

# WELCOME!

We are so glad that you are joining us to study *Know Your God: The Bible Overview*

This year we are going to study the whole Bible, focusing on the major themes from Genesis to Revelation, so that we can see how the one big story of the Bible works together as a whole. By focusing on key themes and events we will not only see how the Bible fits together, but most importantly, we will see God and come to know Him more and more deeply.

Over and over again the Bible speaks of the importance of our minds, what we know and how we think. It teaches that people are transformed by their minds being renewed (Romans 12:2), and that before we were Christians we were enemies of God in our minds (Colossians 1:21). Paul worked with all his energy so that the Christians he was teaching would understand and know Christ completely (Colossians 1:28-2:3) and he prayed that the church would come to know God better and to know what he has done and will do (Ephesians 1:17-18).

The point of *Know Your God: The Bible Overview* is that as we work through each lesson we would come to know God more. As we know God more fully (understanding who He is, what He has done, and what He is doing) - our minds and lives will be shaped by Him. It is our prayer that as we study this overview, we will be people who continually have our attitudes, aspirations, hopes and thoughts aligned with the mission and purposes of God.

Here's what you can expect each week as you do the study at home, and as we get together.

## **AT HOME:**

You will have a whole week to focus on the lesson on your own. Create space and time to read the passage carefully, and answer the study questions to help you organize and observe the passage. Some of the questions will help us slow down to pay careful attention to what is in the passage, so we can better understand what we are reading and make important observations about what is happening. Other questions will help us think how the themes of the passage apply to our lives today. Make time every week to allow the scripture you've studied to shape what you think and pray about.

Doing the lesson could take you anywhere from 2-4 hours a week, depending how fast you read and how much time you want to spend thinking through the questions. You don't need to do all the questions all at once; feel free to work on one question at a time, as you have time during the week.

## **TOGETHER:**

Each week as we get together, we will read the scripture, discuss some of our observations, hear teaching on the passage, and spend time discussing and praying through how this scripture applies to our lives.

We are looking forward to studying *Know Your God: The Bible Overview* with you!

Northview Adult Ministries Team

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## WHAT'S IN THIS WORKBOOK

This *Introduction* is designed to help us get the most out of this Bible study. It includes:

- A guide to studying passages in the *Overview*. We'll find that there are a few differences involved in studying passages in the *Overview*, and this guide gives some suggestions about how to tackle these.
- An outline of the Bible's story. This gives us a bird's eye view of the whole Bible, and shows us where we are in the overall story at any point in the course.

The heart of this workbook is the *Studies*. Each study consists of:

- A brief introduction to the passage that sets the scene for the study, gives us some of what we need by way of context, and reminds us of the key relevant truths we've discovered so far.
- Questions are designed to help us think about the passage we are studying. We'll get much, much more out of our times in our study groups if we come having begun to think seriously about the passage we'll be studying. These questions are designed to help us do this, so come having worked through them. Some are distinctly harder than others, but have a go at all of them, even if you're not convinced that you can do justice to the question. It will mean the discussions in the groups will be much more informed and thought through.

In addition to the *Studies*, there are some short articles called *Briefings*:

- These summarize the overall story of the Bible so far, and give an outline of what's about to happen. In other words, these give us a starting point for thinking about each major new phase in God's plan, something that's a help because we're going through the Bible so fast.

## STUDYING THE OVERVIEW

Studying the *Overview* differs from most other Bible study in three main ways:

*In general, we'll not have studied what happens immediately before the passage we're looking at.*

In the *Overview*, we're trying to find out what happens in the Bible as a whole. In order to do this, we need to go through the entire Bible, focusing on the key events and seeing how these relate to each other. The constraints of time mean we'll usually not study much of the immediate context of the event. It's an axiom of good Bible study that we must put the passage in its context, both immediate and biblical. In most Bible study, limitations of time mean we focus on the immediate context at the expense of the overall biblical context, but in the *Overview* it's the other way round.

*Many of the passages we'll be studying are much longer than we're used to.*

This is partly a result of the need to study at least some of the immediate context of the key events. More importantly, it is also a result of trying to get the whole of a major event into one study in order that we might understand it and not get distracted by detail. Finally, much of the Old Testament is written to be read in relatively large sections, so we won't do justice to it if we don't study it in large sections.

*Much of the Old Testament (OT) can't be applied in the way we're used to doing in the New Testament (NT).*

One reason is that the OT books are written to or about people who're very different to us. They are usually Israelites rather than Christians and they are often unique figures with unique roles in God's plan. This doesn't mean we can't learn from them, but we'll need to think harder before we can make the transition from them to us. Far more crucially, *much of the Bible is not actually about us and what we should do, but rather about God and what He is doing*, and we don't know how to apply this sort of material. This is true in the NT as well, but it is more obvious in the OT.

Having identified the differences, let's look at how they should be handled.

### **PUTTING PASSAGES IN THEIR CONTEXT**

We can't understand any passage of the Bible without putting it in its context. Sometimes the immediate context is the only context we need and sometimes the context of the whole Bible is the only context we need, but often we need both. Since our aim is to understand the Bible as a whole, all the passages we'll be looking at fall into the latter two categories. Where the context of the Bible as a whole is the key, it doesn't matter that we won't know the immediate context. However, where we need both the biblical and immediate contexts then this workbook will explain the immediate context in the introduction to the study, and where necessary there will be cross-references and questions to help us further understand it.

### **STUDYING LONG PASSAGES**

By far the best way to handle long passages is to work out what the main points of the passage are, and then to focus on these. This is the best way to study most passages, because the author's main points are the important ones, the ones God – working through the human author – is making. The detail is there to make these major points and to support them. When we're studying short passages we can afford the luxury of getting immersed in the detail, even though this may not be the best approach. However, when studying long passages it's vital to study it in the best way, and over the course of the year this will have the added benefit of teaching us good habits that we can apply to all our Bible studies in the future. In order to focus on the author's main points, we must first identify them. One of the best ways to begin to do this is to see what are the main steps in the author's argument, i.e. how the passage 'subdivides'.

There are two reasons for doing this:

- Dividing the passage into 'subsections' which deal with one sub-point makes the passage's argument more manageable. These subsections are often the right level of detail to work at, better than verses or sentences. If we get them 'right' then we're working with the steps the author himself used. In order to be clear about what sub-point is being made in a subsection, it is well worth working out a 'subtitle' for each subsection which summarises the sub-point clearly, accurately and succinctly.
- Once we've worked out the main steps in the argument, we can then see how they fit together and so see what the argument as a whole is all about. In practice, when we do this we'll often find that the subsections we initially identified don't fit together well, i.e. we haven't got the right subsections. This may appear depressing, but it's actually a key step in grasping the passage better. It shows us that we're not yet on the author's

wavelength and we need to think further to work out what his argument really is. We mustn't give up, but must keep mulling over the passage until the pieces do fit. When we eventually do see how the author's argument is developing and how all the steps fit in, then we'll not simply be thinking on the biblical author's wavelength, we'll be thinking on God's wavelength (since he chose to use these authors), and this is a prize worth working hard for.

Subdividing and summarizing a passage is thus both an important exercise and a difficult one. It's one we need to begin to do near the beginning of our study, but we'll need to keep refining our conclusions as we come to understand the passage better. In order to remind us to engage in this exercise – and to help us get into the habit of doing this with every passage we study – a question on subdividing and summarizing the passage comes in every study. Often it's the first question, but don't simply do it quickly and then forget about it. Work at it, and keep revising it as your study progresses. Subdivisions and summaries that accurately reflect the author's argument are an extremely useful 'end-product' of a study. They give us a 'handle' on the passage, something to remember the passage by and the foundation for applying it to ourselves correctly.

## APPLYING WHAT WE LEARN FROM THE OVERVIEW

Many Christians find applying the Bible hard. The reason for this is that, often, the way we expect the Bible to change us is not the way God intends the Bible to change us! Many Christians treat application as being about changing their lifestyles, rather than about changing their underlying attitudes, goals, world-views, etc. In effect, they try to add Christian values to a basically non-Christian world-view. Of course it's not put like this, but the focus in applications on what we do means that this is what it amounts to. We all start off our Christian lives with a non-Christian world-view because we're products of the world we live in and were brought up in. As non-Christians we think of this world as primary and human beings (particularly ourselves) as central. When we are converted, this non-Christian world-view is given a tremendous jolt as we begin to see that God is the centre of the universe, not us; that he is the rightful Ruler of our lives, not us; and that there is an eternity beyond this world. But conversion is only the beginning of this process. As young Christians our world-view is still essentially non-Christian and needs to be reshaped. However, instead of doing this, many of us concentrate on adding Christian behaviour to our old world-view and look to the Bible to tell us how to do this. For example, the Bible is seen to tell us about going to church and having fellowship; praying and reading the Bible; not lying, cheating or stealing; and only having sex inside marriage. All these are excellent values which the Bible commends, but the Bible is actually about far more profound changes than these.

God wants to transform us, i.e. our attitudes, aspirations, and hopes. This is why his Word emphasizes the need for us to change the way we think. For example, Romans 12:2 tells us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds; in Ephesians 1:17-18, Paul's constant prayer is that the Ephesians would come to know God better and to know what He has done and will do; Ephesians 4:17-18 says the problem with Gentiles (i.e. non-Christians) is their futile thinking, their darkened understanding and their ignorance; Colossians 1:21 describes the Colossians prior to their becoming Christians as being enemies of God in their minds; and, finally, in Colossians 1:28-2:3, Paul says that the thing he is labouring towards with all his energy is that all the Christians he is involved with would completely understand and know Christ. In other words, the Bible is meant to change our mind-sets and world-views. It wants to continue and

deepen the changes that began at our conversion. Thus, genuine biblical application is about changing the way we perceive and view God, what he's doing, the world, ourselves and our place in the world. If this occurs, then radically changed lives will follow naturally and inevitably. The goal of all Bible study, therefore, should be a transformed world-view, but this is particularly true in the Overview. This is because, as we study the whole Bible, we'll find it's all about God and what he's doing. The only thing we can do with this, and the thing we must do with this, is to allow it to transform our world-views. In other words, to come to see God more and more at the centre of the universe he's made and rules, instead of seeing ourselves there, and to come to see that what he's working towards is so much greater than what we originally wanted that we'll start to want it and work towards it as well. What this means for us as we work through the Overview is that we shouldn't look for what the Bible is telling us to do. Rather, we should allow it to communicate its main message and let it tell us about God and what he's doing (this is not something we'll need to work at, it'll jump out and hit us between the eyes!). What we will need to do is allow this to challenge what we previously thought. For example, is the God we see in the Bible the God we believe in? If not, we'll need to change our perception of God. Or, is what we see him doing what we think he ought to be doing? If not, we'll need to change our understanding of what we think He ought to be doing. Again, is the world as we see it described in the Bible the world we think we know? If not, we'll need to change the way we perceive the world.

