



# **GCSE Religious Studies (Short Course)**

## **Revision Guide**

### **Component 2 Christianity**

**(35 minutes)**

## GCSE Religious Studies Revision Guide Summer 2023 – CHRISTIANITY

**Note: you will not be required to learn length extracts from the Bible but you should make reference to them to support points that you make. Bible verses from the specification have been included in full, with key points and a summary in bold.**

***Specification: Beliefs in Great Britain; Christianity in Britain; results of the 2011 census compared to 2001 census, showing an increase in diverse religious and non-religious beliefs and practices (including Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, Humanism and Atheism), whilst also showing that more than half of those who responded considered themselves Christian. UK laws, festivals and traditions rooted in the Christian tradition***

### **Beliefs in Great Britain**

#### **Results of the 2021 census compared to the 2011 and 2001 census**

2021 Census showed Christianity as the religion of 46.2% of British people, (still the largest proportion). In contrast the 2011 Census showed Christianity as the largest religion (59.3% - down from 72% in 2001)

The second largest was Islam at 6.5% (increased from 3% in 2001 to 4.8% in 2011) then Hinduism (1.7%) Sikhism (0.9%) Judaism (0.5%) Buddhism (0.5%) and others (0.6%)

There was an increase in those reporting no religion to 38% in 2021 (25.1% reported having no religion in 2011, up from 15% in 2001)

Overall, this shows that Christianity is still the religion followed by the largest number of people, but this number is declining while the number stating that they do not follow any religion is increasing. Figures for minority religions are increasing.

#### **UK Laws, festivals and traditions rooted in the Christian tradition**

- Laws related to the Ten Commandments (e.g. not killing, not stealing)
- Christian festivals such as Easter and Christmas are celebrated by many people, including non-Christians
- Traditions such as Christian ceremonies for births, marriages and deaths remain popular

#### **Should the UK still be classed as Christian?**

Supporting views...

- Over half of those who complete the 2011 census considered themselves to be Christian
- Many people still have rites of passage ceremonies in church (e.g. christenings, weddings, funerals)
- Some Christian churches are growing
- Church leaders are still influential (e.g. Bishops in the House of Lords)
- Immigration can bring Christians to the country

Opposing views...

- Increase in non-religious beliefs and society has become more secular (e.g. shops open on Sunday; relaxing of divorce and abortion laws)
- Christian traditions but now also holds large communities made up of different faiths such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism and Judaism which all have different places of worship, dress codes etc. Greater diversity from immigration.
- Attendance at Christian services is falling, far below the number of people stating that Christianity is their religion
- Being an atheist is now more acceptable than in the past. Emphasis on Science rather than religion.

**Specification: The nature of God.** Omnipotent: Exodus 7-11, Exodus 14:21; Omni-benevolent: Psalm 86:15, John 3:16, Romans 8: 37-39. Evil and suffering: Quote on God and evil from Epicurus, Book of Job 1:8-12, 42: 1-6

*The Trinity, beliefs and teachings about the oneness of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit: John 10:30, John 14:6-11*

**Christians believe that God is...**

- **Omnipotent** (all powerful). This was demonstrated in the book of **Exodus** where he unleashed a series of plagues upon Egypt including turning water into blood and killing all first born children. These demonstrated his power of nature, the elements and even life and death

- **Omnibenevolent** (all-loving/ininitely good). Demonstrated in the following texts:

**Psalm 86:15.** *But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.*

**This tells us that God cares for us, is full of love for us, and will never leave us.**

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

**This tells us that God loves us so much that he sacrificed his son so that we could be forgiven and go to heaven for eternity**

**Romans 8: 37-39.** *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

**This tells us that nothing will come between us and God's love**

- **Evil and suffering**

**Quote on God from Epicurus:**

"Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent.

Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent (wishes harm to others)

Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil?

Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?"

**This quote challenges Christian beliefs regarding the nature of God, asking why an all-knowing and all-powerful God does not intervene in the world and stop evil.**

Some people would argue that the presence of evil and suffering in the world goes against the idea of an all-loving God as he would hold the power to stop the suffering.

