

**“A Hop, Skip and Jump through the  
whole bible”**  
**“Genesis to Revelation in 25 steps”**

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# Week 1

## Introduction

Welcome to the first session of our three weeks of bible overview.

If you look at the chart on your handout you'll see that I've called this bible overview - "Genesis to Revelation in 25 steps" - because I have decided to focus in on 25 key moments in the progression of God's revelation from Genesis to Revelation.

Now about these 25 steps through the bible. Imagine you were going on a coach trip to Paris, and were trying to take in the whole of Paris in 1 day by coach. I had hoped that these 25 stops would be like getting off the coach for a look round a museum, or a walk by the Seine, or a spot of lunch, or a stroll down the Champs-Elysees.

But I worked out roughly that we will have just 5 minutes at each of these 25 stopping off points! So it will be more like a look at a museum, a glance at the Seine, grabbing a bite to eat, or sprinting down the Champs-Elysees!

And the chart on your handout is a bit like a tour map if you like, with all the stopping off points marked on there. And we will be referring to the chart quite a lot as we go through the bible story. And on the back of the chart is the outline for the 3 weeks, with the 25 stopping off points listed, which should correspond to the numbers on the chart. So you need to hang on to the chart, and try and remember to bring it back each week.

And what I am trying to do is take you quickly through the storyline of the bible. I am not trying to impart a load of facts about bible history, but rather I want us to see what God is up to from beginning to end in his dealings with people throughout thousands of years.

And it's all going to be done bible in hand. We will open up the bible and read verses from it at many of these 25 stopping off points.

And my aim for this whole bible overview is twofold:-

1. That you may feel at the end that you understand a bit better how the whole Bible holds together. That it is not two separate parts – the Old Testament and the New Testament with very little connection between the two. The Old Testament points forward to the New, and the New points back and explains the Old, and it's an organic whole. The more you study, the more you realise how tightly knit together they are.

2. That you may feel at the end that the whole bible is about Jesus.

In Luke 24:27 Jesus is speaking to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus after the resurrection and it says "Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself".

Or look in John 5:39 how Jesus rebukes the scribes and Pharisees "You search the scriptures (meaning the OT) because you think that in them you have eternal life – and it is they that bear witness about me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life"

Jesus is in no doubt and unashamedly says "The Old Testament is all about me".

Just a word about the book for Lent – “God’s Big Picture”. I have not precisely based this bible overview on the book, but it does follow the same broad outline, and you will find it helpful as another way in to the bible’s grand storyline. It’s a very good and easy to follow and clearly written book which I recommend, but I’m not going to be simply following that book chapter by chapter.

## 1. Creation and Eden (Gen 1-2)

So let’s start at the very beginning.

Gen 1:1 says “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”. God made everything by speaking, and everything he made was good. Look at Gen 1:31 “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good”.

And the pinnacle of God’s creation is human beings, the only creature made in God’s own image. Look at 1:26-27 “<sup>26</sup> Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. ...<sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

And then God creates this garden paradise called Eden for the man to live in. Look at 2:8-9:-

“<sup>8</sup> And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. <sup>9</sup> And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”

And we all need a satisfying purpose in life, and God gave Adam purpose there in v15 “<sup>15</sup> The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.”

And then God creates Eve for Adam in 2:23, and Adam is very pleased with God’s handiwork saying “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman because she was taken out of man”. Its verses like this one which underlie the fact that marriage is between one man and one woman.

So God lovingly provides for the man everything he needs - his perfect wife, his satisfying work, and his perfect environment. Adam & Eve lack nothing, and notice they enjoy friendship with their creator, because God comes walking in the garden in the cool of the day, as we discover in 3:8.

Here we have a picture of God’s people living in God’s place under God’s rule, which is as it should be.

And there is only one prohibition. Look at Gen 2:16-17 “<sup>16</sup> And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, <sup>17</sup> but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Surely God as the creator is allowed to make the rules. And God’s rule here is the least restrictive it could possibly be – look how generously it is phrased “... you may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ...”. God basically says you can eat anything from any tree in the garden (and remember they are all pleasant to the sight and good for food). They can even eat of the tree of life.

And yet there is this one prohibition with a serious warning attached “... but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”. This is the first hint of this principle that runs through the whole bible “the wages of sin is death”, as it says in Romans 6:23.

## 2. Fall (Gen 3)

It all goes horribly, horribly wrong.

Read Gen 3:2-6 “The serpent said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”<sup>2</sup> And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,<sup>3</sup> but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’”<sup>4</sup> But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die.<sup>5</sup> For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”<sup>6</sup> So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.”

Starts with an apparently innocent question from this creature the serpent “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”. Notice what God had actually said “You may surely of every tree of the garden ...”, and the serpent innocently, or maybe not so innocently quotes God as saying “You shall not eat of any tree in the garden”. He makes God sound restrictive, whereas God was liberal. The conversation soon progresses from subtly questioning God’s word and motives to outright contradiction of God. “You will not surely die”. God had said in 2:17 “... you shall surely die”, now the serpent says “you shall not surely die”.

Eve believes the word of the serpent over and above the word of the Creator of everything, including her and the serpent! This is the first ever sin, and its major. Taking the fruit was just the consequence of this first sin – the sin of unbelief.

And as promised, God judges. That judgement involves the disordering of every aspect of creation. Everything in the whole creation is ruined. The whole universe becomes fallen and broken, and we are still experiencing the effects of that today.

Mankind’s relationship with nature becomes disordered. V15 and v16 and v17-18. V16b speaks of a power struggle between men and their wives. V17-18 speaks of frustration in man’s work. And v19 hints for the first time at man’s life being brought to a physical end. Everything has gone wrong.

But the worst judgement of all is expulsion from God’s presence.

Read v23-24 “... the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.<sup>24</sup> He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.”

Man is now thrown out of this paradise into a hostile and disordered world, and worst of all he is cut off from God’s presence, which is life itself – and so he is spiritually dead. Symbolically, the tree of life is inside Eden, and Adam is outside, and the way back is guarded by a cherubim with a flaming sword. There is no way back.

And Gen 4-11 show how humanity spirals down into a very dark place indeed. The first murder in ch 4, the flood in chs 6-8, as God determines to wipe out evil humanity from the earth, sparing only Noah and his family, and the tower of Babel in ch 11 which stands as a monument to human foolish pride. This is the low-point of the story so far.

### 3. Abraham (Gen 12-22)

Gen 1-11 has in many ways been context to what is about to follow in the rest of the book of Genesis. God has created the universe and man, and everything has been ruined by Adam's sin. So now every man born is born sinful, alienated from God, and spiritually dead. But now God embarks on the first step of his rescue mission. Genesis chapter 12 comes like a bolt from the blue, with a promise that dominates the rest of the bible story:-

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Gen 12:1-3

We need to understand the significance of these verses. Abraham is just a sinful man, no different from any other sinful man walking the planet, deserving God's judgement, not his blessing. But God chooses Abraham and chooses to make these amazing promises, full of blessing, to him – the promise of land, nationhood, blessing, and ultimately blessing to all families on earth. Keep this in mind throughout this bible overview – because in many ways the whole of the rest of the bible, both Old and New Testaments, is an outworking of these promises to Abraham.

Now Abraham does have something he has to do in order to qualify for these promises. There in v1 – Go. And v4 tells us "So Abram went, as the LORD had told him".

So Abraham has met the conditions to qualify for these promises, by simply going, and so now these promises are unconditional – there's nothing else Abraham has to do to inherit the promises.

And as chapters 12-22 of Genesis pan out, God fills out more and more details of the promises. In Gen 15 God takes Abraham outside and promises him that although his wife Sarai is childless, he will have as many descendants as the stars. Look in Gen 15:5 "And God brought him outside and said, "Look towards heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." <sup>6</sup> And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness."

Now God makes the promise even more certain by entering into a legally binding agreement with Abraham, called a covenant, which is designed to give Abraham great confidence in God's promise to him.