Letting the Bible challenge our world-view and mind-set is clearly vital, but it's not easy. All the studies have questions designed to help us begin to think about how the truths of the passage might change our world-view, but the difficulty and challenge is to answer these questions honestly and thoughtfully. The only way to let God revolutionize our thinking as he wants to is to mull over and wrestle with the truths we will discover. Don't simply answer these questions glibly (or worse, leave them till you get to the group). Instead, chew them over in the bath-tub or wherever you do your serious thinking. The result, over the course of the year, will be lives that are transformed and turned upside-down.

# MAP SHOWING ISRAEL AND THE SURROUNDING NATIONS



Wright, Paul H. Rose Then and Now Bible Map Atlas with Biblical Background and Culture. Torrance, CA: Rose Publishing, 2012.

## THE PLOT OR 'STORY LINE' OF THE BIBLE

One of the main things we'll do in the *Overview* is to work out how all the various pieces of the Bible fit together to tell of God's one great plan for all eternity – and it will take us most of the year to do this. The basic story we'll see is summarized here, though doing it this briefly means leaving out some quite important elements and making everything appear much simpler and more one-dimensional than it really is. Nevertheless, it's worth having the main 'plot' laid out so that we can see it at a glance, can see where everything is going and have something to build on.

At its most basic, the history of the world, as told in the Bible, can be divided into 8 phases:

### 1. The Creation and Fall (Genesis 1-11)

These events set up the rest of the Bible. The Creation reveals God's power and authority. The Fall – in which humankind rebels against God and the whole creation is cursed as a result – is *the* problem that God is dealing with in the rest of the Bible.

### 2. From Abraham to Egypt (Genesis 12-50)

God begins his plan to rescue humankind from the effects of the Fall by promising Abraham that his descendants will enjoy *some* restoration of what went wrong at the Fall. God repeats this promise to Abraham's son and grandson, but no real fulfilment of this promise occurs in this period. However, this promise to Abraham is the fundamental promise that God is working to fulfil, and much of the rest of the Bible is devoted to showing how it develops into a promise to fully reverse the effects of the Fall. The importance of this promise is confirmed when Jesus is repeatedly said to be fulfilling God's promise to Abraham (e.g. Luke 1:73, Romans 4:16, Galatians 3:8,29).

### 3. The exodus and Mosaic covenant (Exodus 1 - Deuteronomy 34)

Over the next four hundred years, things actually get worse for Abraham's descendants and they become slaves in Egypt. Eventually, however, the time comes for God to begin to fulfil what He promised Abraham, so he rescues these descendants – now called Israel – from Egypt and brings them to Mt. Sinai. There he makes a covenant with them (the Mosaic covenant) in which he states that they will receive what he promised Abraham *if* – and only if – they obey his laws. However, if they disobey they will be punished. This covenant sets the agenda for much of the rest of the OT as we see Israel disobeying and being punished and God revealing how, in the light of this, he will fulfil his promise to Abraham.

Israel's disobedience begins swiftly, even before God has finished giving her his laws, and God responds by saying that those who have sinned will not enter the promised land. As a result, Israel spends the next 40 years in the desert waiting for that rebellious generation to die off.

#### 4. From the entry into Canaan to Solomon (Joshua 1 - 1 Kings 11)

Israel eventually enters the promised land, but her initial success in conquering the land with God's help is soon spoilt by further sin, so Israel spends some 250 years being oppressed by the other inhabitants of the land. One of the reasons Israel is so very sinful is the absence of a king to help her obey (e.g. Judges 21:25), but eventually God gives Israel a monarchy. Israel's second king – David – is the greatest king she has in the OT, and under him Israel's enemies are subdued, and the land fully conquered. In David's reign, and that of his son Solomon, Israel gets closer than at any other time to obtaining what God has promised, and we see more about what is involved in God fulfilling his promise to Abraham. However, this relatively happy time does not last and does not result in God's promises being properly fulfilled because Israel still keeps rebelling against God. Even David and Solomon sin. The reigns of David and Solomon are marked by the writing of many of the Psalms and much of the Wisdom Literature (e.g. Proverbs).

#### 5. Decline of Israel and exile (1 Kings 12 - 2 Kings 25)

Israel's persistent rebellion means that she cannot obtain what God promised Abraham, and after Solomon dies she begins to lose even what she has already gained as God punishes her for her sin. Eventually she ends up even worse off than she was before the exodus. The decline from Solomon's time takes the next 350 years and occurs primarily in three great disasters:

- First, Israel splits into a 'northern kingdom' (Israel) and a 'southern kingdom' (Judah).
- Secondly, the northern kingdom is conquered and taken into exile by Assyria.
- Finally, the southern kingdom is conquered and taken into exile by Babylon.

This is the saddest, most depressing and least known stage in Israel's history. However, it is also one of the most important because it is the period when God reveals most about his plans as he warns Israel of impending judgment but reaffirms that he will, nevertheless, rescue her and fulfil what he promised Abraham. In fact, this is the time when he first reveals explicitly that he will fully deal with everything that went wrong at the Fall and explains how he will accomplish this. Most of the prophetic books of the Bible are written in this period, as are the historical books of Joshua – 2 Kings. All in all, almost 50% of the OT is written during this period, and it is impossible to understand what God is revealing and doing without some grasp of what he is saying during this period.

#### 6. Return from exile (Ezra & Nehemiah)

Judah is allowed to return after some 60 years in exile in Babylon, but this return is not the triumphal event predicted by the prophets. Many Jews do not return at all, and those that do return come back in dribs and drabs over the 130 years between the end of the exile and the end of the OT. Further, though there is some rebuilding of Jerusalem there is no real fulfilment of what God has promised. The main reason for this is that the exile has not changed Israel's propensity to rebel against God. The point of this period in the OT is to show us that God is not yet fulfilling what he has promised. Relatively few books in the OT are actually about this period, but all of them make this point. Thus, by the end of the OT, God has made some truly amazing promises but has not yet begun to fulfil them.

## 7. From Jesus' first coming to his return (New Testament)

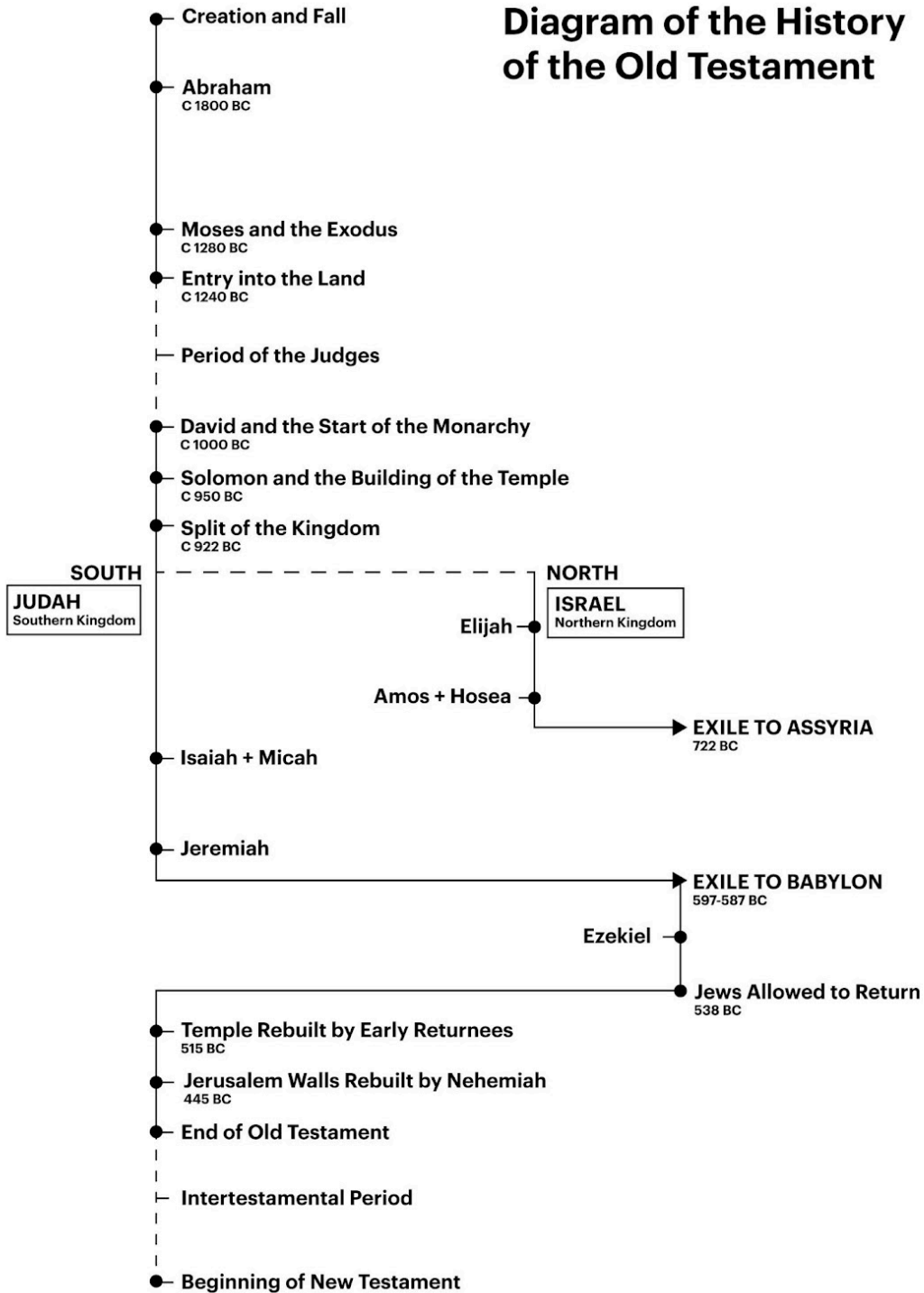
God's promises first really begin to be fulfilled some 400 years later, in the NT, with Jesus' birth, death and resurrection. In Jesus, God provides the king who is indispensable to the fulfilment of all his other promises. In Jesus, God begins the rescue of his people that he promised in the prophets at the exile. Finally, in Jesus, God provides a solution to the problem of sin, the problem that prevented OT Israel from receiving what God had promised and the cause of the Fall itself. Nothing, therefore, now stands in the way of God's people inheriting all that God has promised, in particular a reversal of all that went wrong at the Fall.

