about the awareness of demons with regard to God and His Son? Note how this passage compels us to reach beyond simple belief to faith-confirming obedience and action.

Demons in the future

Read Revelation 9:20-21. With what other types of sin does this passage group the worship of demons? How does this passage reveal the persevering lack of repentance among those who worship demons? Why do you think people choose to “live among evil” rather than turn to Christ?



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Lesson Five: Satan, lord of the demons

WHEN THE BIBLE REFERS TO GOD AS THE LORD OF HOSTS, it is referring to the armies of angels at His disposal. Through these hosts, He announces and ordains His work on the earth and in the heavens, all the way into eternity. That is a vast rule.

But there is another ruler to which Scripture refers. He is called “Beelzebul, the prince of demons” (Matthew 12:24). In another passage (Ephesians 2:2), he is called “the prince of the power of the air.” He is the one followed by a large portion (apparently one-third—see Revelation 12:4) of God’s angels. Now as demons they do the bidding of their new lord, the one most commonly referred to as Satan.

Two known encounters

In the first lesson of this study (p. 4-5), we explored two ancient encounters with Satan experienced by people of earth.

The first of these was the Genesis encounter, where Adam and Eve were met by Satan, who had taken the form of a serpent and who successfully tempted the man and his wife to defy God’s commands and choose their own course. From this passage, we are right in noting the deceptive nature of Satan, a trait that we will find confirmed in later passages in Scripture.

The second encounter was not a direct face-off between Satan and Job. Rather, Satan attempted to derail Job’s faith in God by afflicting him with the destruction of his family, his property, his health, and his friendships. From this passage, we grew in our understanding that Satan will employ wicked methods—even the taking of life—in an effort to separate us from the love of God.

More views of Satan and his work

Let’s continue now to explore passages in Scripture that reveal some of the attributes and activities of Satan.

Read Isaiah 14:12-17, a passage that refers to Satan as “Day Star and son of Dawn.” What does this passage tell us that Satan attempted to do, and what does it tell us will be the result of his actions?

Read *Ezekiel 28:11-19*, a passage where Satan is veiled as the king of Tyre. How does this passage describe Satan favorably? What then happened to him? And what does the passage say will happen to Satan in the end?

Read *Matthew 12:24*. What position of authority does this passage assign to Satan?

Read *Matthew 6:13* and *1 John 5:19*. What qualities do these passages assign to Satan?

Read *1 Thessalonians 3:5* and *James 1:12-15*. What activity is Satan involved in as he seeks to draw us away from God, and what tools does he use?

Read *John 8:44* and *1 Corinthians 1:13-15*. What role does deception play in Satan's character and activity? How does knowing this about Satan help us to counter his attacks?

REFLECTION

In the next two lessons we will study spiritual warfare in Scripture and in our lives. In order to prepare for these lessons based on what we have already studied, reflect on what you have read in Scripture and consider: What validity do you find in the old expression, "The devil made me do it"? Where does Satan's work run up against our personal responsibility and our dependence on God? (Consider as well *1 Corinthians 10:13*).



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Lesson Six: Spiritual warfare, Part I

IN MOST OF THE WESTERN WORLD, OUR FASCINATION with athletic competition is higher than ever. But not only sports channels broadcast battles anymore. Flip through the endless listing of cable television and you'll find cook-offs and talent wars and survival contests.

Because of this piqued interest in showdowns and because of the studying we have been doing about the invisible forces revealed in the Bible, you would not be alone if your curiosity leads you to wonder about the encounters between angelic and demon armies—moreover, between God's side and Satan's side. Among those who study the Bible, this is frequently referred to as "spiritual warfare" (though this term itself is not used in Scripture).

Before we embark on the study portion of this first of two lessons about spiritual warfare, we want to be clear that the Bible is clear: while the fight on earth rages on, the outcome has already been settled. Christ's resurrection, having broken the grip of enduring death for all who believe in Him, has effectively thwarted the grand scheme of Satan. What is now seen from the enemy of God amounts to nothing more than pot-shots. In modern terms, the bank has foreclosed on the loan, the notice has been sent, and while a family may still say they live in the house, it is only a matter of time before the bank forces them out. So it is with God; the day when He will send Satan packing draws nearer all the time.