Look at Gen 15:8-21 "<sup>8</sup> But he said, "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?"<sup>9</sup> He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtle-dove, and a young pigeon." <sup>10</sup> And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half. <sup>11</sup> And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

<sup>12</sup> As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. <sup>13</sup> Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. <sup>14</sup> But I will bring judgement on the nation that they serve, and afterwards they shall come out with great possessions. <sup>15</sup> As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. <sup>16</sup> And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

<sup>17</sup> When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking firepot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. <sup>18</sup> On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, <sup>19</sup> the land of the Kenites, the

Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, <sup>20</sup> the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, <sup>21</sup> the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.”

Now this cutting in half of animals was a way of signing and sealing this legal agreement. Normally the two parties to the covenant would each walk in between the halves of the dead animals. And it was as if to say ‘if I break my side of the bargain, let it happen to me just as it has happened to these animals. In other words, by walking through the middle, you were committing yourself to keep your side of the bargain on pain of death.

And the remarkable thing there in v12 is that Abraham does nothing at all – he is virtually comatose. But there in v17 it is God alone who walks between the pieces. God is showing us graphically that he alone is bound to keep his promises to Abraham on pain of death, while Abraham has contributed nothing.

Later in ch 17 God does tell Abraham what his side of the bargain is to be – but it’s not very onerous. It’s there in 17:9-10 “<sup>9</sup> And God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. <sup>10</sup> This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised”

And so Abraham and all the males in his family are circumcised on that very day. And every future male child is to be circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day. And notice, that for every male descendant of Abraham, this is something that is done to you once only, never to be repeated, and once it’s done, you are in the covenant.

It’s all by God’s choosing. God chooses Abraham, God makes the promises, God is the one performing, not Abraham. And it’s interesting throughout Gen 12-22, that even though Abraham goes astray and sins many times, and doubts God, the covenant is never thrown into question – its unconditional.

And the same is true for Abraham’s descendants Isaac, Jacob, Joseph. God repeats unconditionally the promises to Abraham to each one of them. And in spite of their many sins, the covenant promise is never in doubt. So for example in Gen 26:3, God says to Isaac “<sup>3</sup> Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father.”

And so much of what happens throughout the history of Abraham’s offspring, the nation of Israel, boils down to God fulfilling these unbreakable promises to Abraham.

#### 4. Egypt (end of Gen & Ex 1-15)

So Abraham’s offspring multiply, and when famine strikes later in Genesis they all have to go to Egypt to survive, 70 people in all.

And in Egypt, as we move into the book of Exodus, we read in 1:7 “But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them”

In the back of our mind, we should be thinking “That sounds like God beginning to fulfil his promise to Abraham, that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars”.

Years pass, and a new Pharaoh ruled over Egypt, who knew nothing of the history of Joseph. And the new Pharaoh is troubled by how prolific these Israelites are, and starts to oppress them, treating them as slaves, but in spite of all his cruel oppression, they multiply.

And their oppression became so severe that they cried out to God, in Ex 2:23-4 **“Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. <sup>24</sup> And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.”**

God remembers the unbreakable promises made to Abraham – his covenant with Abraham - and so he resolves to set the people of Israel free from their Egyptian slavery.

And so through Moses God sends the 10 plagues which eventually force the stubborn Pharaoh to let God’s people go.

And the last of those plagues, the death of the firstborn, was the straw that broke the camel’s back, and forced Pharaoh to let them go. It was such a significant event that it marked the birth of the nation, and became known as the Passover. You can read all about it in Exodus 12.

At midnight on that fateful night, God sent a destroying angel to kill the firstborn in every household in Egypt. There’s nothing unjust about that – because we know that ever since Genesis 3, every single one of Adam & Eve’s offspring have been born with a sinful nature, and we know from Romans 6:23 that “the wages of sin is death”. God is simply acting as a just judge here.

And God specified that only one thing would prevent the angel from killing the firstborn in any given household –Egyptian and Israelite alike. The Israelites were to take a lamb at twilight, a male lamb, a year old, without blemish, and they were to kill it, and put some of the blood on the doorposts and the lintel of the house. And when the angel passed over at midnight and saw the blood, he knew that a life had been laid down in the place of the firstborn son in that house. And the angel would see the blood, and “pass over” that house.

It’s a powerful picture of substitutionary atonement – God accepting the life of a substitute laid down for the life of the sinner. This so clearly points to the death of Christ on the cross as our substitute, as John the Baptist saw when he looked at Jesus and said “Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!”

Every household in Egypt, whether Egyptian or Israelite, experienced death that night. Either the death of the firstborn son, or the death of a substitute lamb.

The Egyptians are so shattered by this national tragedy, that they urge the Israelites to leave that very night. And so God leads the Israelites through the wilderness to the Red Sea in chapter 14, supernaturally parting the waters, and then drowning the entire Egyptian army who have foolishly decided to pursue them. God is making a public spectacle of Egypt, humiliating Pharaoh, triumphing over them, a graphic picture of the way Satan is later utterly humiliated at the cross. Look up Col 2:15 when you get home.

## 5. Sinai covenant (Ex 19-24)

So God has delivered his people Israel from slavery, in order to fulfil his promise to Abraham.

Now God leads the people into the wilderness, and it only takes 3 days for the people to turn nasty on Moses and indeed on God. They so quickly forget God's powerful deliverance at the Red Sea, and constantly grumble against God, who is leading them to Mount Sinai in chapter 19, in order to make a covenant with them. And Exodus chapters 19 to 24 are all about this very important covenant.

Now cast your mind back to God's covenant with Abraham that we discussed a few minutes ago. There it was only God who walked between the animal halves, while Abraham was virtually comatose. Remember what that meant? Very unusually, God was committing himself to keep his side of the covenant terms and conditions on pain of death, while Abraham made no such commitment to God.

Now God is about to make a covenant with the whole nation of Israel, but this covenant is more of the common or garden variety. This kind of covenant was well known throughout the nations of the near East at that time. And if you want the fancy name it's called a Suzerain-Vassal treaty. Suzerain means the great king, and vassal is a subject nation.

Basically what would happen is that when a smallish nation would come under attack from a neighbour, the king of this smaller nation would go to a much more powerful king and beg for help. And if the great king (the Suzerain) decided to help, he would draw up a contract for the little king (the Vassal) to sign up to. And if the little king agreed to the terms and conditions, the great king would wade in and sort out the troublemaker, and deliver the small nation from peril.

And it would normally be a fairly standardised legal document like a will is today, or a house purchase. It would have an introduction, explaining what events have led to this covenant being made. It would have stipulations, saying precisely what behaviour was expected of the little king and his people. Normally that would be that they would be loyal and be devoted and loving subjects to the big king, and never scheme behind his back, and never make any treaties with other kings. And it would have blessings and curses saying what benefits they would get if they obeyed the big king, and what curses they would suffer at his hands if they disobeyed. It would all be written down, and copies would be kept by both parties. And then a solemn ceremony would be performed where both sides would commit to their side of the bargain on pain of death, just like God did with Abraham. Then after it was all signed and sealed, there would be a covenant meal, where both sides would sit down and have a feast together, to celebrate their new relationship.

This is precisely what is going on at Mount Sinai. God is the big king, the Suzerain, and Israel is the nation he has already rescued from slavery, the Vassal, and a covenant is in order.

The people arrive at the foot of Mount Sinai, and God descends from heaven to the top, and calls Moses up. Moses meets with God and then comes down and tells the people all the details of the deal, including famously the 10 commandments in chapter 20, more detailed laws in chapters 21-23, then in chapter 24, the covenant is signed. Look at 24:3 "Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do".

Then look at v6-8 "And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. <sup>7</sup> Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." <sup>8</sup> And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

The blood throwing has the same meaning as the animal halves did with Abraham. Moses threw half the blood against God's altar – which signifies God side of the bargain. And Moses took the rest of the blood and threw it on the people – signifying the people's side of the bargain. And remember, for both sides, the covenant is on pain of death. And what was their side of the bargain – it's there in v7 again -“All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient”.