However, Christians explain this in different ways:

- God gave each person **free will** so that they can make their own choices. Some will choose evil.
- The devil exists on earth as a force for evil
- Suffering is a **test**
- Suffering is a **result of sin**
- How we deal with suffering gives us the chance to **become better people**
- Evil can lead to **positive actions** (e.g. compassion on a large scale following a terrorist attack)

## **The story of Job**

Job was a wealthy man who always avoided doing wrong. Satan appears before God and says that Job is only good because God had blessed him – if Satan was allowed to challenge him he would turn against God. God allowed Satan to test him. Job hears that all of his flocks, servants and children have died but he still praises God. God allows him to be tested again with terrible sores and his wife encourages him to curse God but she refuses. Job eventually questions why God allows the wicked to prosper while the innocent suffer. However, he ultimately states that God's ways are beyond human understanding and he still has faith in God.

This story therefore tells us that Christians will suffer but that God's ways are beyond human understanding and they should therefore remain faithful

## **- The Trinity**

Christians believe in the **oneness** of God (they are monotheists) but that God is made up of **three persons**:

- **God the father**. All knowing and all powerful. Shows the caring nature of God, like that between a father and his child

- **God the son**. Jesus Christ – God in human form (God incarnate). By becoming human as Jesus God revealed his nature to the world

- **The Holy Spirit**. Christians believe that after his resurrection Jesus rose up to heaven. God then sent the holy spirit into the world to guide Christians and help them to live their lives in the best way possible. Some Christians such as Pentecostals believe that the Holy Spirit allows them to 'speak in tongues' or fall over having been 'slain by the spirit'

**John 10:30** (Jesus said) *"I and the father are one"* – **this tells us that Jesus is God in human form**

**John 14: 6-11** *Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."*

*Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."*

*Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.*

**This also tells us that Jesus is God in human form and that what he says is the word of God.**

**Specification: Creation. Genesis 1-3; nature and role of humans, literal and non-literal ways of interpretation. The role of Word and Spirit in creation: John 1: 1-5**

**Genesis 1** gives an account of how God created the world and everything on it. God created everything in 6 days and rested on the 7<sup>th</sup>.

Some **fundamentalist** Christians interpret the creation story **literally** and believe that it means that each part of creation took place within 24 hours and within the same week. They reject the scientific belief that the universe has developed over millions of years and concepts such as the 'big bang' and 'evolution'. They may believe that dinosaurs and humans existed at the same time.

However, other Christians adopt a more **liberal, non-literal interpretation**. They may see a day in Genesis as representing millions of years, allowing for scientific theories to be incorporated within the account (such as evolution, with life appearing first in the waters and then on land)

Furthermore, other Christians may see the story as being entirely **symbolic**, designed to inform us of God's power and nature rather than to be a historical account.

**Genesis 2** – Adam lives in paradise in the Garden of Eden and God creates a companion for Adam from his rib – a woman called Eve. God gives them one commandment – not to eat fruit from the tree of knowledge. This account makes it clear that humans have a role in **caring and ruling over God's creation** (they are given '**dominion**' over his creation and this power must be exercised through **stewardship** on his behalf). **Humans are unique** in his creation as they are made in '**God's image**'

### **Genesis 3 – The fall**

A serpent (the devil) tempts Eve to eat fruit from the tree of knowledge, and she encourages Adam to do so as well. They confess to God what they have done; God is angry and banishes them from the Garden of Eden to live elsewhere on earth. This is important for Christians as it represents the moment when the perfect relationships between God and humans was broken. Because of this all Christians believe that we are all born with '**original sin**' and this is why it was necessary for Jesus to die on the cross to pay the price for this sin.