So why bother studying spiritual warfare? The answer is really quite simple. If Satan and his demons are bent on attacking us through trials, temptation, deception and accusation, then we would do well to be able to recognize these attacks for what they are and prepare our own spirits to respond.

We will begin by examining two significant spiritual encounters as they are shown in Scripture.

Daniel and the prince of Persia

In the tenth chapter of the Old Testament book of Daniel, which includes a combination of history and prophecy, Daniel reveals the contents of a vision wherein a battle occurs between "one with human likeness," "the prince of the kingdom of Persia," and Michael, the archangel. Though brief, no other account in Scripture seems to describe a spiritual face-off as this does. *Read Daniel 10:1-21.*

What appearance and dress did the man whom Daniel encountered possess (vv. 5-6)?

What were the reactions of Daniel and his companions to the angelic man (vv. 7-9, 15-17)?

What delayed the angelic man and how was he released to come to Daniel (vv. 12-14)?

Bible commentators nearly all agree that “the prince of the kingdom of Persia” was a leader in the demon realms, in the same way that Michael is referred to as an “archangel” or “chief prince” in God’s heavenly armies. Therefore, invisible forces were in direct battle over the delivery of this prophetic message to Daniel. A passage like this certainly helps give understanding to the Ephesians 6 passage that we will explore in the next lesson, where we read that our battle is “not against flesh and blood, but against... the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

The temptation of Christ

Many people are aware of the direct encounter between Jesus Christ and Satan as it is depicted in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. However, let’s review this account now in light of our fuller knowledge of spiritual warfare. *Read Matthew 4:1-11.*

Satan appeared before Jesus immediately following Jesus’ 40-day fast. Some suggest that this means Satan attacked Jesus while He was at His weakest; others say, rather, that Satan came upon Jesus when He was at His strongest. How are both of these conclusions possible?

In each case, Satan used Scripture in his attempt to tempt Jesus. And each time Jesus responded with an accurate clarification of the Scriptures. What does this tell us about Satan’s deceptive tactics and the value of knowing the word of God?

In verse 11, Jesus was restored to health by angels. What does this reveal to us about their ministry?



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Lesson Seven: Spiritual warfare, Part 2

AS YOU READ THROUGH THE LAST LESSON and its accompanying Scripture passages, you may have come to this internal conclusion: *I don't want to have anything to do with spiritual warfare! Demons are wicked and even angels can be frightful, so I'd rather just stay in my comfortable place and mind my own business.* And for reaching that conclusion, we really couldn't blame you. Angels often have to begin their encounters with human beings with these words: "Fear not!"

Here is the truth, however: You don't have a choice. You live in a spiritual world. And in this spiritual world, the forces at work will attempt to engage you, both desiring to show which side is stronger.

But here is an equally important reminder: While for angelic and demonic beings the battle may be a *power encounter*, for you and me the best defense we can employ comes in keeping the battle in the realm of truth—that is, make it a *truth encounter*. Like Jesus, our knowledge of the truth will help us win out against temptation and continue to grow steadfast in our pursuit of Him. (And the greatest truth may be that His grace restores us on those occasions when temptation grabs us.) With this in mind, let's take a few more looks at what the Bible teaches us about the enemy who would come against us.

The armor of God

In the opening lesson of this study, we briefly examined Ephesians 6:10-20 to note the presence of invisible forces in the universe. Look again at this passage closely.

According to verse 10, what enables the believer in spiritual battles?

Verse 11 tells us that Satan does not operate willy-nilly but that he employs tactics (alternately translated *schemes* or *tricks*) in his warfare. How might we be purposeful in our response to these schemes?

Because we suggested that you list the weapons of spiritual warfare in Lesson 1 (p. 5), we will not do that again. Rather, look now at the concluding verses of this passage, 18-20. What activity did Paul (the writer of the letter to the Ephesians) emphasize in these verses? How, specifically, did he say we should employ this practice?