However, only God's people will experience God's great promises and even they will have to wait for Jesus' return before they can experience all that God has promised. The NT, therefore, is in large measure explaining who God's people are and telling them how they must live as they wait. We are, of course, currently in this stage of God's plan, which is why we often find the NT immediately relevant.

## 8. Jesus' second coming and the new creation

The fulfilment of the rest of God's promises – in particular, the actual reversal of all that went wrong at the Fall – will occur when Jesus returns and God brings about his new creation. Then those who are his people will enjoy the fruits of Jesus' solution to the problem of sin. This stage in God's plan still lies in the future, but the Bible ends with a few tantalizing visionary glimpses of the immense treasures God has in store for his people. We do not yet experience God's promised new creation, but God has revealed enough for us to begin to know what it will be like and to look forward to it eagerly.

# Diagram of the History of the Old Testament





# BRIEFING 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE OVERVIEW

## WHAT IS THE OVERVIEW?

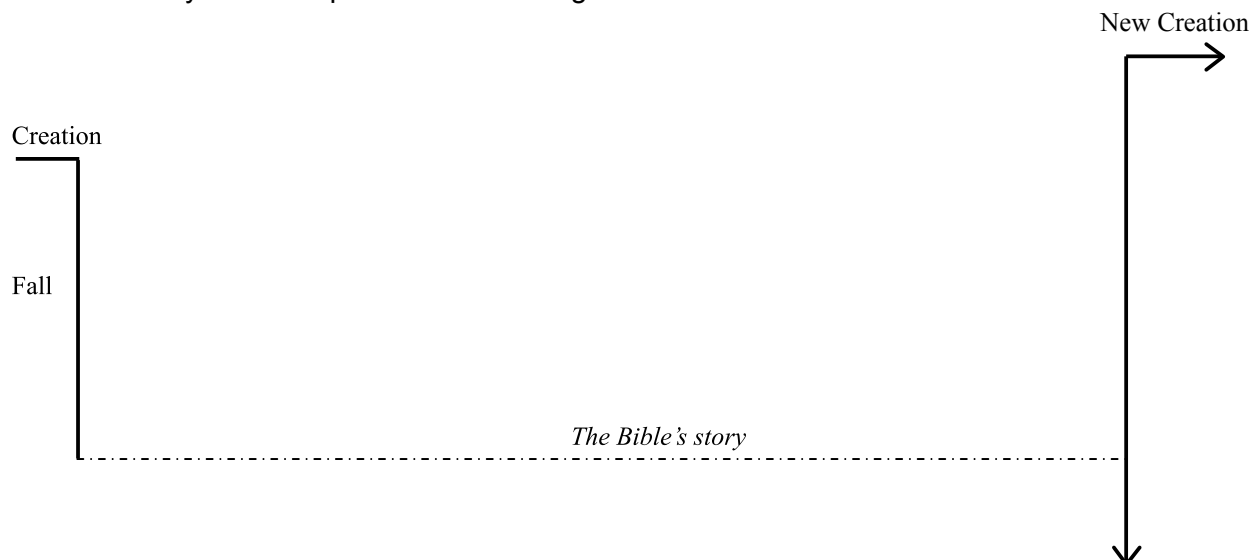
The Bible is one book written by the One God telling us about his one plan for all time and eternity. The *Overview* is a look at the whole Bible in twenty-seven studies which aims to see what this One God has revealed of himself and to understand what this one great plan for all eternity is and why it is so important. The emphasis throughout, therefore, is on seeing that the various events, themes and points in the Bible *do* fit together, on understanding *how* they all fit together and on understanding the implications of this for us. Not surprisingly, we will find that Jesus lies at the heart of what God is doing (cf. Ephesians 1), but seeing how he is the turning point in God's plan, the key that enables God's purposes to be fulfilled and the climax of all that God is doing will transform our understanding of what he has done and help us to worship him as we ought.

## THE BIBLE'S BASIC 'PLOT' OR STORY LINE

At its most basic there are three elements to the Bible's story:

- In the beginning God created the world and he made it good (Genesis 1-2). Adam and Eve rebelled against him, and this led to the world being wrecked, the event referred to as the 'Fall' (Genesis 3).
- At the end of the Bible, we see that God creates a new heaven and a new world to replace the one that has been ruined (Revelation 21:1-22:5). God has put right the problems caused by the Fall.
- The bulk of the Bible, however, lies in-between these two and tells of how God accomplishes this, i.e. how he puts right all that went wrong at the Fall. Over the year in the *Overview* we will study the steps along the way, seeing how God deals with the various problems of the Fall, why he does things the way he does and what 'put right' means. The multitude of historical events and his various actions all fit in to his reversal of the Fall. The three main things we will see him do are:
  - Deal with the *effects* of the Fall.
  - Deal with the *cause* of the Fall.
  - *Rescue* his people from the Fall.

This Bible story can be represented as a diagram as follows:



## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THIS ONE OVERALL STORY?

Three of the most important reasons why we need to grasp the Bible's one overall story are:

*The Bible's main overall story communicates the most important lessons God wants us to learn.*

Like most good authors, God's main message is seen in what his book as a whole is about, not in just what some corners of it are about. The individual parts of the Bible are important because they contribute towards the whole, but they are just parts, each teaching only one facet of God's truth. When we have the 'big picture' of the Bible it will become much clearer which issues are central to God's revelation and what exactly God is saying about them. Understanding the Bible's overall story, therefore, will help us focus on and understand correctly the most important issues God is communicating and it will prevent us from being distracted by less important issues. What we will see over the year is that the Bible's overall story is of God and his one great plan for all eternity. *The Bible's overall story is particularly important today because Christians are losing sight of what God is really doing i.e. that he is working out his plan for all eternity, and so is working on an infinitely bigger scale and for infinitely more important ends than we usually think.* Christians, increasingly, are concerned with what is happening in this world here and now and, in particular, with themselves. We badly need to regain the biblical picture of the God who created and rules the whole world and who is working towards his great eternal goal of putting everything under Jesus. Seeing the Bible as a whole will give us this biblical picture and show us that it is not simply one truth among many, but *the truth* the whole Bible is teaching.

*The Bible's overall story is the best way to learn more about God.*

By far the best way to know God better is to see what he does, because he acts in accord with his character. In fact, time and time again in the Bible God says that he wants to be known through what he does (e.g. Exodus 6:6-8, 9:14-16, 10:1-2). However, the main thing God is doing is working out his big, overarching plan, so the best way to get to know God better is to see him working out this plan. This will show us what his main concerns are, how he goes about achieving his purposes, what his main attributes are, how the various facets of his character fit together, etc. Knowing God better is one of the most important things a Christian can do, since the first and greatest commandment is to love him with all our hearts, souls, minds and strength (e.g. Mark 12:29-30), and we must know him to do this.

*The Bible's main overall plot enables us to make much more sense of all the many different things God is doing and revealing in the Bible.*

God and his one great plan for eternity gives us the *context* for every individual part of the Bible. Almost everything God does and says is making a contribution to this overall story and is meant to be understood in this way (not taken on its own out of context). If we study the individual books in this context, it is clearer what each one is about and why it matters.

## HOW SHOULD STUDYING THE OVERVIEW CHANGE US?

Many Christians think that applying the Bible means trying to change their lifestyles; adding, removing or modifying things they *do*. However, genuine biblical application involves far more fundamental changes than this. Biblical application is about changing who we *are*; changing our

attitudes, ambitions, priorities and world-views (what we think life is all about and where we fit into the world).

The *Overview* will not often directly tell us what to do, which is why some people find it hard to 'apply', but it *will* radically challenge our world-view and mind-set. Precisely because it teaches us about God and the main things he is doing, it will revolutionize our understanding of where the world is going, what it's all about, where God fits in and where we do. It will, if we let it, eventually turn our lives upside down, but because this is so fundamental, it's also slow. Don't expect a different 'application' each week, but *do* expect your understanding of God, what he's doing and how you fit in to be gradually transformed over the year, and do wrestle with how this challenges your world-view.



# LESSON 1 – GOD’S PLAN FOR ETERNITY

## EPHESIANS 1:3-23

This passage is one of the Bible’s great summaries of what God’s plan for eternity is all about. We’re going to spend the year studying this plan in some depth, and a good introduction to this is to study a summary like this to see that God has a plan and to get a rough idea of what it is before we examine it in detail.

This passage also shows us how God and his plan should affect us. The second part of the passage is one of the New Testament’s great prayers, and in it Paul prays for the Ephesian Christians in the light of what he has just said about God and his plan. Our aim for the year must be that what Paul prays for here becomes true in our lives as well, both because it is the right response to God and his plan and because Paul clearly thinks it is supremely important for Christians to respond in this way.

Organize the passage:

1. Read Ephesians 1:3-23
2. Summarize each section, briefly highlight the most significant things that are happening.
  - Ephesians 1:3-14
  - Ephesians 1:15-23

Observe the passage:

3. In 1:3-14, what are the main things God does for Christians?
4. What is God’s ‘will’ or ‘plan’ in 1:3-14, and what is he doing about it?

*Think it through:* How does everything these verses say God is doing fit in with his plan?

5. In 1:3-14, what is God the Father's part in what he is doing, and what is Jesus' role?

*Think it through:* What does this teach us about God the Father and Jesus?

6. Focus on Paul's prayer in 1:15-19a
- How is this prayer influenced by God and his plan as described in 1:3-14? (notice that Paul starts his prayer with 'for this reason')
  
  - What is Paul's main underlying request?