### **The role of Word and Spirit in creation: John 1: 1-5**

*"In the beginning was the **Word**, and the **Word** was with God, and the **Word** was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."*

**Some Christians interpret the 'word' as meaning 'Jesus' which means that this emphasises that Jesus is God and that he was part of all of creation.**

**Specification: Jesus Christ.** Beliefs and teachings about Jesus' incarnation: John 1:14, Luke 1:28-33. Crucifixion: Matthew 27:28-50; Salvation and atonement: Matthew 26:26-29, Leviticus 16:20-22, Isaiah 53:3-9. Resurrection: Luke 24:1-9, 1 Corinthians 15: 3-8, 12-14; Ascension: Luke 24: 50-53

**Incarnation** – Christians believe that Jesus was God incarnate – God in human form. An angel appeared to Mary and told her that she would give birth to a son, who would be named Jesus. Mary was a virgin when she gave birth.

**John 1: 14** *“The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us”*

**Luke 1:28-3:** *The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you. Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”*

Evidence for Jesus being the son of God came from...

- The virgin birth
- His miracles (e.g. healing the sick, feeding the 5000)
- His resurrection (coming back to life after he was killed)

**Crucifixion** – Jesus’ teachings brought him into conflict with the Jewish authorities who accused him of blasphemy because of what he said. He was eventually arrested and executed for stating that he was a king which was a form of treason. He was nailed to a wooden cross and a crown of thorns placed on his head. Christians believe that he suffered as any human would.

**Matthew 27: 28-50 (note the highlighted points if asked for a brief account)**

*They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a **crown of thorns** and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and **mocked him**. “Hail, king of the Jews!” they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.*

*As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named **Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross**. They came to a place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”). There they **offered Jesus wine to drink**, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. When they had crucified him, they **divided up his clothes by casting lots**. And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. **Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.***

*Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.*

*From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon **Jesus cried out in a loud voice**, “Eli, Eli, lemasabachthani?” (which means “**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**”).*

*When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.” Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.” And when **Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.** (died)*

The significance of the crucifixion:

**Salvation and atonement – Jesus’ death on the cross was an act of atonement. The ‘fall’ (when Adam and Eve disobeyed God) broke the perfect relationship between humans and God but Jesus dying paid the price for this sin and allowed people to be forgiven and live for eternity with God in heaven after death.**

**Matthew 26:26-29**

*“While they were eating, Jesus took **bread**, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; **this is my body.**”*

*Then he took a **cup**, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. **This is my blood** of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the **forgiveness of sins**. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”*

**This tells us that Jesus knew what was going to happen to him and explains the reason for him dying – so that people can be forgiven.**

**Leviticus 16: 20-22** *“When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat’s head. He shall send the goat away into the wilderness in the care of someone appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a remote place; and the man shall release it in the wilderness.*

**This explains how Jesus (the goat in this story) took on the sins of everybody (so that they could be forgiven)**

**Isaiah 53: 3-9**

*He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.*

**This explains how Jesus took on the punishment for all of our sins, even though he had done nothing wrong himself**

## **Resurrection**

**The resurrection is fundamental to the Christian faith. This is when Jesus rose from the dead after his crucifixion. They see this as his greatest miracle and evidence that he was God.**

**Luke 24: 1-9.** *On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' " Then they remembered his words. When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others.*

### **1 Corinthians 15:12-14**

*But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.*

## **Ascension**

**Christians believe that Jesus appeared to a number of people after his resurrection before ascending (going up) to Heaven. Some take this literally - he rose up - while others believe that the language is more symbolic.**

**Luke 24:50-53** *When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.*

**From this moment Jesus was no longer on earth but Christians believe that God's spirit remained with us**



**Specification: Salvation.** *Law: Word of God; inspiration and revelation; different ways of interpreting biblical writings; Bible in relation to other sources of authority. Sin as preventing salvation. Grace and the Spirit: Acts 2:1-6. The role of Holy Spirit in Evangelical worship.*

## Law

Christians view the Bible of being the word of God – a record of ‘divine law’ (God’s laws by which we should live our lives)

However, the Bible was written by people who were seen as being inspired by God or who received revelations (messages and understanding) from God

While the Bible is the main source of authority in Christianity, it can be interpreted in different ways (as discussed in the creation section):

- Literal interpretation (every word is true and actually happened)
- Non-literal interpretation (it is true, but a certain amount of interpretation is required)
- Symbolic (the meaning of the stories is important – they should not be seen as historical accounts)

In addition to the Bible, there are other sources of authority in Christianity as well such as:

- Ministers or priests
- The teaching of a particular denomination
- Other, more experienced Christians within the church
- Responses to prayer
- Conscience, feeling moved by the Holy Spirit

## Sin as preventing salvation

Sin is anything that goes against God’s law. Sin separates people from God, while salvation brings them together. Therefore, the more people sin, the more people move away from God.