And the covenant blessings and curses are spelled out in for example Leviticus 26, and Deuteronomy 28. And the blessings are wonderful, and the curses are horrendous.

And I think it's really important to see how different this arrangement is to that with Abraham.

With Abraham God promised unconditionally on pain of death to give to Abraham's descendants land, numbers, blessing - and Abraham promised ... well, nothing, he was asleep!

But here at Sinai God promises to be their God if they will obey him. And the people, to the last man promise, on pain of death -“All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient”. This is conditional, and the standard of obedience is perfection! As long as they perfectly obey, all will be well, but if they disobey, heaven help them. You get the sense that there may be trouble ahead.

And what's the very first thing that happens? In Exodus 32, as soon as Moses comes down the mountain, they immediately break the covenant bigtime, by making and worshipping a golden calf. Like the two stone tablets, the covenant lies shattered, and God is furious. Look at 32:9-10 “<sup>9</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. <sup>10</sup> Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you.”

## 6. Tabernacle (Ex 25-40, Leviticus)

We have to be left thinking “How is this ever going to work?”. God is holy and separate from sinners, and these people are just as sinful as the next man. How can this holy God come to live amongst sinful people?

And the answer is the tabernacle. God comes to dwell among his people, right in the midst of the camp, in this special tent called the tabernacle, which contains the ark of the covenant.

The tabernacle shows us how holy God is. Only one man, the high priest could enter the presence of the Holy God, and only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, and only ever with the blood of a sacrificial animal. It was the development of the idea of the Passover lamb. God sees the blood, and accepts the life of the sacrifice in place of the life of the sinful individual or nation.

Remember Romans 6:23 , “the wages of sin is death”. The Jewish nation sinned constantly, and God's justice demanded their death. But God in mercy accepts the life of the sacrificial animal as a substitute, and so he can continue to dwell amongst a sinful people, but kind of at a distance. God is among them, in the tabernacle, between the cherubim above the ark of the covenant, and yet he is distant. No ordinary Israelite could enter God's presence or he would immediately die.

And we get 13 chapters where God tells Moses in minute detail how the tabernacle and all its furniture is to be made. The reason it takes 13 chapters is to show us how very important it is. It's the only way the holy God can be their God and not destroy them under the terms of the performance-based covenant they have just signed up to.

And right at the end of the book of Exodus, in chapter 40, God comes to take up residence in the tabernacle that he himself has designed. Look at Exodus 40:34-35 **“<sup>34</sup>Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. <sup>35</sup>And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.”**

That’s the truly amazing thing. The holy God, who created the universe just by speaking, has come from heaven, to the top of Mount Sinai, to the very midst of the nation of Israel in the tabernacle, to be with them.

## 7. Wilderness wanderings with God (Numbers)

And the book of Numbers continues the story of how the Israelites followed God through the wilderness to the promised land.

But the same fatal flaw keeps cropping up. God is holy, and the people have sworn perfect obedience on pain of death. And they just keep on disobeying.

And it reaches a crisis in Numbers chapters 13 & 14. God brings the people to the very border of the land which he has sworn to give to them, as descendants of Abraham. They have now become a great nation as promised, as numerous as the stars, but they are a nation without any land. The next step is for God to give them their own land.

So spies are sent out to spy out the promised land, one from each of the 12 tribes. Just 2 – Joshua and Caleb - come back after 40 days displaying any kind of faith – saying “It’s a good land, and God has promised us this land, so let’s take it!”. The other 10 come back saying “The people are like giants, and the land will swallow us up. It’s terrifying! Let’s go back to Egypt”.

Only 2 have faith, 10 have no faith. In fact, worse than no faith. It’s not just honest doubt, it’s a stubborn, wilful refusal to trust God. What will God do?

Numbers 14:11-12 looks very ominous. **“And the LORD said to Moses, “How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them? <sup>12</sup>I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they.”**

Moses pleads with God not to destroy them, and God relents. But in his judgement he does send the entire nation back to the wilderness, until every one of that unbelieving generation has died out – all except Joshua and Caleb. So Israel is forced to wander in the wilderness for 40 years, because of their own stubborn disobedience. Nevertheless, in spite of their sin, God remains among them in the tabernacle.

## Week 2

So we have now covered the first 5 books of the bible, called the Pentateuch, and as we move into the book of Joshua, we can pick up the pace somewhat.

Just to recap. God has made these gracious, unconditional promises to Abraham of land, people, blessing, and finally blessing to every family on earth through his descendants. And God has by now fulfilled his promise to create numerous descendants. By this time Israel the nation numbers somewhere in the millions. So the next promise outstanding is the land promise. It's no good having a nation of millions if you are permanently camping on someone else's land. You need your own land. And so we come to the book of Joshua.

### 8. Entry to promised land with Joshua (Joshua)

In many ways the book of Joshua is very simple indeed.

At the beginning of Joshua, Israel is a nation without land, and by the end it is a nation with land. God has made detailed promises to Abraham of a very specific land that will be given to his descendants, and the book of Joshua shows us how God keeps that promise.

The book starts with the handover to Joshua, Moses' assistant, after Moses has died. Soon after Joshua takes command, Israel crosses the Jordan river from East to West, and enters the promised land.

Then Israel begins taking the land, as commanded by God. They attack many cities beginning with Jericho, and as commanded by God, wipe out the inhabitants of these cities. We don't have time to discuss the morality of these actions. Let's only say at this stage that they were following direct orders from God – it was God's idea. Look at chapter 10 v40-41 **“So Joshua struck the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings. He left none remaining, but devoted to destruction all that breathed, just as the LORD God of Israel commanded.”**

And they succeed in taking most but not all of Southern Canaan, and then Northern Canaan. Then there's a long section from chapter 13 to the end of chapter 21 where the land is divided up as directed by God to the tribes of Israel. And chapter 21 v43-45 summarises for us the thrust of the whole book **“Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers ...v45 Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.”**

And then right at the end of the book we fast forward many years to Joshua's old age. On the whole, both Joshua and the nation had been faithful to God throughout this time, and Joshua gathers all the tribes together as he approaches death, to remind them how faithful God has been in keeping his promises to Abraham, and to strongly encourage them to remain faithful to God.

The book finishes in chapter 24 with a covenant renewal ceremony, where the people commit themselves once again, under the terms of the Sinai covenant, to remain faithful to God. But there are worrying signs in that final chapter. The people solemnly swear in v18 **“We also will serve the LORD, for he is our God”**, and Joshua's reply is troubling, in chapter 24 verses 19-22

“But Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good.”

And the people said to Joshua, “No, but we will serve the LORD.”

Then Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD, to serve him.” And they said, “We are witnesses.”

And then skipping to v25 “so Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and put in place statutes and rules for them at Shechem.”

## 9. Slippery slope of Judges (Judges)

The book of Judges spans about 300 years. And over that period from time to time God raises up 12 or so different leaders to save his people from foreign invaders - men like Gideon, Jephthah, Samson. And none of them were perfect, but in one way or another they prefigured the need for the nation to have a strong leader, or king.

By and large, the book of Joshua painted a positive picture of obedience, but with some ominous looking clouds in chapter 24. Now as we move into the book of Judges, after Joshua dies, things start to go wrong.

And we see a cycle in Judges of repeated behaviour - of 4 S's. First we see Sin – the people disobey God. Then we see Servitude, as God deliberately sends foreigners to begin to oppress the people. Eventually this oppression becomes so awful that the people cry out to God for deliverance – that's Supplication – earnestly praying to God for help. And finally God raises up a short term deliverer, or saviour, usually empowered by the Holy Spirit (e.g. 14:6), who in those days were called judges – and that's the Salvation part of the 4 S's. So there's this repeated cycle of 4 S's – sin – servitude – supplication – salvation.