*Apply it:* To what extent are the things Paul prays for the things you pray for and want for your own life? If you don't share Paul's passion for them, why not? How might we make these things become more true in our lives?

7. What does 1:19b-23 teach us about God's power? How does God's power relate to His plan, (i.e. why is Paul telling us about God's power here)?
- 
8. *Think it through:* How does this whole passage shape your understanding of what God is doing and of what the gospel is all about?
- *Apply it:* How does this influence your understanding of the purpose and goal of your life?





## LESSON 2 – BEGINNINGS AND ENDS

### GENESIS 1-3

The Bible's account of God and his plan for eternity begins with God's creation of the world, and this is where this study begins. However, the idyllic world God originally created is ruined as early as Genesis 3, and the bulk of this study looks at what caused this 'fall' and what its consequences are. The Fall, however, is not the end of the story but its real beginning, *the Bible is about what God does in response to the Fall*. This lesson includes a quick look ahead to the end of the Bible to see how the situation there compares with the situation at the Fall, so we can start to see the main 'plot'.

This study is important because Genesis 1-3 (particularly Genesis 3) sets the scene for the rest of the Bible, while Revelation 21-22 show us where all God's actions are leading. Without some idea of the beginning and end of the story it is impossible to understand what the middle is all about.

Organize the passage:

1. Read Genesis 1-3
2. Summarize each section, briefly highlight the most significant things that are happening.
  - Genesis 1:1-2:4
  - Genesis 2:5-2:25
  - Genesis 3:1-24

Observe the passage:

3. Focus on Genesis 1-2
  - What are 3 or 4 important things that Genesis 1-2 teaches us *about God*?
  - What are 3 or 4 important things that Genesis 1-2 teaches us *about creation* as God originally made it?
4. Re-read Genesis 3:1-6. In what ways do Adam and Eve go wrong? Be specific.
  - In light of Genesis 1-2, why is their sin so serious and what is at the heart of it?

5. Consider the result of Adam and Eve's sin
  - What are the main things that happen *immediately* as a result of their sin?
  
  - What are the main things that happen *when God judges them* as a result of their sin?
  
  - *Think it through:* How is God's original creation, as we saw it in Genesis 1-2, changed as a result of Adam and Eve's sin?
  
6. What does Genesis 3 teach us about God? Is there any evidence of hope in this chapter?
  
7. Read ahead to Revelation 21:1-5 & Revelation 22:1-5
  - What happens at the end of the Bible to the consequences of Adam and Eve's sin?
  
  - *Think it through:* What does this glimpse of the end of the story suggest about what God is doing in the rest of the Bible (from Genesis 4 to Revelation 20)?
  
8. *Apply it:* How does Genesis 3 help us to understand the world today? Why is that important?





## LESSON 3 – THE FLOOD

### GENESIS 6 & 8:13-9:29

God's good creation has been ruined by Adam and Eve's rebellion against his rule. The consequences of this are seen in the early chapters of Genesis. Thus in Genesis 4 sin has already reached the stage of brother murdering brother, and in Genesis 5 death reigns. By Genesis 6 the situation is dire and God now intervenes to reshape the world. The flood is in several ways a miniature picture of what God will do in the rest of the Bible, but its other crucial role is to teach us what does *not* work and so what God will *not* do in the rest of history. This is not because God made a mistake, but so that when he begins to implement his real plan to reverse the Fall we will understand better what he *is* doing and be clearer that alternative remedies will not work.

Organize the passage:

1. Read all of Genesis 6-9 to set the whole passage in context.
2. Summarize each section, briefly highlight the most significant things that are happening.
  - Genesis 6:1-12
  - Genesis 6:13-7:5
  - Genesis 7:6 -7:24
  - Genesis 8:1-19
  - Genesis 8:20-9:17
  - Genesis 9:18-9:29

Observe the passage:

3. What does 6:5 teach us about human sinfulness? List as many things as you notice.
4. What are 3 or 4 important things 6:5-6:22 teaches us about sin and how God responds to it?
5. What are the main things 6:5-6:22 teaches us about God's rescue of Noah?
  - What was Noah's role in this rescue?

6. What does God tell Noah in 8:13-9:17?

- What similarities are there with Genesis 1:26-29?
- *Think it through:* Why might this be significant?

7. What do the events of 9:18-29 add to the story?

- In light of that, what is the significance of God's promise in 8:21-22 and 9:8-17?

8. What remained the same as a result of the flood? What changed?

- *Think it through:* So, what did the flood achieve?
- *Think it through:* What are the 2 or 3 main things this teaches us about what it will take actually to solve the problem of the Fall?

9. *Apply it:* What implications do the lessons of the flood have for us today?





## LESSON 4 – GOD’S PROMISES TO ABRAHAM

### GENESIS 12 & 15

God, the sovereign Creator, has been rejected by humankind and his good creation is ruined. The flood shows that God continues to punish sin, but will rescue those he chooses. However, even washing the whole world clean and starting afresh with the most righteous man deals with neither sin nor death. Something different will be needed before the Fall can be reversed, and God begins to do this different thing in Genesis 12. At first reading these chapters might not appear to be particularly special, but they are one of the key turning points in the Bible. The context gives us several clues as to this passage’s importance (as we’ll see), but the foundational nature of these promises becomes clearer as the Bible story develops. In fact, one of Jesus’ main roles is to fulfil the promises made here (e.g. Luke 1:68-73).

Organize the passage:

1. Read Genesis 11-17
  - We will only be studying chapters 12 and 15, but reading this larger section will help us know what events are happening around it, and set our two chapters in their proper context.
  
2. Summarize each section, briefly highlight the most significant things that are happening.
  - Genesis 12:1-9
  - Genesis 12:10-20
  - Genesis 15:1-8
  - Genesis 15:9-20

Observe the passage:

3. What are the main things that God promises Abram in 12:1-7?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What are the key additional promises that God makes to Abraham in Genesis 15:1-7 & 17:1-8?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. In what ways do all these promises in Genesis 12-17 relate to what happened at the Fall and what does this teach us about what God is beginning to do?

6. *Think it through:* What do you think is the significance of God beginning his plan for Abram and his descendants with promises?
  
7. Did anything prompt the promises of 12:1-3? Under what circumstances will they be fulfilled?
  
8. Abram asks God a question in 15:8 and God answers it in 15:9-21. What do you think God's answer means?
  - HINT: Jeremiah 34:18-20 might help you think through this. Even though this passage is referring to a different covenant, it involves the same ritual and will help you understand the significance of how God responds to Abram.
  
9. How long is it before God begins to fulfil the various elements of his promise to Abram?
  - *Think it through:* What does this teach us?
  
10. How does Abram respond to God's promises in 12:1-9 and 15:1-6?
  - *Think it through:* What does this teach us about what faith is?
  
11. What does 12:10-20 reveal about Abram?
  - *Think it through:* Why do you think it's important for us to know about this side of his character?





## BRIEFING 2: GOD'S PROMISES

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GOD MAKING PROMISES

God's promise to Abram is a turning point in God's plan for three reasons:

- For the first time there is clear indication that things will get better. Before this point there has appeared little hope for this fallen world. Even starting afresh after the flood has not changed the fact that sin and the consequences of the Fall are universal. The existence of godly individuals like Noah give no grounds for hope and neither does God's covenant with Noah (which is simply that He won't destroy all living creatures again – until the time comes for him to destroy the whole world [Genesis 8:21-22!]). In fact, when God rescued Noah, he made no promises that the world afterwards would be any different, and it wasn't! Now, however, God promises that things *will* get better. The rescue of Abram's descendants that God is beginning here will be radically different to His rescue of Noah. The Fall is not the end of the story and judgment for sins is not all we have to look forward to.
- The promises are of some kind of reversal of what went wrong at the Fall. As we saw in our study of Genesis 12 & 15, the things promised to Abram are the same sorts of things lost at the Fall. Thus, (1) Adam and Eve lost Eden, but Abram is promised a land; (2) they were cursed, but Abram will be blessed and be a blessing to others; (3) the Fall meant death, but Abram is promised many descendants; (4) the Fall led to hostility between people, but Abram's descendants will be a nation (with the implication – in Hebraic thinking – of people living together in harmony); and (5) the Fall led to a distancing and a hostility between humankind and God, but Abram is promised a relationship with God. These parallels between what was lost at the Fall and what is promised to Abram are crucial because they show that God is actually dealing with the problem of the Fall. The promises are not merely a side-show to the main issue that has dominated the world since Genesis 3. What is promised to Abram is certainly infinitely inferior to what was lost, but they are a move in the right direction and this is a momentous step. These promises are not a full solution to the Fall, but they are a start.
- God has committed himself to making things better. This is crucial. The flood shows that human beings cannot make things better. Even starting with the most righteous man and putting him in a clean world solves none of the problems, all the consequences of the Fall remain. Now, however, God promises that things will get better and this promise is certain because God has committed *himself* on oath to doing it. Time and time again in the Bible we will see that when God leaves something to human beings to do we make a mess of it and fail, even when given the best of circumstances (as Noah was). The only way anything good gets done is for God to do it himself.