## Grace and the Spirit

Grace refers to the goodness and mercy of god towards human beings.

God sends the Holy Spirit to bring grace and help people to move closer to God. The Holy Spirit plays an important role in evangelical worship, with ‘gifts from the spirit’ such as speaking in tongues or having the power to heal helping people to believe in and understand God.

## Acts 2: 1-6

*When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken.*

*Specification: The afterlife. Eschatological beliefs: John 11:25-26; John 14:2-7. Judgement: Matthew 25:31-46, Luke 16: 19-31. Resurrection: 1 Corinthians 15: 42-55, Traditional and contemporary beliefs about Heaven and Hell*

Eschatological beliefs =beliefs about death, judgement and the final destiny of the soul and humankind.

John 11: 25-26

*Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;<sup>26</sup> and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"*

John 14: 2-7

*My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way? Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."*

These verses tell us that if you believe in and follow the teachings of Jesus then you will live forever in Heaven.

Judgement

Christians believe that there will be a day of judgement where a final decision is made over how they will spend eternity. Christians believe that on this day Jesus will return to earth (the second coming) and earth will cease to exist. People will be separated into those who will go to heaven and those who will go to hell...

Matthew 25:31-46. The Sheep and the Goats

*"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.<sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.*

*"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'*

*"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'*

*"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'*

*"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."*

This story tells us that there will be a day of judgement where people will be divided into those who have led good lives (e.g. by helping the poor) and those who have not. Those who have led good lives will have eternal life (in heaven) while those who have not will have eternal punishment.

Luke 16: 19-31. Lazarus and the Rich Man

*“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. “The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’ “But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’ “He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ “Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’ ““No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ “He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”*

This story tells of somebody who gained riches for himself but did not care for the poor and was therefore sent to Hell when he died. It also emphasises the importance of people listening to Christian teachings and believing them without having to see evidence.

Resurrection

Christians believe that people who have died will be brought back to life with physical bodies on the day of judgement.

1 Corinthians 15:42-55

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.

I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”

This story explains how the physical body will be raised as a spiritual one – everybody will be resurrected and their spirits will live on in Heaven or Hell.

## Traditional and contemporary beliefs about Heaven and Hell

The Bible does not give many descriptions of Heaven and Hell, and they are therefore interpreted in different ways.

Most Christians view them as the places that you go in the afterlife: Hell if you have been bad, Heaven if you have been good. They believe that Heaven is where God and angels are located.

Some believe that heaven is a physical place whereas others believe that it is a spiritual place

There are also different views of hell, but most agree that it is a place of suffering. As with heaven, some believe that it is a physical place whereas others see it as a spiritual place. Most Christians believe that the main torment and punishment is complete separation from God.

Traditional views...

Physical places

Heaven in the sky, hell underground

Heaven = paradise, people restored in healthy, physical bodies. Images of clouds and golden gates.

Hell = images of fire and endless torture/punishment

Contemporary views...

Heaven is where God is, hell is where he is not.

Would an all loving and forgiving God send people to Hell for eternity? A current debate in Christianity

Purgatory

Catholic Christians believe in purgatory. People who die cannot go immediately to heaven because of their sins so they go to purgatory, a place to stay before heaven, in which they go through a process of cleansing and purification.

## GCSE Religious Studies Revision Guide 2023– Issues of Life and Death

**Note-** you must be able to refer to two different religions or two different religious traditions in your 8 mark responses. We have focused on different Christian denominations (e.g. Anglican and Catholic) but you could add ideas from other religions if you prefer (e.g. ones that you have studied or your own religion). You must also consider non-religious views as these are required in your 15 mark response.