Let me show you just one simple example of this cycle from the book – concerning the Judge called Ehud, in chapter 3.

Ch 3 v 12 says “**12 And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD ...**” that's the first S – Sin.

Second half of v12, and v14 “**... and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done what was evil in the sight of the LORD ... v14 and the people of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab for 18 years**” – that's the second S – Servitude.

Now look at v15 “**Then the people of Israel cried out to the LORD ...**” that's the 3<sup>rd</sup> S - Supplication.

And finally the 4<sup>th</sup> S - Salvation. Look at the second half of v15 “**and the LORD raised up a deliverer, Ehud ...**”. Ehud defeated Eglon and Moab by various means, and then v30 tells us “**30 So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest for eighty years.**”.

That's how this cycle works in each case, with more or less detail.

But superimposed on the cycle of sin-servitude-supplication-salvation is a long term downtrend of worse and worse behaviour in Israel. And by the end of the book it's pretty grim. In fact it's so grim, as their sin is

just laid bare, that in Victorian Britain, certain chapters were not thought suitable for public reading. By the end of the book we have encountered false religion, gang rape and murder, and devastating civil war within the nation, so bad that the tribe of Benjamin is almost wiped out.

And there is this important refrain repeated throughout the book, which is also the very last verse in the book 21:25 **“In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes”**.

That verse is meant to leave us crying out for a good king to come and take charge. And that’s what I Samuel is all about next.

## 10. Kingship begins and Saul (1 Samuel)

I Samuel is all about how Israel transitions from this ad-hoc sequence of judges, to a king, King Saul, the first King of Israel.

Things were pretty grim at the end of Judges, and in the early chapters of I Samuel things take a turn for the worse, because the ark of God, which symbolises the very presence of God with his people, is captured by the Philistines. That was disastrous, because their whole national identity was based around the presence of the one true God with them.

Eventually the ark proves too hot to handle for the Philistines and is returned, and then God raises up Samuel as the last and greatest in the long line of Judges. In fact he is more than a mere judge, because he is a prophet who is going to appoint Israel’s first king.

But it’s clear that Israel gets off on the wrong foot in demanding a king. Look at chapter 8 v 5 where the elders of Israel come to Samuel and say **“Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations”**.

There’s nothing wrong with having a king – it is actually part of God’s good plan for them to have a king – a good one - but not “a king like all the nations”.

The job description of Israel’s king had already been spelled out in Deuteronomy ch 17 – he was most definitely not to be a king like all the nations around them had. He was to rule the nation, but humbly, submitted to God’s word through the Law and the Prophets, and not proudly lifted up above his brothers. Perhaps we could even begin to see the role of a servant-King being envisaged here.

Well its clear from what God says to Samuel in v7 of chapter 8, in response to the elders’ request for a king, that they have sinned **“Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.”**

We gather from this that their demand for a king is a demand not for a king ruling under God, but for a king instead of God.

Nevertheless God tells Samuel to agree to their request, even though Saul will not turn out to be the right man for the job. In v9 God says to Samuel **“Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them”**.

In God’s goodness to Israel, Saul is not a complete disaster. He wins some victories over the Philistines, but it’s clear that he’s not fit to be king. He seems to have no real faith, and disobeys God when it suits him, and is rejected by God as King in chapter 15. David is then anointed, probably while still a teenager, by

Samuel as God's chosen future King in chapter 16, but not yet installed as king, while Saul continues to reign. Reading between the lines, it is clear that God has rejected Saul, and David will be king, the king chosen by God, not by the people.

The rest of 1 Samuel shows Saul's continued disobedience to God, his jealousy of David and his increasingly unbalanced attempts even to kill David, and finally his death in battle.

## 11. David (II Samuel)

So God has chosen David to be King, and we must recognise at the outset the uniqueness of God's dealings with King David, which have a very similar feel to God's dealings with Abraham in Genesis. Rather like Abraham, and very unlike Saul, God's choice of David is clear. In 1 Samuel 16, where teenage David is anointed by Samuel to be future king while Saul still reigns, God says to Samuel in v 1 **"I have provided for myself a king"**.

David's uniqueness is further indicated immediately after his anointing with oil by Samuel, where in 1 Samuel 16:13 we read **"And the Spirit of the LORD rushed on David from that day forward"**.

Then we have the famous David and Goliath story, still in I Samuel, where David single-handedly defeats the enemies of God's people, personified as the giant Goliath. Many clues are being given – we are to think of David as a prototype of Christ, the one who really would finally defeat the enemies of God's people, namely sin and death. There's something unique about David.

That uniqueness is spelt out after David becomes king of all Israel in 2 Samuel chapter 5. We keep hearing this refrain, for example in v10 **"And David became greater and greater, for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him"**.

David goes from strength to strength, defeating the Philistines, capturing Jerusalem, and then bringing the ark back to Jerusalem. Then in 2 Samuel 7 David, having built his own palace, and having subdued his enemies on every side, expresses his wish to build God a house, a temple, for the ark to dwell in, for at this stage the ark is still in the tabernacle tent.

And in response God makes some amazing promises to David, which have a very similar feel to his promises to Abraham back in Genesis 12. These promises of God to David, just like those to Abraham, are unconditional, and are known as the Davidic covenant.

God says to David in 2 Samuel 7 v 9 **"<sup>9</sup> And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth"**.

Then in v16, God continues **"...<sup>16</sup> And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me. Your throne shall be established for ever."**

These covenant promises to David seem to be unconditional, just like those to Abraham. There is certainly mystery here, but somehow, David's royal line will last forever – one or more of his descendants will reign eternally.

That's certainly how David understands what God has just said to him, because in v28-29 David responds to God in prayer **"<sup>28</sup> And now, O Lord God, you are God, and your words are true, and you have promised**

this good thing to your servant. <sup>29</sup> Now therefore may it please you to bless the house of your servant, so that it may continue for ever before you. For you, O Lord God, have spoken, and with your blessing shall the house of your servant be blessed for ever". Look at David's response to God there. It's a response of faith, just like Abraham.

Well, it's a jolly good job these promises to David are unconditional, because after many more victories, David crashes horribly - committing adultery with Bathsheba, and ordering her husband Uriah to be effectively murdered, by having him put in the front line of the army – both of which were capital crimes in Israel.

David is brought back to repentance by a word from God through the prophet Nathan, even though his sin has serious ongoing consequences, as the first child born to David and Bathsheba dies. Nevertheless, the unconditional gracious promises to David still stand - as David's own mouth had said "...with your blessing shall the house of your servant be blessed forever".

## 12. Solomon (I Kings)

David's son Solomon is born to Bathsheba, and it is a sign of God's gracious commitment to David that we read in 2 Sam 12:24-25 "The LORD loved him (Solomon) and sent a message by Nathan the prophet. So he called his name Jedidiah" – which means "beloved of the LORD".

David eventually dies in I Kings chapter 2, and Solomon becomes king in his place. And he starts off really well. God gives him great wisdom, and great wealth as well, and peace all around. 1 Kings 4:20-21 "<sup>20</sup> Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea (does that ring any bells?). They ate and drank and were happy. <sup>21</sup> Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt (does that ring any bells?). They brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life".

And not only is Solomon wise and wealthy and ruling in peace, but in chapters 5-8 of 1 Kings Solomon builds the temple. And in chapter 8 the ark is brought in, and the temple is dedicated. And exactly the same as in Exodus chapter 40 when the tabernacle was finished, God came to dwell there. 8:10-11 says "<sup>10</sup> And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, <sup>11</sup> so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD."

After sacrificing 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep, in v66 we read "On the eighth day he sent the people away, and they blessed the king and went to their homes joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the LORD had shown to David his servant and to Israel his people".

The author wants us to get it that this is the high point of the history of the nation. God's promises to Abraham regarding his descendants are largely fulfilled. God's people Israel, are in God's place, the promised land, living with God in their midst in the temple, in peace, under God's King ruling as a kind of assistant King under God himself.

