

# THE BIG JOURNEY

*from Creation to New Creation*



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Our journey ends at New Jerusalem (Revelation 21.1-2,9-22.5). Each of the city's gates is made from a single pearl, and its gates are always open. In this painting by Pat Marvenko Smith, we're looking through one of these open gates. We see the river of living water flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb, through the middle of the street of the city, with the tree of life on either bank.

## one ► Charting our Course

### Two testaments – one story

The Bible is, at its heart, a story. Its 66 books were written by around 40 authors over 1,500 years. It includes all kinds of literature - history and biographies, genealogies, legal codes and moral guidelines, songs and poems, prophecies and letters. But through all them all runs a single story – a story that begins at Creation and ends in the New Creation. There are many things in the

Bible that may seem rather obscure at first sight. But when we view them in the context of the whole Bible story, we see their true significance more clearly.

The Bible is divided into two major sections – the Old and the New Testaments. The two testaments appear very different. But they're simply two halves of a single story. As Augustine said: "The New Testament is in the

**Old concealed; the Old is in the New revealed.**” We can’t fully understand the New Testament unless we read the Old. And reading the Old Testament on its own is like reading the first few chapters of a thrilling novel and then finding, to our frustration, the last chapters missing. We’ll never know what happened in the end!

These connections between the Old and New are clear and unmistakable. For example, if we want to really understand Jesus’s death on the Cross we must turn back to the Old Testament and read about the sacrifices (described particularly in Leviticus). In fact, the whole Old Testament points to Jesus Christ. Jesus tells us that Himself. When conversing with His companions on the Emmaus Road, Luke records: *“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”* (Luke 24.27).

Some of the most remarkable links of all are those that connect the first and last books of the Bible:

- ▶ In Genesis we see the Tempter’s victory (Genesis 3.1-6). In Revelation, he meets his doom (Revelation 20.10).
- ▶ In Genesis, God creates Heaven and Earth (Genesis 1.1). In Revelation He creates a New Heaven and a New Earth (Revelation 21.1).
- ▶ In Genesis, sin calls down the judgment of pain and death (Genesis 3.16-19, see Genesis 2.17, 5.29). In Revelation God abolishes pain and death (Revelation 21.4). In the Garden of Eden, God walked with Adam and Eve (see Genesis 3.8). In Revelation, *“ ‘... the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, ...’ ”* (Revelation 21.3).
- ▶ In Genesis, we see a river watering the garden (Genesis 2.10-14). In Revelation a life-giving river flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Revelation 22.1).



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Tuscan landscape, Italy. A preview of the wonderful New Heaven and Earth where God’s people will live with Him for ever.

- In Genesis, Adam was driven from the tree of life (Genesis 3.22-24). In Revelation 22.2 we see a whole grove of trees of life flourishing on either bank of the river, yielding fruit every month and bearing leaves that bring health and wellbeing.
- In Genesis we see a man and his wife (Genesis 2.22-24). In Revelation we see a Man and His wife, the Lamb and His bride (Revelation 19.7, 21.2,9).

So you can see that these two passages in Genesis and Revelation are closely linked. They're like two bookends enclosing the entire Bible story.

But there are differences between these two passages, too. The most obvious is this: at the beginning there's just a **garden**; at the end there's a **garden-city**. God began with a garden in Eden. This garden was, so to speak, a 'building site'. In the garden God planned to build a city. This city is the New Jerusalem. It's a place where God lives with His people (see Hebrews 12.22-24, Revelation 21.2-3). It's a wonderful place – a river of *"water of life"* flows through the city and a grove of *"the tree of life"* flourishes on its banks (Revelation 22.1-2). New Jerusalem symbolises God's perfect world where He reigns over His people in paradise. It's a picture of the Kingdom of God.

One day, God's people will live with God in His paradise for ever. That's God's goal – **God's people living in God's presence in God's paradise**. That's the destiny of our race and of this world we live in.

## God's history book

The Bible is – in the words of the Hindu scholar quoted in the introduction to this session – *"the history of the whole of creation and the history of the human race."* In particular, the Bible tells the history of God's people, Israel. What God did in history was an integral part of the nation's national heritage. See, for example, Nehemiah 9.6-31, Psalms 78.1-72, 106.6-46, Acts 7.2-47 and Acts 13.17-37.