*Specification: Issues of Life and Death – The World. Diverse Christian beliefs, teachings and attitudes about the accounts of the origin of the universe: Genesis 1 and 2.*

**Genesis 1** gives an account of how God created the world and everything on it. God created everything in 6 days and rested on the 7<sup>th</sup>.

Some **fundamentalist** Christians interpret the creation story **literally** and believe that it means that each part of creation took place within 24 hours and within the same week. They reject the scientific belief that the universe has developed over millions of years and concepts such as the 'big bang' and 'evolution'. They may believe that dinosaurs and humans existed at the same time.

However, other Christians adopt a more **liberal, non-literal interpretation**. They may see a day in Genesis as representing millions of years, allowing for scientific theories to be incorporated within the account (such as evolution, with life appearing first in the waters and then on land)

Furthermore, other Christians may see the story as being entirely **symbolic**, designed to inform us of God's power and nature rather than to be a historical account.

**Genesis 2** – Adam lives in paradise in the Garden of Eden and God creates a companion for Adam from his rib – a woman called Eve. God gives them one commandment – not to eat fruit from the tree of knowledge.

*Specification: Issues of Life and Death – The World. The relationship between Christian views and non-religious views of creation and the extent to which they conflict; Stephen Hawking's view of the Big Bang*

### **Big Bang Theory: A scientific explanation of the creation of the universe**

'Big Bang' theory states that about 13.7 billion years ago all the matter in the Universe was concentrated into a single incredibly tiny point. This began to enlarge rapidly in a hot explosion, and it is still expanding today.

Evidence for the Big Bang includes:

- all the galaxies are moving away from us
  - the further away a galaxy is, the faster it is moving away.
- These two features are found in explosions - the fastest moving objects end up furthest away from the explosion.

Scientists have also detected a cosmic microwave background radiation or CMBR. This is received from all parts of the Universe and is thought to be the heat left over from the original explosion.

**Stephen Hawking** was a British theoretical physicist who spent his life looking at the nature of the universe including how it started and built upon existing understanding and theories from other scientists.

### **Conflict between religious and non-religious views?**

## Yes...

Some Christians **reject** Big Bang Theory because it does not fit within their literal interpretation of Genesis. **Young-Earth Creationists** believe that the universe is less than 10,000 years old so will not accept the suggestion that the universe has expand over billions of years.

## No...

However, many more **liberal Christians** are happy to combine the Genesis account with what we know from scientific research. For example, they would state that the Big Bang was created by God and the days in Genesis may represent billions of years. Whatever we discover from science simply tells us more about God's design.

*Interesting point...the person most commonly credited with developing 'Big Bang' theory, Georges Lemaitre, was a Catholic priest who was also a physicist.*

**Specification: Issues of Life and Death – The World.** *Christian and non-religious beliefs, teachings and attitudes about dominion, stewardship, environmental responsibility, sustainability, and global citizenship: Genesis 1:28, Psalm 8:6, 'Humanists for a Better World'*

## Definitions:

- Dominion: Ruling or having control over something
- Stewardship: The task of supervising or taking control of something
- Environmental responsibility: the duty that people have to operate in a way that does not harm the environment
- Sustainability: Acting in a way that does little or no damage to the environment so that this can continue for a long period of time
- Global citizenship: When you are aware of and understand the wider world and your place within it.

## Christian beliefs...

### Genesis 1: 28

God blessed them (Adam and Eve) and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. **Rule over** the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

### Psalm 8:6

You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet

**Many Christians** believe that we have a responsibility to look after Gods creation as **stewards**. They believe that we should give thanks to God for what he has given us and make every effort to look after it for ourselves and future generations.

However, **some Christians** may emphasise the concept over **dominion** and **ruling** over the earth, and may interpret this as allowing them to use the planet as them deem fit.

## Non religious beliefs...

Many atheists will believe that we have a shared responsibility to look after and planet and maintain the environment for future generations. For example, **Humanists** would see this as their **moral duty** to other humans. Such decisions are based on reasoning rather than religious beliefs.