Chapter 10 v 23-25 kind of sums it all up "<sup>23</sup> Thus King Solomon excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom. <sup>24</sup> And the whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind. <sup>25</sup> Every one of them brought his present, articles of silver and gold, garments, myrrh, spices, horses, and mules, so much year by year."

This really is the high point of the nation, because tragically Solomon falls away. He marries many foreign wives, who are allowed to carry on worshipping their false gods, and Solomon himself is eventually drawn away to worship these false gods too. Chapter 11 v4 tells us:-

**“4 For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father.”**

And God was angry with Solomon. Look at ch 11 v 11-13 **“I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant. <sup>12</sup>Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. <sup>13</sup>However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen.”**

Notice the promise to David is still intact. In spite of David’s sin, and in spite of Solomon’s great sin, Yes God will tear most of the kingdom from Solomon’s son, but for David’s sake God will delay until after Solomon’s death, and for David’s sake God will leave a remnant for David’s line.

### 13. Kings: slide to oblivion (1 and 2 Kings)

And so it happens exactly as God promised. In 922BC, after Solomon’s death, his son Rehoboam presides over a civil war which results in 10 of the 12 tribes forming the nation confusingly called Israel in the North, ruled by Solomon’s former servant Jeroboam, as promised by God. And only 2 tribes in the South - Judah and tiny Benjamin – remain under the control of Rehoboam, and become known henceforth as Judah. So the nation has been split into 2 – Judah and Israel - because of Solomon’s disobedience, and Judah and Israel remain as two separate nations.

The Northern kingdom, called Israel, was ruled by a series of kings who went from bad to worse, with not a single good king. And God kept sending his prophets to warn them to turn back to God, and God also sent enemy nations to oppress them, as had happened previously in the book of Judges. 200 years after the kingdom split, in 722BC Israel in the North succumbed to the Assyrians and was totally destroyed. The people were exiled and the Assyrian conquerors repopulated the land with different nationalities to deliberately destroy national identity, so that forever after Judah in the South regarded the descendants of Israel in the North as a mongrels, like the Samaritans, for example.

And God’s verdict on the whole sorry history of Israel was this, from 2 Kings 17 - **“v13 Yet the LORD warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying, “Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the Law that I commanded your fathers ... v14 But they would not listen, but were stubborn ... v17-18 they sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger.<sup>18</sup> Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight. None was left but the tribe of Judah only.”**

So by 722BC, Israel in the North is finished. Judah in the South was little better. Most kings were bad, some like Manasseh very bad, with the nation as a whole turning away from God to idol worship. A few kings were good, one or two very good like Josiah, who reformed Judah somewhat, destroying the idols and restoring true worship. But through all the ups and downs, one of David’s descendants remained on the throne, in fulfilment of God’s unbreakable promise to David. Nevertheless, just like in Judges, the general trend was down, and by 600BC Judah was in a desperate situation. In 586BC Jerusalem finally fell to the Babylonians, who had become the new world superpower.

And throughout this period of national decline, God faithfully kept on warning the people to turn back to him by prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel. But few were listening.

If you remember when we talked about the Sinai covenant with Israel, I mentioned that part of such a covenant was a section of covenant blessings and curses - Leviticus chapter 26 and Deuteronomy chapter 28 are the best known examples. If Israel obeyed God and loved him, and kept his commandments, they would be blessed. If they disobeyed, they would be cursed. And they have disobeyed, and have been experiencing the covenant curses in increasing measure. And now that process is coming to fulfilment, as the whole nation of Judah goes into exile in Babylon.

## 14. Nemesis (that's not a book of the bible!) (2 Kings 25)

So we come to the low point of the history of Judah, the exile to Babylon in 586BC. We are at the bottom of a slippery slope that started with Solomon's idolatry around 400 years previously. And throughout that period God had repeatedly warned the people to turn back and keep the terms of the Sinai covenant, but to no avail. So in 2 Kings 25 v9-10 we reach the end. Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem "And he burned the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down. And ... broke down the walls around Jerusalem ... and the rest of the people who were left in the city ... Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried into exile"

And the prophets had repeatedly warned this would happen. Turn to Jeremiah, for example, ch 21 v 10 "For I have set my face against this city for harm and not for good, declares the LORD: it shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire."

And the reason? Always unfaithfulness to the Sinai covenant. Look at Jeremiah 22:8-9 "And many nations will pass by this city, and every man will say to his neighbour, "Why has the LORD dealt thus with this great city?"<sup>9</sup> And they will answer, "Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD their God and worshipped other gods and served them."

Remember how Adam & Eve sinned against God in Eden, and were immediately expelled from that garden paradise? It's a bit like it's happening all over again, but at a national level. God has graciously once again put his people in his place under his good rule, and blessed them. But it's as if they are unable to obey God. As God said through Jeremiah in ch 17 v 1 "The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, with a point of diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart". That really hits the nail on the head. The fundamental reason why God and his people can't stay together is that they are just too profoundly sinful. "The heart of the human problem, is the problem of the human heart".

Not only are the people cast out from the promised land, but worst of all, God symbolically gets up and leaves the temple.

Think back to 1 Kings 8:11 when Solomon had finished the temple and we read "the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD"?

Well at around the time that Jerusalem fell, the prophet Ezekiel has a vision where God's glory, which had filled the temple - now leaves the temple with the cherubim. In ch 10 v 18 it says "Then the glory of the LORD went out from the threshold of the house (the temple) and stood over the cherubim...", and then in ch 11v23 "The glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city".

And so off goes the remnant of Judah to exile in Babylon. And that 70 years in exile throws everything into question. God had promised Abraham numerous descendants in their own land, enjoying God's presence and blessing. And for a moment it happened in Solomon's early reign. But now look. Only a small number of Abraham's descendants remain alive, banished to a foreign land, and God's glory has left the temple.

## 15. Return from exile (Ezra, Nehemiah)

And so we come to really the last episode in the Old Testament. Jerusalem fell around 586BC, and after 50 years in exile, the Babylonian empire crumbles and the Medo-Persians become the new regional super-power. And in 538BC, Cyrus King of Persia decrees that all exiles who want to, may return to their homeland.

And so the exiles return to Judah. It's worth turning to the book of Ezra, where chapter 2 v 64 tells us that the whole assembly who returned was 42,360 - I have estimated that that is less than 1% of the peak population in the promised land.

Once they are back in the land (remembering it's not their land anymore) God through prophets like Haggai and Zechariah encourages them to start rebuilding the temple, and it was finished in about 515BC, after a few stops and starts.

And it's fascinating that on the day when they laid the foundation stone for the new temple, it was a time of real joy, but also sadness. Look at Ezra 3:11-13 "all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. <sup>12</sup> But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid, though many shouted aloud for joy, <sup>13</sup> so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping"

It's a weird mixture of undeniable joy, but also disappointment. Presumably the old men who remembered the first temple had seen the plans for the new one, and knew that it wasn't going to be a patch on Solomon's temple so they were weeping with sadness, while the youngsters were shouting for joy.

The other thing that gives us the same impression is the number of animals sacrificed at the rededication of this temple in Ezra 6:16-17. They sacrificed 100 bulls, 200 rams, 400 lambs. When Solomon dedicated the temple in 1 Kings 8:63 they sacrificed 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep!

And most importantly, there's never a mention of the glory of the LORD filling this rebuilt temple. Yes there's joy and celebration, but where is the glory? It all seems still unclear.

Just 1% of the people are back in the promised land, which is not their land any more but part of the Persian empire, soon to become the Greek empire, then the Roman empire, but never their own land again. And yes there's a temple but it's a shadow of Solomon's temple, enough to make grown men cry. And it's not clear whether God has taken up residence again! It must have left people saying surely this can't be it!