The early Christians, too, didn't preach their subjective experience of Jesus Christ, but His life and crucifixion and resurrection – facts of history that were objectively true



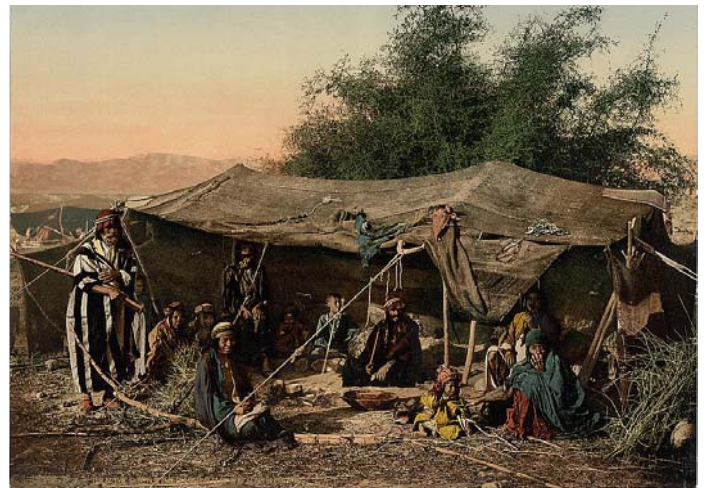
Image © Ferrell Jenkins <http://ferrelljenkins.wordpress.com/>  
A rolling stone tomb dating from Roman times. It's of the kind in which Jesus's body was laid, and from which He emerged victorious over death.

(see, for example, Acts 13.27-37). The apostles' Gospel witness was centred not on *"cleverly devised myths"* (2 Peter 1.16) but on facts. Christianity is embedded in history that is well-documented and verifiable.

## God's perspective on history

But God has a rather different view of history than we have. Geoffrey Bingham commented: *"... we are struck by the remarkable fact that very little in God's salvation history seems great and imposing by outward standards."*

As we'll see in session 5, Abraham left his home in the city of Ur in Mesopotamia to travel to the land God promised to his descendants. This act of faith was, to those who might have observed it, nothing extraordinary or spectacular. It didn't - as far as we know - even merit a footnote in contemporary historical accounts! Probably no-one but Abraham knew its significance. Yet it began a whole new phase in God's plan.



Bedouin encampment in the Holy Land (an early photograph probably taken between about 1890-1900). Abraham, too, lived in tents: *"By faith [Abraham] went to live in the land of promise, . . . living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God."* (Hebrews 11.9-10).

Abram fathered the nation of Israel that, except for one brief period of glory under Solomon, served mainly as a troubled buffer state between rival Middle Eastern powers. Yet, as far as God was concerned, this tiny nation was at the centre of history.

Jesus Himself was born in poverty and obscurity - a baby nestling in a lowly stable in a troubled corner of the Roman Empire. Very few contemporary records of Jesus's life exist, outside the Gospels. Yet His coming refashioned history, reordered our very chronology, and transformed the destiny of the whole created realm!

And the Church that He brought into being appears - by worldly standards - small and weak in the midst of powerful godless civilisations that seem at times poised to extinguish it. Yet the Church, in Paul Billheimer's words: *"Through the use of her weapons of prayer and faith, . . . holds in this present moment the balance of power in world affairs"*. And one day she will rule with Christ over all creation!

So we need to see things from God's perspective, not ours. Empires and civilisations have risen and then fallen to oblivion, but what has really shaped history - and what will determine its destiny - are not the great events chronicled in our history books, but those God records in the Bible.

## Our personal history

And this principle applies to us, too. Our lives as Christians may seem insignificant in the great plan of things as the world sees it. But our daily and largely unseen faithfulness to God - and, conversely, our secret sins - have repercussions far beyond what we might think. Meteorologist Edward Lorenz discovered that small disturbances in the air may have tremendous cumulative effects - an idea he captured in his paper entitled "Does the Flap of a Butterfly's Wings in Brazil Set Off a Tornado in Texas?" Likewise, each step of obedience we take, or sin we commit, has more impact than we imagine.