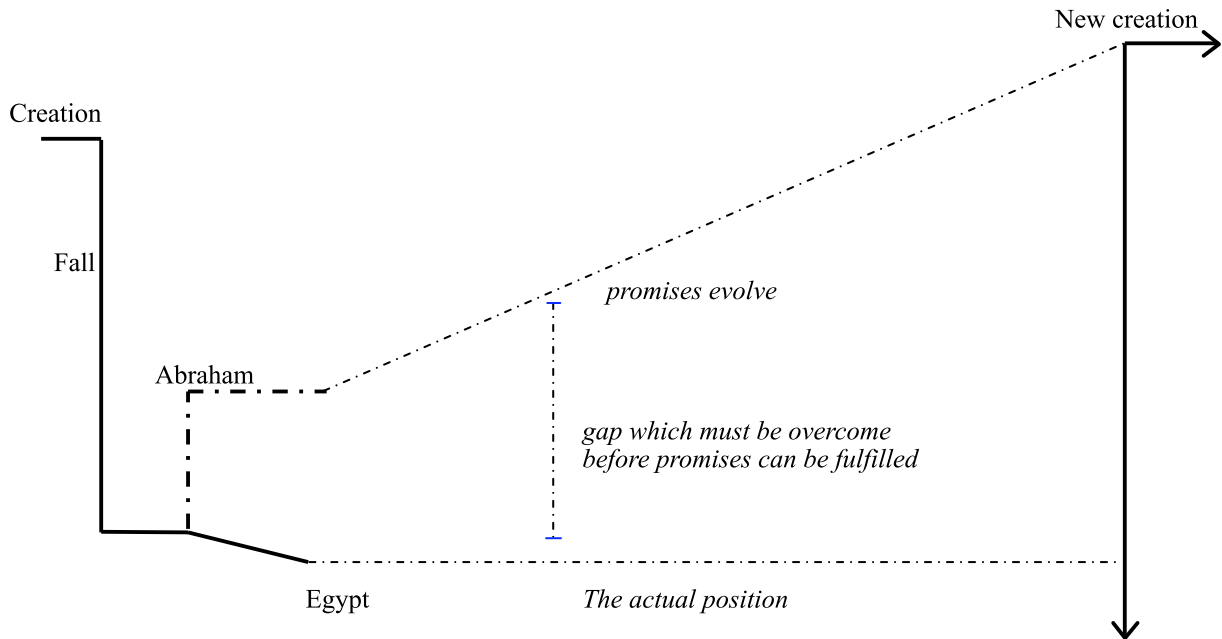
## THE FUTURE OF GOD'S PLAN

In order to understand how God is going about his plan to reverse the Fall, we must note that his promises are about what will happen in the *future*. God has promised Abram great things, but all that Abram actually sees of this is one solitary son, and he has to wait more than 25 years for that! Further, over the next 400 years things actually get worse. Abram's son and grandsons continue to live as nomads, but in the following generation the descendants of Jacob (the grandson through whom the promises will be fulfilled) are driven down to Egypt by a famine (Genesis 37-47) and there they stay, first as honoured guests but later as slaves. Thus, after 400 years Abram's descendants are worse off than Abram was. Nevertheless, God's promises still stand, and a cardinal principle in God's plan is that, *at any given point in time, what is experienced is not necessarily what has been promised*. God's promises tell us what will *eventually* happen, but a long time may pass and a lot may need to happen before they are fulfilled. Throughout the rest of the Bible we will see a disjunction between what God has promised and what God's people are actually experiencing at that time, and we must examine both promise and experience if we're to understand God's plan.

As we examine how God goes about reversing the Fall there are three issues we must think about. In the rest of the *Overview* we will see what happens to these. They are:

- How do God's promises evolve into full-blown promises of a reversal of the Fall? The promises to Abram are, as we've noted, simply the start of God's promises to reverse the Fall. God will add to His original promises to Abram, but He will, in the main, stick with the categories He has introduced – not surprisingly since these correspond to the categories of what was lost at the Fall, as we've seen – but what is promised in each category will evolve until, well before the end of the OT, it matches then surpasses what was lost. A substantial part of our study of the Bible will be directed towards seeing how these promises evolve. It is worth noting at this stage that the promises do not evolve gradually. Instead God's promises evolve in a series of 'steps' with relatively long periods in-between when little is added. Thus, after Abraham 400 years pass before God, speaking through Moses, next adds materially to His promises. The *Overview* will focus primarily on these 'steps', because most of the Bible is about these times. Not only are they the times when the promises evolve, they are also the times when most of the other important events happen as well.
- What are Abram's descendants actually experiencing? If Abram's descendants aren't enjoying what God has promised, then we also need to see what they *are* experiencing. So, one of the things we'll be doing in our study of the Bible is seeing what Abram's descendants are experiencing and understanding the gulf between that and what God has promised. Many studies of the OT focus on this 'history' of Abram's descendants, but it's only part of the whole story, albeit an important one.
- How is God going to overcome the 'gap' between experience and promise and fulfil all his promises? As well as seeing that there is a gap between experience and promise, we need to understand *why* it exists and how God is going to overcome it and so fulfil His promises. This will turn out to be one of the most important subjects in the Bible, if not *the* most important. However, at this point in the story, God has not yet said much about it, so we'll defer thinking about it until it arises in God's unfolding plan.

All this can be put on our schematic diagram of the Bible's story. The dashed line represents promises, the solid line represents historical experience and the dotted line indicates the part of the story we've not yet discovered.





## LESSON 5 – ‘I AM WHO I AM’

### EXODUS 2:23-6:8

Over 400 years have passed since God made his covenant with Abraham, but his descendants have received little of what was promised. In fact, in most ways they are much worse off since they are slaves in Egypt (though this fulfils Genesis 15:13). Now the time has come for God to start to fulfil his promise. The most obvious way he does this is to rescue his people from Egypt in order to bring them to the land he has promised, but a land is not the only thing God has promised Abraham’s descendants. He has also promised them a relationship with himself and the way God begins to fulfil this promise of a relationship is the key of the book of Exodus (see the way the book ends in Exodus 40:34-38).

Organize the passage:

1. Read Exodus 1:1-6:8 (We will be focusing on 2:23-6:8, but reading this larger section is important to set these chapters in their context)
  - As you read 1:1-2:22, note the extent that God’s promises in Genesis 12-17 have been fulfilled.

Summarize each section, briefly highlight the most significant things that are happening.

- Exodus 2:23 – 2:25
- Exodus 3:1 – 3:22
- Exodus 4:1 – 4:9
- Exodus 4:10 – 4:17
- Exodus 4:18 – 4:31
- Exodus 5:1 – 5:23
- Exodus 6:1 – 6:8

Observe the passage:

2. In 2:23-3:10, what are the two main things God says he will do?

- *Think it through:* Why does he need to do both?

3. In 2:23-3:10, how does God intend to rescue Israel?
  - What objections does Moses raise in 3:11-4:17, and how does God answer each one?
  
4. What responses does Moses get from the Israelites (see chapters 4-6) and from Pharaoh?
  
5. What issues are at stake at the end of chapter 5?
  - Why is God concerned that Israel should see what he will do and know what he is like? (see 6:1 and 6:7)
  
6. What do we learn of God in 2:23-3:10?
  - In the ancient world, and particularly the biblical world, a person's name revealed a lot about them and what they did (example: 'Smith' was the blacksmith). What does God's revelation of his name in 3:14-15 teach us about him? What does 6:1-8 add to this?
  
  - *Think it through:* Why do you think God chose to reveal these particular truths about Himself to the Israelites in Egypt?

7. *Apply it:* According to 6:1-8, Israel will know God by looking at what he will do. How are we to know God today and why is it important?

**Pray the passage:**

Knowledge of God and his Word should shape our minds, hearts, lives, and worship. Spend some time praying through the scripture you've just studied.

- Adoration. Based on this passage, what can you praise God for?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Confession. Based on this passage, what might you need to confess to God?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Supplication. Based on this passage, what will you ask God for?



## LESSON 6 – OUT OF EGYPT

EXODUS 6:28-7:7 & 11:1-12:51

The time has come for God to fulfil his promises to Abraham, but in order to do this he must first rescue Israel from Egypt. This passage gives us the clearest and fullest description in the Bible of what is involved in God rescuing his people, a subject that is very relevant for us today as God rescues us through Jesus. However, there is more to what God is doing here than rescuing Israel. For example, as we began to see in Exodus 3-6, he intends Israel to enter into a relationship with himself and he is working towards this end by revealing himself to her – since Israel can't have a relationship with God if she doesn't know him. Further, in 5:2 Pharaoh scorns God, and he will not ignore this challenge.

Note that the ancient world thought of gods as territorial, i.e. powerful only in their region. Egypt had many gods including Hapi, god of the Nile; Usiris, god of crops and fertility; Re, the sun god; Sunu, the pestilence god; Isis, goddess who protected children; Pharaoh's firstborn son, a god; etc.

Organize the passage:

1. Read Exodus 5:1-14:31 to set the passage in its context
  - *Think it through:* What are the issues at stake at this point in Exodus?
  
2. Summarize each section, briefly highlight the most significant things that are happening.
  - Exodus 6:28 – 7:7
  
  - Exodus 11:1 – 11:3
  
  - Exodus 11:4 – 11:8
  
  - Exodus 11:9 – 12:20
  
  - Exodus 12:21 – 12:28
  
  - Exodus 12:29 – 12:30
  
  - Exodus 12:31 – 12:42
  
  - Exodus 12:43 – 12:49
  
  - Exodus 12:50 – 12:51

Observe the passage:

3. What two things is Israel rescued *from*? (see chapter 12 for both)

- How does God accomplish each of these rescues?
- How does the Passover lamb avert God's judgment? (be specific)
- *Think it through:* Why are both of these rescues necessary?

4. What is Israel rescued *for*? (see 6:8, 7:16, 8:1,20, 9:1,13, 10:3, 12:25)

- Why are both of these important?

5. *Think it through:* What else do these chapters teach us about God's rescue of his people?

6. What is Israel to do in order to remember these events? Why does Israel need to remember? (see 12:24-27, and 3:15; 6:6-8)

7. Who is God revealing himself to in the plagues and what do the plagues reveal about him? (see 7:35,17; 8:10,22-23; 9:14-18,24,29; 10:1-2,6,14; 11:7-9)

- Why is God concerned to do this?

8. *Think it through:* What were the main implications of the plagues and the Passover for Israel at the time?

- *Apply it:* What relevance do the plagues and the Passover have for us today?

9. *Apply it:* How does this passage's revelation of God and what he is doing challenge your concept of what God is like?



## LESSON 7 – AT MOUNT SINAI

### EXODUS 19, 20 & 24

It takes Israel 3 months to travel to Mount Sinai (19:1-2). The rescue from Egypt initially results in Israel praising God (14:31-15:21), but this doesn't last and Israel grumbles against God repeatedly (15:24; 16:23,7-8; 17:1-7). God, however, continues to provide for her (15:25,27; 16:4-8; 17:6,8-16).

Chapter 19 is the start of the second main part of the book of Exodus. More than this it is the beginning of a major new phase in God's plan to deal with the Fall. The 'Mosaic' covenant that God inaugurates at Mount Sinai establishes the terms of Israel's relationship with God for the rest of the OT. It is as foundational as the Abrahamic covenant, though in a different way, and it is the main subject of the next three and a half books of the Bible (and our next three studies). A grasp of the Mosaic covenant is essential if we are to understand both the OT and what Jesus came to do.