Liars and truth-tellers

When Satan came to Christ in the wilderness to tempt Him, the face-off was direct. In our lives, the enemy will often employ unrighteous people to do his work. But his tactics are still the same: chiefly deception and falsehood. We can learn much about these schemes when we *read 2 Peter 2:1-16*.

In verses 1-2, what are revealed as methods of false teachers? What happens to truth as people follow these teachers?

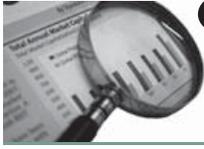
What teachings in verses 3 and 13-14 help us identify possible false teachers?

From verses 10 and 11, make a note of the alternate tactics of false teachers and angels. Include in your thinking what we know about Satan from Revelation 12:10.

A look ahead

In the final study of the Spiritual Due Diligence series, we will address what the Bible has to say about the end times. Included in that study will be the matter of Satan's final defeat before God. A quick preview of that material is of immense value here in fortifying our confidence in Christ's work in us and for us as we now encounter spiritual warfare with a greater awareness of biblical teaching. *Read Revelation 20:1-3 and 7-10.*

How is Satan's reign finally ended? What does this mean for our joy in eternity?



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Lesson Eight: In review—what do we know about angels and demons?

IT IS LIKELY THAT WHEN YOU BEGAN THIS STUDY, you had several preconceptions about angels and demons. Most people do, because it is hard to ignore this fascinating topic. As you moved through these lessons, you should have gained an increased sense of what the Bible teaches about the invisible realm, including angels and demons. Before we move away from this study, let's take some time to review what we have learned, allowing us to secure our gained knowledge.

The presence of the supernatural

Review your notes in Lesson 1 (pp. 4-5). What leapt out at you as surprising in this opening survey of references to angels and demons in the Bible?

Characteristics of angels

From Lesson 2, list six to eight pieces of information that the Bible gives us directly about angels:

Angels and demons in Scripture

Reviewing Lessons 3 and 4, which account from Scripture held the most value for you in your understanding of angels and/or demons? What caught your attention?

Our great enemy

Lesson 5 focused specifically on Satan. What new truths were revealed (or old truths renewed) for you in this lesson?

Spiritual warfare

How did reading the account of Jesus’ resistance to Satan’s temptations (Lesson 6) help you build a strategy for your own resistance to temptation? New material: According to Hebrews 4:14-16, how is Christ equipped to serve as our “great high priest” because of these temptations?

What role does deception play in drawing us from Christ? How can we recognize deception and fight against it?

Ready to go forward

In what ways do you find yourself more equipped with useful biblical knowledge because of this study?

WHAT’S NEXT?

This is the seventh in a series of studies on spiritual due diligence. The complete set of studies allow for a thorough investigation of some of a number of spiritual matters, including:

- The need for due diligence
- The nature of man
- The nature of God
- The nature of Scripture
- Death and life after death
- Christ and other religions

The final study in the series, which you may explore next, is “End Times and Eternity.”

For as long as people have been reading the Bible, they have been fascinated by the prophetic passages that point to the “end times.” In our next study, we will explore some of these important passages as we look to gain an understanding of how the present world will come to a close as God ushers in the eternal heaven and earth.

Through all of these studies, our hope is that you will gain a greater and greater sense of who God is and how He promises to interact with you as taught in the Bible. If this occurs, you will have accomplished what many have not—you will have conducted your spiritual due diligence.

What you decide to do with the knowledge you gain is surely a matter between you and God. But we also believe that God has designed us to live in community with other people. Therefore, it is also important that you discuss what you are thinking with others who are also considering the claims of Scripture, be they “seasoned veterans” of Bible study or quite new at the task. If you are not in a study with others at this time and would like to be, call Links Players at 800-90-LINKS and we’ll offer some suggestions for groups who might encourage you in your thought and discussion.



Spiritual Due Diligence

Leading a group study

IT CAN BE DAUNTING TO BE CALLED ON to teach the Word of God. Indeed, many potential leaders have told us that while they are capable of and eager to bring a group together, or to act as host, teaching is an entirely different level, one for which they do not consider themselves prepared.

Others don't feel so much weight when it comes to teaching. They know their Bibles well, or they're naturals when speaking to a crowd.