They also managed to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem a few years later, around 445BC under Nehemiah, and the people do rededicate themselves to God, celebrating the Passover, and there even seems to be something of a spiritual revival in Nehemiah 8, as the people gladly and attentively hear the book of the law taught by Ezra the priest, and repent of their sins, and recommit themselves to the terms of the Mosaic covenant.

## 16. Unfinished business (whole OT)

And so we reach the end of the Old Testament, around 400 BC at the latest. And there are many unresolved issues. It's a bit like a detective novel with not just the last page missing, but the whole of the last chapter missing. How frustrating to get to the end of such a book, and it's all left hanging. Surely, there has to be a sequel planned!

So many unresolved questions. Let me list a few:-

1. Back in Gen 3:15 God had given a word of judgement to the serpent who deceived Eve  
"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

Who is that referring to? An offspring (singular) of Eve (not Adam?) who would damage the serpent's head and sustain damage to his own heel? Clearly no-one in the OT story so far fits the bill.

2. What about God's promises to Abraham, back in Gen 12:1-3.

God had said to Abraham "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

We have seen most of these promises fulfilled. Abraham's descendants had become a great nation, by the time of the Exodus, and they had been given their own land by the time of Joshua, and they had been greatly blessed by the time of David/Solomon, and God had been with them, in the temple.

But it so quickly went wrong, and now look. At the end of the OT they are a tiny nation again, under foreign rule, and it's not clear to what extent God is still with them. And what about that last clause of 12v3 "in you all families of the earth shall be blessed". That has most definitely not happened. Which of Abraham's descendants are going to bring blessing to every family on earth?

3. And then there's the whole Sinai law. The people swore allegiance to God on pain of death, and God promised blessings for obedience, curses for disobedience. But they couldn't help themselves – they constantly disobeyed. And all the threatened curses of the covenant have been played out. How are they ever going to live with such a holy God among them, when they are so sinful? Rom 6:23 "The wages of sin is death" holds for all time - from the beginning to the end of the bible. How then can they live with such a God?

4. And what about the tabernacle? God was showing them this principle of substitution – that their life which was forfeit by sin would be saved by a substitute giving its life in sacrifice. But surely a mere animal could never really be a proper substitute for a man or woman, uniquely made in God's image?

5. And what about this descendant promised to King David - a King who would reign forever? The last actual in David's line died childless at the time of the exile.

6. And what about all the other mysterious prophetic utterances. Who or what was the suffering servant of Isaiah 53? Who or what was the righteous Branch prophesied by Jeremiah around the time of the fall of Jerusalem, in chapter 23:5-6?

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.<sup>6</sup> In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness’”.

And what about Jeremiah’s new covenant and Ezekiel’s new circumcised heart, and his very mysterious new temple in the last 9 chapters of Ezekiel? The list goes on and on.

And so the OT draws to a close, and we are left crying out for answers! What about ...!?

### **Week 3**

Recap - so we’ve finished the OT. Last week we went from the entry into the promised land under Joshua, to the high point of the nation under Solomon in 1 Kings, then to the low point at the end of 2 Kings, the exile. We saw how about only 1% of the exiles came back to Jerusalem after about 70 years in Babylon, and rebuilt the temple in 515BC and the city walls in 445BC. But we couldn’t help feeling that it was all a bit of a let-down. The OT ended really not with a bang, but with a whimper. And we surely are left feeling “There must be more than this!”. If you remember I said it was like reading a detective novel with not just the last page, but the whole last chapter missing.

Last week I finished by listing some of those OT loose ends.

Who is the prophesied descendant of Eve who would come and crush the serpent, as promised in Gen 3? Who is the promised descendant of Abraham in Genesis 12:3 who brings blessing to every family on earth? How will the inability of all people to perfectly keep the Sinai law of Exodus 19-24 be resolved? How can the sacrificial death of an animal substitute for the death of a man made in God’s image? Who is this long-awaited Son of David – the promised eternal King of 2 Samuel 7? Who is the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, and the righteous branch of Jeremiah 23? How will God deal with the deeply ingrained sinfulness of the human heart that we read of in Jeremiah 17? And how will God bring about the New Covenant prophesied in Jeremiah 34, and the new heart promised in Ezekiel 36?

And all these questions at the end of the OT testament are just left hanging there begging to be answered. But no answers come, not immediately - there is just radio silence from heaven for 400 years - no word from God - no prophets speaking.

Anyway, life goes on in Judah - and different empires come and go. Jerusalem passes from the hands of the Persians to the Greeks under Alexander the Great in 332BC, then to the Romans in 63BC.

## **17. The Christ Event (Gospels)**

And that 400 years of radio silence from heaven only serves to emphasise the significance of what is about to happen. All these unresolved questions are about to be answered.

This is it! – this is no let-down, like the rebuilding of the temple was – remember the grown men weeping in Ezra chapter 3. This is the real deal!

I am going to call what happens next the “Christ event”. What do I mean by that? I mean everything from the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ.

It’s been around 1800 years since God first began his rescue mission for humanity through Abraham. But now in a mere 33 years or so, God basically deals with all these outstanding issues by sending Jesus, the Christ. Within that 33 year period, God basically accomplishes the core of his plans for the universe.

Jesus is born of a virgin, grows into a man, lives the first ever sinless life, dies on a Roman cross, is physically raised again from the grave, appears to his disciples, ascends back to heaven from whence he came.

33 years from beginning to end. Job done – that’s why Jesus’ last words from the cross in John’s gospel are “It is finished!”, a cry of triumph, not defeat. All of that – from his birth to his ascension - that’s what I’m calling the Christ event.

And what Jesus accomplished in those 33 years ties up all the loose ends of the OT, as we will see shortly.

But equally importantly it also sets the agenda for the rest of history, until he comes again to judge.

This period in which we now live – the entire period between the ascension of Christ back to heaven, and his coming back from heaven to judge – the bible calls it “the last days”. That’s where we are. By the way, there’s no implication in that phrase “the last days” that the world is imminently about to end.

And this period in which we live is really about one thing. It’s about Jesus’ command to his disciples to proclaim to the whole world the good news of Jesus, and of people being brought into the kingdom of God through faith in Christ.

The whole OT looks forward to this “Christ event”, recalled for us in the 4 gospels, and the rest of the NT looks back to and interprets for us this “Christ event”.

So the birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension of Christ is an epoch-making event. Let’s look at it in more detail, by starting with the birth of the King.

## 18. The birth of the King (Gospels)

The birth of Jesus marks the start of this “Christ event”, and it is announced by an explosion of angelic activity. The previous appearance of an angel was about 500 years previously, but suddenly you can’t move for angels!

In Luke’s gospel, the angelic activity all kicks off with the prophetic announcement of the birth of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, to his father Zechariah by no less than the angel Gabriel, in Luke chapter 1.

Six months later Gabriel goes to Mary in Nazareth in Galilee, and tells her that she will bear a son, in Luke 1:31-33, saying <sup>31</sup> **And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.** <sup>32</sup> **He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,** <sup>33</sup> **and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”**

Remember how in 2 Samuel 7 God had promised to David a son who would reign forever? He's on his way.

And so Jesus is born, with yet more angelic appearances to shepherds in Luke chapter 2, emphasising the massive significance of his birth.

Turning to Matthew's gospel, chapter 1 doesn't look very promising to modern eyes, starting with a long list of names, until you see the connections with the OT we talked about last week, then you realise verse 1 is dynamite **"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."**

If we're still in any doubt, an angel appears to Jesus' legal but not biological father Joseph in Matt 1:20-23, saying **"Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."**

**<sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: <sup>23</sup> "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).**

And we mustn't miss the wonder of this. The name Jesus there means "God saves", and Immanuel there means "God with us". So God has come to us, to save us.

Remember how God was with Adam & Eve in the garden? And how God came to dwell in the tabernacle in the wilderness in Exodus 40, and then in the temple in Jerusalem in 1 Kings 8? And then how God's glory left the temple in Ezekiel's vision, and never seemed to return with the exiles? Well, now at long last, God himself has shown up in person!