*Specification: Issues of Life and Death – The origin and value of human life. Diverse Christian beliefs, teachings and attitudes toward the origin and sanctity of human life: Genesis 1:31, Jeremiah 1:5*

**Origin of life = how life started**

**Sanctity of life = life is holy and sacred**

**Genesis 1:31**

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

**Jeremiah 1:5**

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.

**Christian beliefs...**

The first book of the Bible, Genesis, states that God created human and animal life. All life is therefore special as it was created by God and it should therefore be protected. Each human life is unique and valuable and God is interested and involved in every human life. Only God should take life away.

**NOTE** - It is likely that the vast majority of Christians will agree with these ideas. However, if you were asked to talk about diverse views you could refer to the material on abortion and euthanasia as there are different interpretations there.

*Specification: Issues of Life and Death – The World. Non-religious beliefs about evolution; Charles Darwin, Richard Dawkins*

**Charles Darwin** developed the theory of **evolution** as a result of his studies of the natural world. The theory of evolution proposes that all species of living things have **changed over time**. Scientists believe this is the reason why all living things on Earth exist today.

**Darwin** proposed the theory of **natural selection** which states that individuals with characteristics most suited to the environment are more likely to survive and reproduce the genes that allow these individuals to be successful are passed to their offspring. Darwin **did not** see himself as an **atheist** but more as an **agnostic** – being uncertain about whether there is a God or not.

**Richard Dawkins** is a prominent **evolutionary biologist** and **atheist**. He is well-known for his criticism of creationism and religion in general, writing books such as 'The God Delusion'.

**Young-earth creationists** reject evolutionary theory as it does not fit within the account in Genesis or a belief that the world is less than 10,000 years old.

**Liberal Christians** may be happy to combine their beliefs with scientific evidence, stating that evolution is God's design and that the days in Genesis represent millions or billions of years, with life starting in the water at first, then on land and finally as humans.

*Specification: Issues of Life and Death – The World. Diverse Christian attitudes towards abortion and euthanasia*

**Abortion: The deliberate termination of a human pregnancy**

**Many Christians** will see abortion as undesirable because...

- God is the creator and the only one who gives or takes away life
- All life is sacred and precious
- God made and has a plan for all of us. Jeremiah 1:5 “before I formed you in the womb I knew you”
- One of the Ten Commandments is ‘thou shall not kill’ and abortion could be seen as killing.

However not all Christians will share the same view:

The **Roman Catholic Church** is against all types of abortion as they see it as murder, with life beginning at the moment of conception. The Didache (early Christian writing) states “You shall not kill the embryo by abortion”.

However, the **Church of England** views it as permissible in certain circumstances such as when the life of the mother is at risk or the child would have a very low quality of life due to physical or mental defects.

Some Christians will also believe that allowing the **mother to choose** is an example of showing **compassion**. If continuing with the pregnancy is causing the woman pain and suffering then they may feel that steps should be taken to relieve this. There are many examples in the Bible where Jesus helps those who are suffering and Christians believe that they should follow his example.

Christians may focus on alternatives such as adoption.

**Non-religious views:**

Atheists may still be for or against abortion. **Humanists** are likely to focus on the woman’s quality of life and will look at the impact on her first rather than the unborn child. Generally they will view it as personal choice.

**Euthanasia: Intentionally ending a life to relieve pain and suffering**

**Assisted suicide:** Ending your own life with the help of somebody else

Many of the views and teachings in relation to abortion can also be applied to euthanasia:

e.g. God has a plan for all of us, only God can create or take away life...

e.g. Christians should show compassion and want to help those who are suffering

**Many Christians** believe that **suffering is part of life** and suffering and death is a doorway to the next life. Job was made to suffer but did not end his life. “Do unto others...”

Christians may emphasise **alternatives** such as **hospice care**.