As Roger Forster and Paul Marston said in their book 'God's Strategy in Human History': ". . . we find it tremendously exciting to be able to grasp a little of God's purposes in history. It enables us to see the whole movement of which we are a tiny part, and the whole history into which our lives fit. Day by day we begin to discover how our actions, our sufferings, and our attitudes have repercussions for eternity; we realise the great future destiny God has in store for His children."

## A drama in four acts

The Bible, as we said at the beginning, is a drama - as Dorothy Sayers' said, "the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man . . .". It's a drama in four acts:

**Act 1 Creation** God creates the universe, with mankind as its crowning glory and ruler.

**Act 2 Rebellion** Seduced by God's arch-enemy Satan, mankind rebels against God. That gives Satan a foothold on Earth. And it brings catastrophe upon mankind and a curse on the Earth.

**Act 3 Rescue** God sets out to deal with all the consequences of that rebellion. He provides restitution for sin and deals with all its consequences. He conquers Satan and all his forces, rescues mankind, and renews His creation.

**Act 4 Re-Creation** God's new humanity lives with Him in His new creation, never to be troubled by Satan or sin again.

Through our journey, we'll follow this cosmic drama from creation to re-creation. As we travel, we'll unfold key themes and ideas woven through the Bible.

Before we embark on our journey, let's check our route.

The Bible begins by telling us how God created the Heavens and the Earth, and filled the Earth with living things. Then He created mankind. Let's pick up the story there, as told in Genesis chapter 2.

## Act 1 Creation

### 1 God's paradise where He lives

God creates a garden in the land of Eden - planted with trees and watered by a river. *"And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. 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. A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers."* (Genesis 2.8-10)

In Genesis 3.8 we find God *"walking in the garden in the cool of the day"*. The Hebrew word for *"walking"* is used later in the Bible for God walking or moving about in the Tabernacle (Leviticus 26.12, Deuteronomy 23.14 and 2 Samuel 7.6-7). The tabernacle was a tent that God made His home. It was where He lived among His people (Exodus 25.8). So this word *"walking"* here suggests that the garden was His home, just as the Tabernacle was to be many centuries later.

God didn't make the Universe and then just govern it

from the heavenly places, out of sight and out of reach, like some absentee landlord. He created Earth to fill it with His presence - just as Habakkuk prophesied, *"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea"* (Habakkuk 2.14).



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Sunrise in Bohemian Switzerland (a national park in the Czech Republic). One day there will be *"a new heaven and a new earth"* (Revelation 21.1) and *"the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord . . ."* (Habakkuk 2.14). This glorious prospect is captured in this wonderful morning scene.



Image © NASA

An image of the Earth taken from the VIIRS instrument aboard NASA's most recently launched Earth-observing satellite - Suomi NPP, and composed from a number of swathes of the Earth's surface taken on January 4, 2012. This Earth, though soiled by sin, is still a breathtakingly beautiful place.

Of course, we know that God is present everywhere. David asked God *"where shall I flee from your presence?"* (Psalm 139.7). He couldn't. Even if David made his bed in Sheol, the shadowy abode of the dead, he knew he'd find God there (Psalm 139.8). But though His presence fills all creation, God plans to presence Himself here on Earth among mankind in a special way.

## 2 God's people whom He loves

God creates Adam in His image and after His likeness (Genesis 1.26-27). Then He places Adam in His paradise (Genesis 2.8).

From Adam's side, God creates a woman, Eve (Genesis 2.21-23). He commands them: *"Be fruitful and multiply"*. The human race is to become a great family expanding beyond the Garden of Eden to fill the entire earth.

Notice how God made Adam. He *"breathed into his nostrils the breath of life"* (Genesis 2.7). God gave this man-shaped lump of clay 'the kiss of life'. As Adam

awoke into consciousness he found God, so to speak, bending over him and lovingly kissing him into being. Adam's very first experience was intimacy with God. The Bible story is - at its heart - a love story. That love story began at the very moment of man's creation.