## 19. The life of the King (Gospels)

How can I possibly cover the whole life of Jesus in 5 minutes?!

We get a feel for the centrality of the life of Jesus in the whole bible in that there are 4 gospels - God has seen fit to give us 4 versions of Jesus' life.

Jesus began his preaching ministry at about age 30, which lasted for 3 years. As he went around teaching and healing first in Galilee in the North, then in Judah in the South, he gathered a relatively modest number of committed followers who travelled round with him.

His teaching was incomparable. When in John 7:46 the chief priests and scribes sent temple guards to arrest Jesus, they came back empty-handed, saying **"No one ever spoke like this man!"**

And his claims about himself were outrageous – outrageous unless true, of course.

He claimed to be the eternal God, saying in John 8 **"Before Abraham was, I AM!"**, when Abraham had lived 1800 years before he was born! And taking the holy name of God, "I AM!", upon his lips, first revealed at the burning bush to Moses in Exodus 3.

And when questioned by the high priest at his trial if he was the Christ in Matt 26:63, Jesus claimed to be the divine end-time judge of all, thereby sealing his own fate, when he answered:-

“You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

<sup>65</sup> Then the high priest tore his robes and said, “He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? “

And he even predicted his own death, for example 3 times in Mark’s gospel chapters 8, 9, 10.

His miracles were astonishing signs of the breaking-in of the kingdom of God. Luke 4:40 tells us “Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them.”

And it’s clear, and very important, that his life was without sin. At his baptism in Matt 3, v17, God testifies about him - “A voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.””

That voice from heaven is repeated up the mountain at Jesus’ transfiguration in front of only Peter, James and John in Matt 17:5 “behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”

The verdict on his life by all who saw him - “without sin”. The only person to have walked planet earth who perfectly kept the law of God. He alone loved God with all his heart, soul, mind, strength. He alone loved his neighbour as himself.

## 20. The death of the King (Gospels)

Just as the fact that God has seen fit to give us 4 gospel accounts of Jesus’ life, God has also seen fit to highlight Jesus’ death within those 4 gospels. Normally in a biography, a person’s death is recorded in very limited detail – I am told that Winston Churchill’s death got 1 page in a 900 page book! Normally we want to hear about a person’s life and achievements, not their death.

But God has seen fit to devote ¼ of Matthew’s gospel, 1/3 of Mark, 1/5 of Luke, and almost ½ of John to the events of the last week of Jesus’ life. Not only that, but even in the earlier sections of the gospel’s before we get to that last week, a good deal of what happens has Jesus’ death firmly in view. So, as mentioned a moment ago, 3 times in Mark chapters 8, 9, 10 Jesus predicts his own arrest, suffering, death and resurrection.

So we can be sure that Jesus’ death is very important. But what does Jesus’ death mean?

The gospels recall very matter of factly Jesus’ betrayal by Judas, arrest, trial, torture, crucifixion, death, resurrection, ascension. But by and large the gospels don’t tell us the meaning of Jesus’ death. No, in general, the gospels leave the interpretation to the rest of the NT.

Take just one example - the apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 “<sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures”

Paul says this is the most important thing I can tell you – that Jesus died for our sins, as written in the scriptures, which at that time of course was just the OT. He’s referring to passages like Isaiah 53:5-6, which astonishingly was written around 700 years before Jesus was born!

<sup>5</sup> But he was wounded for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
and with his stripes we are healed.  
<sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have turned—every one—to his own way;  
and the Lord has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.”

The message of the cross is clear.

Jesus is the true Passover lamb of Exodus 12, provided by God. Jesus dies for our sins instead of us dying.

Remember that theme that I said runs right through the bible – “the wages of sin is death”. We have sinned, we earn the death. Jesus never sinned, and so deserved life. But he takes our death, and gives us eternal life. That’s why he cries “It is finished!” from the cross, moments before he dies.

Jesus is then buried, and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day raised physically from the dead by God the Father. That is both his vindication by God, and the proof that his offering for sin has been accepted by God. Jesus then appears to his disciples over a period of many days, and then ascends back to heaven.

All of that – virgin birth, perfect life, substitutionary death, resurrection, ascension – that’s what I’ve called the Christ event. It is the centre of the bible, and I would venture to suggest that Jesus ‘death is the centre of the Christ event.

## 21. Promises kept (whole OT)

So having considered the events of Jesus’ birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, I want to pause here for a while to show how Jesus ties up all those loose ends from the OT that we talked about.

Remember right back at the beginning of week 1, I said that the whole bible is about Jesus. Remember we looked at Luke 24:27 where Jesus appeared to those two dejected disciples on the road to Emmaus after the resurrection and it says “Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself”.

Let me give you 12 ways in which Jesus ties up those OT loose ends:-

### 1. Jesus is the promised serpent crusher of Gen 3:15

God’s judgement on the serpent in the garden of Eden in Gen 3 includes these words “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

At one level this speaks of the normal suspicion and hostility that people and snakes now have for one another. But if that serpent in Eden is a picture of the devil, then this prophecy speaks of something much more profound. The offspring of the woman Eve will bruise or crush the head of the serpent, i.e. fatally wound the devil, and himself be wounded in the heel in the process.

Isn't that precisely what happened at the cross? Isn't that what Colossians 2:15 implies when it says that at the cross " <sup>15</sup> ... he (that's Jesus) disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him."

## 2. Jesus is the promised Son of Abraham of Gen 12:3

Remember the promises to Abraham – land, descendants, blessing. Last week I said they were all fulfilled by the time of Solomon – except one. The very last clause in Gen 12:3 says "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Remember what Matt 1:1 said? - "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham". So Jesus is the promised son of Abraham.

And what does Paul say in Gal 3:14 " <sup>14</sup> so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith."

There it is – Jesus brings the blessing of Abraham to the Gentiles – i.e. all nations except the Jews – i.e. every family on earth. So that last outstanding promise to Abraham is fulfilled in Christ. Indeed, it is still being fulfilled as the gospel goes to all nations and many turn to Christ, becoming children of Abraham by faith in Christ.

## 3. Jesus is the last Adam, the true Son of God

Whereas the first Adam disobeyed God in Gen 3 and brought death to all humanity, Jesus the last Adam perfectly obeyed God and brought life. Rom 5:19 says "For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."

## 4. Jesus is the true Israel who perfectly keeps the Sinai covenant in Exodus 24

Remember how in Exodus 24, the people signed up to the covenant binding themselves on pain on death to perfectly obey God? Remember I said how those covenants always had a section of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience, which is precisely what Deut 28 is. And of course, Israel's failure to love and serve God led to the curses rather than the blessings, ultimately to famine, pestilence, oppression, exile, death.

But Jesus is the only person who has ever fully obeyed the Law of Moses from the heart. He alone loved the LORD his God with all his heart, soul, mind, strength, and loved his neighbour as himself. He alone has earned the blessing of the Law of Moses, with every other person a law-breaker, under the curse of the Law of Moses.

But what happened at the cross?

Look at Deut 21:22-23. "And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree (means the same as cross), <sup>23</sup> his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God".

There it is in the Law of Moses – any man who is executed as a criminal and is hanged on a tree is under the curse of God according to the Law of Moses. And the Jews of Jesus' day considered crucified men as being under this curse.

Now look at Gal 3:14 again, but this time let's read from v13 " <sup>13</sup> Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—<sup>14</sup> so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith."

Jesus is the only man who ever lived the perfect life that merits the blessings pronounced by the Covenant at Sinai. Yet Jesus dies under the Covenant curses. So that we who are “in Christ” might receive the blessing of Abraham, which Paul here identifies as the promised Holy Spirit. Jesus takes the curse that the Sinai Covenant pronounces on us, and gives us the benefits of the blessing he has earned by his perfect covenant obedience.