It is, then, the precise goal of the structure of these Links Players Bible studies to provide a fully operational Bible study for those teachers who need much assistance and yet a format that leaves room for experienced leaders to bring their own learning to the table.

The lessons include these features:

- An **introduction** providing connections for the reader between what they see and know in their lives and the topic of study at hand. While we are primarily a sports-minded ministry aimed at golfers, our materials are used by many non-golfers. Therefore, these introductions use examples from more common experiences, as well as those tied to athletics.
- A **narrative** progressing through the main ideas of the lesson. Some leaders may choose to read this with the participants verbatim (or nearly so). Others may use it as a general guide for presenting the material.
- A **Bible study**, drawing from particular specific Scripture passages. In this more advanced study, the references are provided but most need to be read in an accompanying Bible. You may find that you wish to read the broader context for these passages as well. You may also wish to look up these passages in other translations to see how the alternate wording can assist in understanding.
- Sometimes a **reflection** is included, challenging participants to make some mental connections and decisions about what they have studied.
- **SPECIAL NOTE:** One of the most helpful volumes on the nature and work of angels remains Billy Graham's *Angels: God's Secret Angels*, recently re-released by Thomas Nelson Publishers. For further study on angels, we suggest this book.

In addition to these studies, as your group grows together, you will want to include opportunity for prayer among the participants. Even with a study like this one, which may include a number of participants who are just beginning their investigations of God, Christ, and the Bible, prayer is often an open door for those who are truly seeking God. Offering to pray for personal and family needs is often the best way to begin this practice.

We also strongly encourage leaders to stay in touch with participants throughout the week, simply making themselves available for further questions and discussion.

In the same way, we are available to talk to group leaders about their experiences and to answer questions regarding the studies. You may call us Monday-Friday at 800-90-LINKS.

What is a Links Player?



Spiritual
Due Diligence

THE LINKS PLAYERS BIBLE STUDIES, including “Christ and other religions,” are produced by Links Players International, a Christian sports ministry aimed primarily at golfers. The good news is that sometimes in that aim, we miss! That is, there are plenty of non-golfers who have found benefit in the Daily Devotional, Bible studies, and magazines we have published through the years.

There is a reason for this, of course, and that is because truth transcends our human experiences. For instance, while we often hate to admit it, in many ways we cannot improve on how the previous generation lived. Technologically, we may have made some nifty advancements, but in terms of human interaction—and, we believe, humans interacting with God—we don’t make any real progress through time.

Therefore, whether or not you are a golfer, we think that the chief principles we teach and learn can apply to you. A Links Player tries, by the power of God’s Holy Spirit in them, to live according to the following principles:

LOVE GOD AND OTHERS. When asked the greatest commandment of Scripture, Jesus replied, “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*” He went on to say, “*This is the greatest and most important commandment. The second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’*” (Matthew 22:37-39)

INTEGRATE CHRIST’S REIGN AND INTEGRITY INTO ALL OF LIFE. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told the crowds, “*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things (the necessities of life) will be provided for you.*” (Matthew 6:33)

NETWORK FRIENDS TOGETHER IN CHRIST. When the followers of Jesus met together after His ascension into heaven, it was said of them: *They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.* (Acts 2:42)

KINDLE COMPASSION FOR THE POOR AND NEEDY. Jesus told a parable of the eventual judgment of each man and woman by God. In it, He provided insight into the standards of this judgment: “*The King will answer them, ‘I assure you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.’*” (Matthew 25:40)

SHARE CHRIST. One of the chief of Christ’s apostles, Paul, wrote to the church at Corinth this reminder: *Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ; certain that God is appealing through us, we plead on Christ’s behalf, ‘Be reconciled to God.’* (2 Corinthians 5:20)

Today, you may find that you have reason to be reconciled to God and to become a Links Player yourself. If so, you need to tell God in prayer: *Heavenly Father, Through Your Son Jesus Christ, I am prepared to offer my life to You. Please take it and all of my sin, and begin to renew me as Your ambassador. Amen.* If you have prayed that prayer, you will also want to share your decision with a trusted friend who knows Christ. This way they can encourage and lead you in your new walk of faith. It will be a challenge worth every step!