God made us in His image. We are like Him in many different ways. But perhaps the most fundamental way we're like God is that *we can love*. *God is love* (1 John 4.8,16). And love, too, lies at the root of what it is to be human. We are relational beings. We find our true fulfilment and purest joy in loving other people and, above all, in loving God. And so we can respond to God's love for us and love Him in return (compare 1 John 4.19).

The Garden of Eden was God's earthly home. And that's where He placed Adam, and where Eve was created. He wanted Adam and Eve - and all their descendants - to live in His garden paradise with Him! The eternal, uncreated, holy God made us to live in His presence and enjoy fellowship with Him. How astonishing is that!

## Act 2 Rebellion



Image from Russian International News Agency (RIA Novosti) archive, image #44732, authored by Zelma / Георгий Зельма (CC-BY-SA 3.0)

Soviet soldiers advance in the shattered city of Stalingrad, February 1943. An image that graphically captures our loss of paradise.

But Adam and Eve's fellowship with God didn't last.

God said to Adam that he could eat from every tree in the garden, except one – the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2.16-17).

Then Satan enters the garden. He's disguised as a beguilingly beautiful and cunning serpent. He tempts Adam and Eve to distrust God's word and disobey Him – and eat from the one tree whose fruit God has forbidden them to eat. We read *"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."* (Genesis 3.6).

Adam and Eve eat from the forbidden tree. It is an act of rebellion against God. This rebellion gives Satan a foothold on Earth. And it brings catastrophe upon mankind and a curse on the Earth.

Our holy God curses Satan. He pronounces judgment on Adam and Eve and expels them from His paradise (Genesis 3.14-19, 23-24). Mankind is now in exile, banished from God's presence and under His judgment.

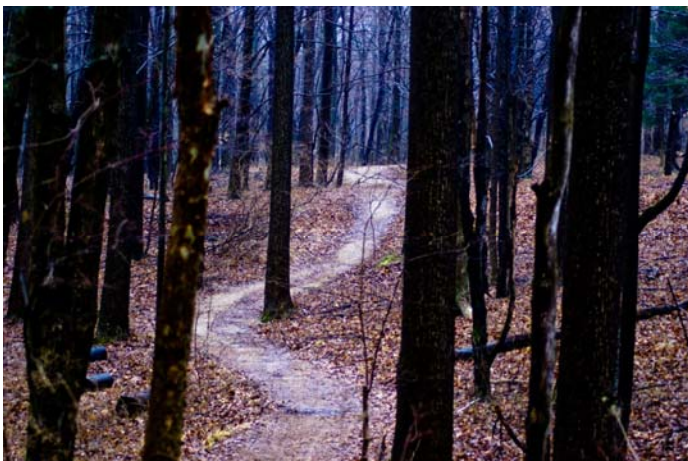


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*"... the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden . . . ."* (Genesis 3.23).

Adam and Eve's act of rebellion had colossal and devastating consequences. The whole of the rest of the Bible tells us how God deals with all the effects of our sin. Don Carson comments: *"... the entire drama of the Bible's storyline turns on understanding how abominable sin is and what must be done to end it"*.

### The distorted image

Something very radical happened to Adam and Eve when they sinned. They now possessed a rebellious self-willed disposition, which all their descendants (except One) would share. Mankind – in his essential nature - still bore the image of God (see Genesis 9.6, James 3.9). But that image was now distorted and dysfunctional.

### "You shall surely die"

God commanded Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, adding *"...for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die"* (Genesis 2.17). At the moment Adam and Eve ate that forbidden fruit, they died (see Romans 5.12,17 and compare Romans 6.23).

But physical death was many years away. Over 900 years would pass before Adam died. So what did God mean?

### Broken relationships

To answer that question, we need to ask what death really is. What actually happens when someone dies? Their bodies die, of course. But they themselves still exist. What happens is this: they lose all contact with this world and enter a new realm unseen to us. All their earthly relationships – with other people and with this present world – are ended.

And that's what death really is. *Death is a set of broken relationships.*

### With God

Firstly – and most fundamentally – mankind’s relationship with God was broken. Adam and Eve were alienated from God, their Creator and Friend.