#### 5. Jesus is the promised Son of David, the King who reigns for ever

Matthew 1:1 again - “**The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham**”. Jesus is the long-awaited Son of David, the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed one, the one who David always pointed to. Jesus is legally, but obviously not biologically Joseph’s son, and Joseph is descended from David, therefore Jesus is legally the Son of David. He is the promised eternal King who will reign forever, as promised to David in 2 Samuel 7.

#### 6. Jesus inaugurates the New Covenant, as promised in Jeremiah chapter 31

In Matt 26, on the very night of the Passover meal, Jesus instituted a new meal of bread and wine, which we call the Last Supper. Matt 26:27-28 says that after distributing the bread, “**... Jesus took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, <sup>28</sup>for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”**”

There’s that covenant language again. There’s the symbolic shedding of blood, soon to be followed by real shedding of blood, as happened in every good covenant-making ceremony. There’s the covenant meal. It’s all there. This is the New Covenant being brought in, in fulfilment of Jeremiah’s prophecy in chapter 31.

I’m running out of time, I need to speed up .... 7. Jesus is the true Passover lamb, 8. Jesus is the Great High Priest, 9. Jesus is the true sacrifice to which all the OT animal sacrifices pointed, 10. Jesus is the true temple, where God is to be encountered. 11. Jesus is the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. 12. Jesus is the righteous branch of Jeremiah.

I’ll stop at 12, but there’s many more.

So just like Jesus said to those two disciples on the road to Emmaus – the OT is all about Jesus.

## 22. The unseen presence of the King (Acts)

So by the start of the book of Acts, Jesus has come and achieved everything he set out to achieve. He has made salvation a possibility for sinful mankind, through his perfect life and substitutionary death and resurrection.

But now he has ascended back to his Father in heaven, and so the question is what happens next?

Jesus had physically been with the apostles for the last 3 years or so, and now he has gone. But in John 16, Jesus had already prepared the disciples for this moment.

Turn to John 16 v 7 - “**7 Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you”**”.

And then continuing in v14 ...

“**14 He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”**”

The Holy Spirit is to be the continuing presence of Christ with them. But it's better than that. Flick back to John 14 v16-18 ...

**"<sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you for ever, <sup>17</sup> even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. <sup>18</sup> "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. "**

The Holy Spirit is not only to be the presence of Christ with them, as he has been for the last 3 years, but now forevermore, the presence of Christ in them!

In Acts 1:8, Jesus had told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for what we now call Pentecost – for the Holy Spirit to come in power:-

**"<sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."**

And I just want to draw out how this sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost fulfils that last promise to Abraham. Let's turn to Gal 3:14 one more time:-

**"<sup>14</sup> so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith."**

What does Paul say there? Look carefully at the verse. Remember the final blessing promised to Abraham in Gen 12:3 **"... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"**. Here Paul is equating that blessing of Abraham that comes to the Gentiles, i.e. to every family on earth, with their receiving the promised Holy Spirit

That is very important. The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is the beginning of the fulfilment of that last promise to Abraham!

And so, because, amazingly, the Holy Spirit has now come to indwell Christians, we start to find this temple language scattered throughout the NT.

For example, in 1 Cor 3:16 Paul says to the church in Corinth **"<sup>16</sup> Do you (plural) not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?"**.

This is remarkable. The presence of God which was first in Eden with Adam & Eve, then in the tabernacle and temple with Israel, then in the physical presence of Christ walking beside the disciples, ... now, after Pentecost, it's not merely Christ with a handful of believers, but Christ in all believers, everywhere, all the time, by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Pentecost was about the beginning of this new era – when the Holy Spirit came to permanently indwell all believers.

## 23. The commission of the King, or the Gospel to all nations (Matt 28, Acts)

Remember Acts 1:8 again **“<sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”**

Jesus had commissioned, or commanded, his disciples right at the very end of Matthew’s gospel in chapter 28 to take the gospel to every nation. And the book of Acts really explains how this commission was begun, and still continues today.

Acts begins with many thousands being converted in Jerusalem at Pentecost, through the preaching of the reinvigorated apostles. And then persecution arose, so the new believers were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, exactly as verse 8 said. And as they were scattered they preached the gospel, and many worked miracles just as great as those that Jesus had done in his own lifetime. And many thousands more believed.

Then part way through Acts we see how God purposely shows the Apostles that this gospel is to go global – that Gentiles are to be included too in the offer of salvation. And as devout Jews, Peter for example takes some persuading that Gentiles can be saved, but he is persuaded, and so as they preach to the Gentiles, the gospel begins to spread like wildfire throughout Asia, eventually reaching Rome itself, which in those days was the centre of the known world.

And this entire period from Pentecost to the return of Jesus to judge is called in the bible the “last days”. And that’s where we are.

And whether Jesus returns tomorrow, or in 5,000 years, this age in which we live is all about the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth. And every time the gospel is preached anywhere, and a person believes in Christ and is saved, the Holy Spirit comes at that moment to indwell them forever. We call it being born-again, just as Jesus explained to Nicodemus in John chapter 3. So that person, newly indwelt by the Holy Spirit, becomes as it were a new living brick being added in to God’s living temple on the earth.

## 24. The return of the King (1 Thess 4-5)

But this age doesn’t just go on forever, because Jesus is coming back. According to 2 Thess 1:7-10, it will be a day of joy for those who have believed, and a day of terror for those who haven’t:-

**“...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels <sup>8</sup> in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. <sup>9</sup> They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, <sup>10</sup> when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at among all who have believed”**

So Jesus will return in power and glory, both to gather his elect from the four corners of the earth, and to punish those who have rejected him. And so this present age will come to an end, and eternity will begin, where each person made in God’s image, with an eternal nature, will live for ever either in heaven or hell. And it’s all a physical recreation, not some spiritual airy fairy thing.

## 25. The eternal Kingdom of the King (Rev 21)

And so we come to the end of history. The Apostle John captures best for us the final scenes, in the last book of the bible, Revelation, as he tries to describe this perfected new creation. Turn to Revelation chapter 21, v1-4:-

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.”

And then look at v22-27

“And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. <sup>23</sup> And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ... v27 ... <sup>27</sup> But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.”

And then chapter 22:1-5:-

“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup> through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. <sup>3</sup> No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. <sup>4</sup> They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup> And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign for ever and ever.”

It's the heavenly city described as best as John is able.

Remember back in Eden, there were the rivers, and the tree of life. And God was there. And it's all here in this city. God is there on the throne, with the Lamb, the Lord Jesus, the man at the centre of history. And his people are there with him forever. This is heaven. Everything is perfect. Only God's own people will be there, and God will be there with us for ever. Everything is all right again.

So that's the end of this bible overview. I said I had two aims for these talks:-

The first was that you would see that the bible is one book – it's an integrated whole. No way is it OT and NT – with the God of the OT being all about judgement, and the God of the NT being all about love.

God's love and grace has been active from the very beginning of the OT, seen clearly in his choice of undeserving Abraham, right back in Genesis 12. And God's justice and judgement is equally seen right to the very end of the NT, very clearly indeed in the book of Revelation.

God's love and grace on the one hand, and his justice and holiness on the other, seem to run intertwined throughout the bible from beginning to end, as two great strands of revelation.

And my second aim was that you would see that the whole bible is about Jesus. Only in Jesus, and in particular, only in what he achieved at the cross, can God's love and grace and God's holiness and justice be truly reconciled.

At the cross we most clearly see how this holy God who hates sin, and this loving God who lavishes mercy and grace on sinners, are one and the same God.

So I regard the cross of Jesus as the very centre of all history. Maybe that's why the book of Revelation pictures King Jesus as the Lamb who was slain, seated on the throne.

To finish let's turn to Rev ch 5 and read together verses 11-14:-

*"<sup>11</sup> Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, <sup>12</sup> saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!" <sup>13</sup> And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!" <sup>14</sup> And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshipped".*

**And all the people said "Amen!"**

*Mike Forward  
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