Organize the passage:

1. *Think it through*: Summarize the message of Exodus so far (prior to chapter 19). What has this taught us about the purpose and character of God?
  
2. Read Exodus 19, 20, and 24
  
3. Summarize each section, briefly highlight the most significant things that are happening
  - Exodus 19:1 – 19:2
  - Exodus 19:3 – 19:8
  - Exodus 19:9 – 19:15
  - Exodus 19:16 – 19:20
  - Exodus 19:21 – 19:25
  - Exodus 20:1 – 20:17
  - Exodus 20:18 – 20:21
  - Exodus 20:22 – 20:26
  - Exodus 24:1 – 24:8
  - Exodus 24:9 – 24:11
  - Exodus 24:12 – 24:14
  - Exodus 24:15 – 24:18

Observe the passage:

4. In chapter 19, how will Israel be blessed if she keeps the covenant that God makes with her?

- *Think it through:* What do you think this means? Why is it a great blessing?
- *Think it through:* What connection is there between this blessing and the blessings promised to Abraham?

5. What must Israel do to obtain this blessing?

- *Think it through:* How does this differ from the Abrahamic covenant?
- *Think it through:* What does this imply about the relationship between the Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants?

6. How does Israel respond to God's covenant in this passage? (see 19:8; 20:18-19; 24:1-7)

- *Think it through:* What does this show they are failing to understand?

7. What are the main things revealed by the manner of God's appearance in 19:10-25?

- *Think it through:* Why does God want Israel to understand all this? (see 20:20 for part of the answer)

8. What are the two main dimensions to the law God gives Israel in 20:2-17?

- *Think it through:* How do the first 4 commandments (20:3-11) relate to what we have seen in Exodus so far?

9. *Apply it:* Summarize the main things God is teaching Israel about the relationship with himself that he's calling her into. Reflect on what that means for you and your own relationship with the Lord.



## BRIEFING 3: DEALING WITH THE CAUSE OF THE FALL

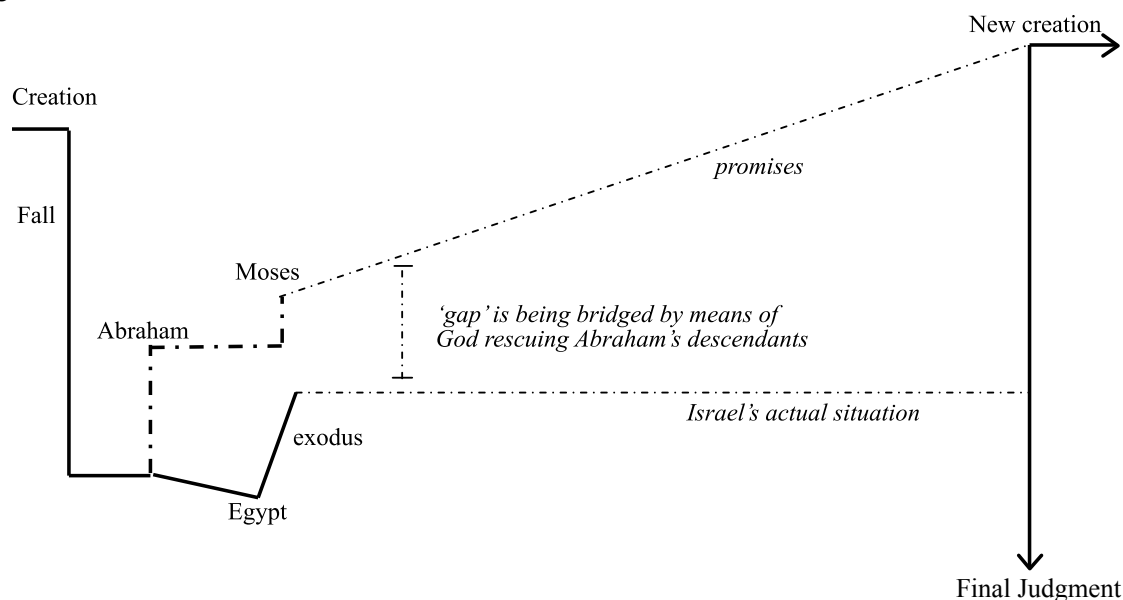
### THE MOSAIC COVENANT OFFERS GREAT BLESSINGS

For over 400 years Abraham's descendants have not enjoyed what God promised, but now the Abrahamic promises are in the process of being fulfilled. Israel has been rescued from slavery in Egypt and is on her way to the land of Canaan. This introduces us to the important idea that the gulf between Abraham's descendants' actual experience and God's promises is overcome or bridged by God *rescuing* them from their situation. This is something that we'll see more of later in the Bible's story.

However, the Abrahamic promises are only the beginning of God's promises. God intends far more for Abraham's descendants than simply many people living in the land of Canaan. The Abrahamic covenant actually marks the beginning of His promises to reverse the effects of the Fall, as we saw. Now, as Israel move towards Canaan he spells out more of what he intends to give Abraham's descendants.

The promises in the Mosaic covenant deal with the same issues as the Abrahamic covenant, i.e. Israel will (1) *have a relationship with God himself* (e.g. Exodus 19:6-7, 29:42-46), (2) *have a land* (e.g. Exodus 23:23-31), (3) *be blessed* (e.g. Deuteronomy 28:1-13), and (4) *be a numerous people and a great nation* (e.g. Exodus 23:30-31). Nevertheless, the promises in the Mosaic covenant are different in that God explains what he is offering in significantly more detail (particularly with regard to the first three promises) and we see that he is actually offering much more than Genesis 12-17 indicate. The promises in the Mosaic covenant are a development of the promises, not simply the Abrahamic promises restated. The first of these promises begins to be developed in Exodus 19-20, where Israel learns that a relationship with God means being his special people, treasured, set aside and given the right of access into his presence and of dealing with him directly, as we've just seen. We will see the second and third promises elaborated when we study Leviticus 26.

We can now extend our diagram of the Bible's story. Note particularly that, even as Israel is rescued and begins to obtain some of what God promised Abraham, what God is now promising gets better.



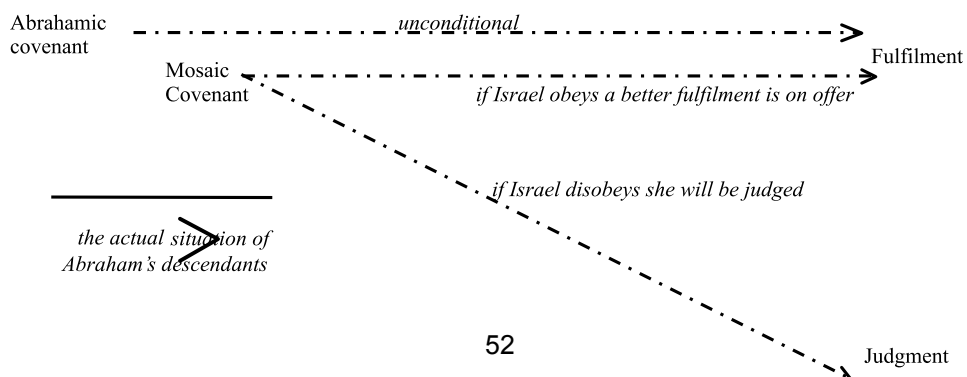
## BUT THE CAUSE OF THE FALL MUST BE DEALT WITH FIRST

However, the most important feature of the Mosaic covenant is not that it develops the promises further, but that it is *conditional*, unlike the Abrahamic covenant which is unconditional. Thus, Israel will only obtain the promises of the covenant *if* she obeys God's commandments. If she does not obey, she will face his wrath and be punished. This is totally unlike the Abrahamic covenant where God commits himself to giving Abraham's descendants what he has promised (e.g., Genesis 15:8-20).

The reason for this difference is that in the Abrahamic covenant God committed himself to dealing with the *effects* of the Fall, but said virtually nothing about the *cause* of the Fall, (i.e., sin). That was not an oversight, it simply wasn't the issue when he made his covenant with Abraham. Now that the time has come for him to begin to give Israel what he has promised, God turns to the cause of the Fall and we discover that *the effects of the Fall cannot be dealt with until the cause is dealt with*. In other words, the rescue can't be completed unless the problem of sin is dealt with. Abraham's descendants cannot obtain what God promised until they give God his rightful place and obeys him, unlike Adam and Eve.

The fact that the problem of sin must be dealt with before God will give Abraham's descendants what he has promised is an absolutely fundamental principle. One of the main points of the Mosaic covenant is to teach Israel (and us) this truth. We'll see Israel being taught this truth again and again in the rest of the OT, because it's a truth she must learn thoroughly if she's to understand what God is doing and ultimately gain what he has promised.

At first sight it might appear that the Mosaic covenant contradicts the Abrahamic covenant, but this is not the case. God is still committed to fulfilling his promises: the Mosaic covenant is simply the *route* he is using at this stage in his plan to fulfil his promises. If this route does not work he will find another route to fulfil his promises. But the Mosaic covenant reveals the crucial truth that whatever route God eventually uses to fulfil his promises, it must deal with the cause of the Fall. It also reveals much about how God will eventually deal with the problem of sin, as we'll see in the next few studies. The Mosaic covenant is not a mistake or a digression, but rather a huge and crucial step forward in God's plan. One of the most important things to notice about the Mosaic covenant is that in it God is promising to deal with the effects of the Fall *himself*, but he is giving *Israel* a large and crucial responsibility for dealing with the cause. When God rescued Noah, he committed himself neither to dealing with the cause of the Fall, nor reversing its effects, and we saw how little that rescue accomplished. Now, in his rescue of Israel, God is committing himself to dealing with more than half the problem, and the question is: will that be enough to deal with the problem of the Fall? The diagram we have been using is useful for showing the way God deals with the effects of the Fall, but a different diagram is better for showing how the cause of the Fall is dealt with and how the covenants relate to each other. Again, the dashed lines represent promises while the solid line shows what is happening historically.