**Non-religious views:**

**Atheists** may be for or against euthanasia. Many people believe that we should have the power to decide that we do not want to carry on living, but there are concerns over how we can judge that a person is in a fit state to make this decision, without influence or pressure from anybody else. Medical judgements are not always accurate (e.g. professor Stephen Hawking was told at 30 that he would only live for 2 to 3 more years...he died recently aged 76 after a hugely influential life in the world of science.



*Specification: Issues of Life and Death – The World. Non-religious views on the importance of human life; Peter Singer's views on 'speciesism'*

**Humanists** emphasise the value of human life as they believe that it is **the only life that we have** (they do not believe in life after death). Humanists values (from humanist uk website)...

We strive to embody our values by...

- engaging in dialogue and debate **rationally**, intelligently, and with attention to **evidence**;
- recognising the **dignity** of individuals and treating them with fairness and **respect**;
- respecting and promoting freedom, democracy, **human rights**, and the rule of law;
- **cooperating with others** for the common good, including with those of different beliefs;
- celebrating human achievement, progress, and **potential**.

**Peter Singer** takes this a step further by emphasising the equal importance of all life, referring to the concept of **'speciesism'** – discrimination on the basis of species, especially as seen with the cruelty to or exploitation of animals by humans. (in keeping with racism or sexism). All living beings, human or not, hold the same value.

*Specification: Issues of Life and Death – The World. Humanist 'Dignity in Dying' movement*

The **'Dignity in Dying'** movement is pushing for greater choice regarding issues of death and dying. They believe that assisted dying for terminally ill, mentally competent adults should be legal in the UK. They believe that the person who is dying should be in control of their life, not doctors.

Note – they do not want euthanasia to be legalised as this allows another person to end someone's life.

*Specification: Issues of Life and Death – Beliefs about death and the afterlife. Christian beliefs and teachings about life after death, including soul, judgement, heaven, hell: John 11:24-27, 1 Corinthians 15:42-44*

\* refer to the Christian beliefs revision guide for further detail \*

**Key Christian beliefs:**

- Humans have a **soul** which is the spiritual part of the being
- There is **eternal life** after death, which is received by through faith (believing in God)
- There is a **heaven** and entry to it depends on a person's response to Jesus and those in need on earth
- There is a **hell** (the opposite of heaven) which is a place of separation from God
- There is a **judgement** which will determine the soul's future

**John 11: 25**

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

This tells us that if you believe in Jesus then you will have eternal (everlasting) life

**1 Corinthians 15: 42-44**

So will it be with the **resurrection** of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is **raised imperishable**; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is **raised in power**; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

This tells us that there will be a resurrection from the dead and that eternal life will be more glorious than physical life

***Specification: Issues of Life and Death – The World. Diverse Christian beliefs about the after-life***

Most Christians share the above beliefs regarding life after resurrection, judgement and heaven and hell.

However, the Roman Catholic Church holds slightly different beliefs:

- Souls of very good believers go directly to heaven
- Most other believers go through purgatory, a place of cleansing that is between heaven and earth. In this place people who are destined for heaven, but who have sinned, are punished for their sins to make them holy and pure, ready for heaven
- Prayers can be said for those in purgatory to shorten their stay there.

***Specification: Issues of Life and Death – The World. How Christian and Humanist funerals in Britain reflect beliefs about the afterlife.***

**Christian funerals:**

- Prayers are said for the person who has died, possibly asking for forgiveness
- Bible verses will be read, such as John 11:25 “I am the resurrection and the life”
- Focus will be on the passing to the next life – in heaven – free from any pain and suffering

These actions reflect the Christian belief that there is life after death and that a judgement will be made about each of us. Those who believed in Jesus will be resurrected to spend eternity with God.

**Humanist funerals:**

- Non-religious service that brings people together to share sadness but also to celebrate the person’s life
- May include a selection of non-religious songs and readings.
- Will not make reference to an after-life.

These actions reflect the humanist belief that we only have one life so it is important that we make the most of it. The focus will be on celebrating the individual and what they did.

*Note – Christian funerals may also be classed as a ‘celebration of life’ with a more positive atmosphere than may have been the case in traditional services. However, the core beliefs regarding belief, resurrection and the afterlife remain the same.*