## LESSON 8 - THE GOLDEN CALF

EXODUS 32:1-34:10

Israel is in the process of obtaining what was promised to Abraham. She is now at Mount Sinai where God is explaining that what he is promising is more wonderful than what Israel might have thought from Genesis 12-17. In particular, he has so far shown them that they can have an extremely privileged relationship with a God who is awesome beyond their wildest dreams. At this very moment Moses is up the mountain, being told that God will live in the midst of Israel and receiving the blueprint for building the tabernacle and ordering the priesthood which will be the visible symbols of His presence (Exodus 25:1-31, especially 29:44-46). However, in order to actually obtain and enjoy what God is offering, Israel must play her part and keep the covenant. Moses is, at this moment, also receiving the instructions for keeping the covenant and the tablets of stone with the 10 commandments (24:12-18).

Organize the passage:

1. *Think it through:* What are the main things that God has revealed about himself to Israel so far in Exodus? What has he said about how Israel is to treat him?
  
2. Read Exodus 32-34:10
  
3. Summarize each section, briefly highlight the most significant things that are happening
  - Exodus 32:1 – 32:6
  - Exodus 32:7 – 32:10
  - Exodus 32:11 – 32:14
  - Exodus 32:15 – 32:29
  - Exodus 32:30 – 32:35
  - Exodus 33:1 – 33:6
  - Exodus 33:7 – 33:11
  - Exodus 33:12 – 33:23
  - Exodus 34:1 – 34:10

Observe the passage:

4. What implications does Israel's sinful behaviour (in 32:1-6) have for Israel's chances of obtaining God's promises?

- *Think it through:* What implications does this have for God's plan?

5. What are the grounds on which Moses pleads in 32:11-14 and what is God's answer?

- *Apply it:* What lessons can we learn for how we pray?

6. What are the grounds on which Moses pleads in 32:30-34 and what is God's answer?

- *Think it through:* What do you think is the significance of this?

7. Why has God decided not to go with Israel? (see 33:1-6)

- *Think it through:* What dilemma does God face in agreeing to Moses' plea in v15-17?

- *Think it through:* How does God's glory tie in with this dilemma? (The two main facets of God's glory, as he reveals it to Moses in 33:18-34:7, are mercy and justice.)
  
- *Apply it:* To what extent do you have these two sides of God's character correctly balanced in your own thinking?

8. What does Moses plead for in 34:8-10 and what is God's answer?

9. *Think it through:* What are the big questions we are left with at the end of this passage?





3. What are the five sacrifices that Aaron has to offer? Pay attention to all the details: how, where, when and why are each of these offered?

Sacrifice	How	Where	When/Order	Why
Bull - for High Priest (V 3)				
Ram - for High Priest (V 3)				
Male Goat #1 - for people (V 5)				
Male Goat #2 - for people (V 5)				
Ram - for people (V 5)				





# LESSON 10 – THE MOSAIC COVENANT

## LEVITICUS 26 & NUMBERS 13-14

The sacrificial system provides a solution to sin, at least to the extent of dealing with ceremonial uncleanness and enabling God to dwell with Israel. However, the basic principles of the Mosaic covenant still stand, and it is important to be clear about them. As the time comes for Israel to move on towards the promised land we find an excellent summary of its main terms in Leviticus 26. Understanding these will help us understand much of what happens in the rest of the OT. Israel eventually leaves Mount Sinai in Numbers 10:11-13, and chapters 13-14 tells us of the most crucial event that occurred on their way to Canaan, an event that is picked up repeatedly in the rest of the Bible.

There are two distinct parts to this study, but they illuminate each other. Leviticus 26 teaches the general principles by which Israel needs to live, namely that she needs to obey God if she is to obtain the blessings he has promised. Numbers 13-14 is a 'case-study' illustrating how Israel is living at this stage in her history and the consequences of this.

Organize the passage:

1. Read Leviticus 26 and Numbers 13-14
2. Summarize each section, briefly highlight the most significant things that are happening.
  - Leviticus 26:1 – 26:13
  - Leviticus 26:14 – 26:46
  - Numbers 13:1 – 13:24
  - Numbers 13:25 – 13:30
  - Numbers 13:31 – 14:4
  - Numbers 14:5 – 14:9
  - Numbers 14:10 – 14:12
  - Numbers 14:13 – 14:19
  - Numbers 14:20 – 14:25
  - Numbers 14:26 – 14:38
  - Numbers 14:39 – 14:45

Observe the passage:

3. In Lev. 26, what are the main areas/categories that Israel will be rewarded if she *obeys* God?

- *Think it through:* How do these areas of reward compare with the promises made to Abraham?

- What are the main areas in which Israel will be punished if she *disobeys*?

- *Think it through:* How do these areas of punishment compare with the promises made to Abraham?

4. *Think it through:* How, therefore, does the Mosaic covenant relate to the Abrahamic covenant?

5. In Numbers 13-14, Joshua and Caleb's report on the land differs to the majority report. How does Israel respond to these reports? How is this treating God with contempt? (see 14:11)

6. What is God's response to Israel's sin?

- *Think it through:* How does this differ from his response to her previous sins and what does this teach us about God?

7. Summarize the main points being made in Leviticus 26:40-45

- *Think it through:* What do each of these mean and why are they important?

8. *Apply it:* What do you think are the main lessons of these chapters for us today, and how should these affect our view of what God has done for us in Jesus?



## BRIEFING 4: ENTERING THE LAND

### THE EXODUS COMPLETED

As a result of her sin at Kadesh Barnea (Numbers 13-14), Israel spends the next 40 years wandering in the desert, just as God said she would. Eventually all that generation die out and God then again instructs Israel to prepare to enter the land of Canaan (Deuteronomy 2:14-25). This time Israel obeys and, led by Joshua, she crosses the Jordan and at last she enters the promised land.

With the exodus completed we can now see that God's rescue of his people consists of three distinct elements. All three are integral to the rescue and all three have their parallels in Jesus' rescue of us, as we'll see when we get to the New Testament.

The three phases of the rescue are:

- Israel is rescued from Egypt. This is what we often think of as the exodus, but it's only the start of the exodus. It's when Israel ceases to be slaves and can look forward to God fulfilling his promises soon. However, it's *not* the point when Israel starts to enjoy the promised blessings. In fact, Israel's actual situation initially appears to get worse, as she goes into the desert (see Numbers 11:4-6).
- Israel crosses the desert. Israel has to cross the desert to get to the promised land. However, her sin means she spends much longer there than she needs to. The right thing to do in the desert is to look back to what God has done in rescuing her from Egypt; to look at what he is doing now by being with her, leading her and providing for her; and to look forward to the promised land he has in store. Instead, Israel grumbles at and doubts God (see Exodus 16:2-8). As a result, virtually all the adults who are rescued from Egypt die in the desert and never enter the land they are rescued for.
- Israel enters the promised land. After crossing the desert Israel enters the promised land and begins to obtain what God has rescued her for, i.e. his promises. This would be the end of the story, except that under the terms of the Mosaic covenant Israel will only fully obtain and keep these promised blessings *if* she obeys God's commands, as we saw in Leviticus 26.

### THE FIRST 200 YEARS IN THE LAND

Israel's first 200 years in the land are a generally unhappy period in her history. At first things go well, but the rot soon sets in.

The main events are:

- Under Joshua's leadership Israel attacks the Canaanites and wins many great victories because God fights for her, as he promised he would (Joshua 6).
- However, despite Joshua's many successes Israel fails to occupy all the land (see Joshua 13:1-17). In fact, a great deal of Canaan remains under the control of others (see Judges 1:27-36).
- After Joshua the people turn away from God to serve other gods, and God punishes her by not destroying her enemies, e.g. the Philistines (Judges 2:10-23). This is a period full of many hardships, ameliorated only by the fact that Israel periodically cries to God who then appoints a judge who delivers her from her enemies. However, the general trend in Israel during this time is downwards.

## THE PROMISES ARE, THEREFORE, ONLY PARTIALLY FULFILLED

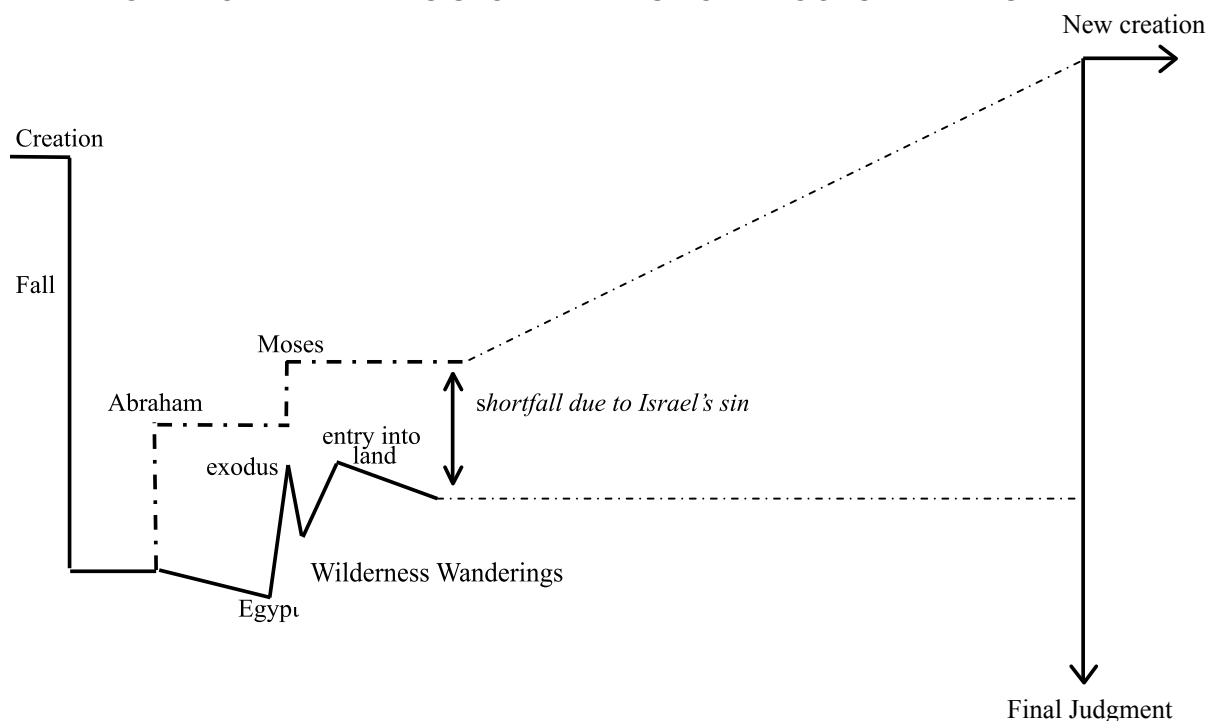
Thus, Israel is now in the promised land, but she only has a *limited* fulfilment of God's promises:

- She has some of the land, but only *some* of it, as we've seen.
- She is not blessed since she has little peace and little prosperity. She is confined to relatively infertile hill country by her enemies (see Judges 1:19) and is oppressed by them (see 1 Samuel 13:19-21).
- She is not a great nation comprising numerous people living harmoniously together, since her people are fighting and killing each other (see Judges 19-20).
- She has a relationship with God, but it is more often than not a relationship of enmity rather than a relationship of friendship (see Judges 2:12-15, 17:1-13).

The main reason the promises are only partly fulfilled is that Israel is sinning and angering God. As a result, he sends enemies who defeat her (see Judges 2:11-15, 20-23). In other words, Israel is suffering the punishments of the Mosaic covenant instead of enjoying its rewards. Until Israel's sin is dealt with this state of affairs will continue, and it is not yet at all clear how her sin will be dealt with. However, by the end of Judges we have two clues as to how this might happen:

- A sacrifice ameliorates sin to some extent. In Leviticus 16 we saw that a sacrifice solves the problem of sin at least to the extent of enabling God to remain in Israel's midst without destroying her. We saw that the sacrificial system does not fully deal with sin, but it suggests that sin *can* be dealt with and gives us a hint as to *how* it eventually will be.
- A good and strong leader helps. The writer of the book of Judges indicates that the leaders or 'judges' that God gives Israel prevent her from sinning too much (see Judges 2:19, 8:33). However, the judges are not that good and sometimes lead the people into sin as well (see Judges 8:27). Towards the end of the book the writer describes some of Israel's sinful behaviour and states four times that this is a result of the absence of a leader like a king (Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25). This sets up the next stage in God's plan and we'll see how this develops in the next few studies.

## THE DIAGRAM OF THE BIBLE'S STORY AT THIS POINT LOOKS LIKE THIS



# LESSON 11 – THE START OF THE MONARCHY

## 1 SAMUEL 8 & 15

The events of 1 Samuel 8 come some 250 years after those of Numbers 13-14. If you want more details of this time period, read sections #3 and #4 in the *Storyline of the Bible* on page 4. God's plan to put right what went wrong at the Fall appears to have stalled. Despite the fact that Israel is now in the land of Canaan (see *Briefing 4* on pages 7&8), she is enjoying little of what God has promised. She occupies only some of the land, has little prosperity, has no peace, and is far from a great nation. Worst of all, her relationship with God is tottering (see Judges 17) and sustained only by God's grace. The direct cause of many of her problems is that she is oppressed by the other people inhabiting Canaan, particularly the Philistines (see 1 Samuel 13:16-22). However, the ultimate cause of Israel's suffering is her unrelenting sinfulness (Judges 2). For God's plan to progress something must change.

### Know the context

1. Before studying these chapters, we must know what's been said about a king in Israel. From the following verses, does it seem like the idea of a king in Israel is good or bad in principle?
  - Genesis 17:6
  - Genesis 49:10
  - Numbers 24:15-19
  - Judges 17:6 & 21:25
2. What do those verses in Judges imply that a king might help with?
  - Why is this important in the context of the Mosaic covenant?
3. From Deuteronomy 17:14-20, what should the king of Israel be like?

4. Read and summarize the passage

- 1 Samuel 8:1-9
- 1 Samuel 8:10-18
- 1 Samuel 8:19-22
- 1 Samuel 15:1-9
- 1 Samuel 15:10-15
- 1 Samuel 15:16-23
- 1 Samuel 15:24-31
- 1 Samuel 15:32-35

Observe the passage

1. What two main things does 1 Samuel 8:3-5 and 8:20 imply that a king is expected to do?

*Think it through:* In Israel's historical context, why are these both important?

2. What is wrong with the people's demand for a king in 1 Samuel 8? What does 8:20 show they have forgotten?

3. What are the main ways in which Saul sins in 1 Samuel 15? Write down everything you notice.

- 1 Samuel 15:3 & 15:9
- 1 Samuel 15:10-11
- 1 Samuel 15:14-15
- 1 Samuel 15:18-19
- 1 Samuel 15:20-21

- 1 Samuel 15:23
- 1 Samuel 15:24

*Think it through:* What does Saul's sin here teach us about what constitutes serious sin in God's eyes?

4. What implications does Saul's sin have for himself? See 1 Samuel 15:26-28



# LESSON 12 – THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

## 2 SAMUEL 7

God's people need a good leader who will help them do what is right, who will help them defeat their enemies and, thus, who will help them inherit what God has promised. However, that leader is not Saul. Following God's rejection of Saul as king, David is anointed king (1 Samuel 16:1-13), though it is many years before he accedes to the throne. He is Israel's greatest military leader, and he makes her a notable power in the region. His most significant victories, however, are within Canaan, where he subdues the Philistines decisively for the first time (thus fulfilling Israel's original hopes for the king, cf. 1 Samuel 8). He also captures Jerusalem from the Jebusites and brings the ark of the covenant into it, making it both Israel's capital and religious centre (see 2 Samuel 5-6). Further, he is a godly (though not perfect) king who becomes the standard against whom Israel's subsequent kings will be measured (see 1 Kings 15:1-5, 11, 2 Kings 14:3, 18:3). However, the most important of the many important events associated with David is recorded in 2 Samuel 7, where God makes with him the last of His great OT covenants. As with the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, this covenant marks a significant development in God's plan to reverse the Fall.

Read and organize the passage

1. Read 2 Samuel 7.
2. Briefly summarize the what is happening in each section of this passage
  - 2 Samuel 7:1-7
  - 2 Samuel 7:8-17
  - 2 Samuel 7:18-24
  - 2 Samuel 7:25-29

Observe the passage

3. What is symbolized by God dwelling in a house, rather than in a tent? (see verses 1-17)
4. What is the house that God promises David in verse 11? (see verses 8-17 for context)
  - *Think it through:* In the context of what we've seen in the previous study, why is this house that is promised to David important?

5. What are the three or four main things God promises *David's descendant* in this chapter?

- What is the idea that crops up in each of these promises?
- *Think it through:* In the light of the Mosaic covenant, why is this important?

6. What does God promise *Israel* in this chapter?

- *Think it through:* How are these promises similar to what is offered in the Mosaic covenant? (Note: Compare it with what God said in Leviticus 26 (see lesson 10))

7. *Think it through:* How does the Davidic covenant relate to the Mosaic covenant? What does this imply about the role of David's descendant and how this fits into God's plan to reverse the Fall?

8. In verses 18-29, what are the main elements of David's response to God's promises? Try to find four or five.

- *Think it through:* What is at the heart of David's response?





# LESSON 13 – THE DECLINE OF ISRAEL

## 1 KINGS 10-12 & 2 KINGS 17

God has made three great covenants with Abraham and his descendants outlining his plan to do something about the problem of the Fall. What he has promised so far still falls far short of a complete solution or reversal of the Fall, but most of the ingredients of the full solution are now present, albeit in embryonic form. The bulk of the next few studies will focus on how these promises evolve into promises of a full reversal of the Fall, but another important issue is the extent to which the promises are fulfilled in Israel at this time. God is faithful and will certainly fulfil his promises at *some* point, but we need to identify which parts of the promises are fulfilled at this time and which are not, since we will then need to look for a fulfilment elsewhere of the unfulfilled promises. The extent to which the promises are fulfilled in the 250 years after David is the subject of this study. We will pick up the story during the reign of Solomon, David's son and successor.

Read the passage

1. Read the context of our passage: 1 Kings 4:20-34, 6:1-7:12, 8:1-21, 9:1-9
2. Read our passage: 1 Kings 10-12 and 2 Kings 17

Organize the passage

3. Briefly summarize the what is happening in each section of 1 Kings 10-12:
  - 1 Kings 10:1-13
  - 1 Kings 10:14-29
  - 1 Kings 11:1-8
  - 1 Kings 11:9-14
  - 1 Kings 11:15-25
  - 1 Kings 11:26-43
  - 1 Kings 12:1-15
  - 1 Kings 12:16-24
  - 1 Kings 12:25-33

Observe the passage

4. To what extent are God's promises to Abraham and David and the blessings promised to Moses fulfilled in 1 Kings 4-10?

- *Think it through:* What does this teach us about kings like David and Solomon?

5. To what extent are God's promises to Abraham and David and the blessings promised to Moses fulfilled in 1 Kings 11-12?

- *Think it through:* Do you think Solomon is the descendant promised to David in 2 Samuel 7? Why or why not?

6. Why is the split of Israel a serious disaster? What is the primary underlying cause of the split?

7. In what ways does Solomon sin in 1 Kings 10-11? (Refer to Deuteronomy 7:1-5, 12:1-6, 17:14-20)

8. What is Jeroboam's sin in 1 Kings 12?

- What is the real underlying cause of this sin?

- *Think it through:* Based on what you know of the bible's story so far, how do you expect that God will respond?
9. Re-read 2 Kings 17. This comes 200 years after Solomon's death and is primarily about the northern kingdom (which is, confusingly, called Israel).
- What was the *political* reason for Israel's exile to Assyria?
  
  - What was the *theological* reason behind this?
10. *Apply it:* What does this study teach us about how God works?
11. *Think it through:* In light of this study so far, to what extent are the Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic covenants fulfilled in Israel at any time prior to 2 Kings 17? Now in 2 Kings 17, what is the state of God's plan to deal with the problem of the Fall?



## PART 1 REFLECTIONS

What have the chapters we've studied so far added to your understanding of God's plan to undo, and to deal with what went wrong at the Fall? Think about how everything we've studied fits together.

Gospel Connections:

1. What have you learned about who God is?
2. What have you learned about the relationship between God and man?
3. What have you learned about the problem of sin?
4. What does it look like to follow God?
5. In what ways does God save in these passages?
6. What have you learned about how Christ is foreshadowed/anticipated?



