### With other people

Our relationships with our fellow humans are ruined, too.

Sin wrecks our most intimate relationship - between husband and wife. God told Eve: *“Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”* (Genesis 3.16). The word *“desire”* suggests she will seek to dominate her husband. Conversely, he will *“rule over”* her; he will exercise leadership harshly. Each will strive to control the other. The battle of the sexes began.

Sin spoils the relationship between parent and child. Women would now bear children in pain (Genesis 3.16). That doubtless includes more than the physical pain accompanying pregnancy and childbirth, but also the emotional demands, anxieties and (so often) heartbreak that rearing children – now naturally disobedient because of sin - will bring.

Every other human relationship is blighted, too – between siblings, among neighbours, between employee and employer. Sandra Richter observes, *“Self-centredness and competition are now the relational norms. A healthy relationship, at any level, is hard to find.”*

### Slavery to Satan

And mankind came under the power of the one who seduced them – Satan. Human society now *“lies in the power of the evil one”* (1 John 5.19), dominated by *“the ruler of this world”* (see John 12.31, 14.30, 16.11). And each individual person finds themselves enslaved to sin (John 8.34, Romans 6.16-19).

### Physical mortality

Our physical bodies, too, have been impacted by sin. Many of us have inherited diseases and disabilities from our ancestors. Our bodies are susceptible to infection. Injuries may never heal properly. And everyone who



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Tombs in Highgate Cemetery, London.

survives to adulthood falls prey to the inevitable ageing process that ends in death.

## Creation’s frustration

In Paul’s words: *“the creation was subjected to frustration”* (Romans 8.20 NIV). Derek Kidner comments that *“the nature-miracles of Jesus give some idea of the control which man under God might have exercised . . . .”* But our race’s moral depravity - coupled with our impaired mental and physical powers - make us unable to subdue and rule the Earth as God intended (see Genesis 1.26,28). And Earth faces ecological disaster as the human race mismanages it, and pollutes land, sea and air.

Furthermore, God removed His blessing on the land (compare Leviticus 26.18-20, Deuteronomy 11.16-17).

Mankind now suffers painful toil in a frustrating and wearisome battle against nature (see Genesis 3.17-19), scratching a meagre living from soil that more readily yielded thorns and thistles than useful crops.



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Farm machinery abandoned to the weeds. *“Cursed is the ground because of you; . . . thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you”* (Genesis 3.17-18).

## Sin’s debt

### Sin indebts us to God

Earth, which God planned as His paradise home, is now *“subjected to frustration”* and in *“bondage to decay”* (Romans 8.20,21 NIV). It’s the scene of crime and suffering and decay. People, rather than being God’s friends, live in rebellion against Him.

Sin has robbed God – just as you and I are robbed when someone else’s crime derails our lives, smashes our plans, and deprives us of what is rightfully ours. Sin incurs debt. And justice requires this debt to be repaid.

### Sin indebts us to other people

And sin incurs debt between us and other people. Our own sin impacts others’ lives – with consequences that we’re so often unable to put right. Conversely, we ourselves suffer because of evil that others have done.

**The effects of sin are staggeringly huge and wide-ranging. Adam and Eve's act of rebellion unleashed consequences they were utterly powerless to put right. No purgatory, no penance, no good works, no recompense, could ever possibly put things right. We owed a debt we could not possibly begin to pay. What could God do?**

## Act 3 Rescue

What did God need to do to put things right? *The answer to this question sets the scene for the rest of the Bible story.*



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Rays of sunshine against a dramatic black sky. A scene that captures the reality of mankind's banishment from Paradise. But there is light. From the moment of the Fall, God sets His plan of salvation in motion – a plan which will deal with sin and all its consequences fully and permanently.

### Mankind needed to be reconciled to God

Firstly, God needed to forgive mankind and restore our relationship with Him.

That may sound simple. But forgiveness was, for God, a profound problem. Why is that?

It's because of what sin really is. Sin isn't merely doing evil things. Sin goes much, much deeper than that. At its root, sin is a state of rebellion against Almighty God. When Adam and Eve ate of the fruit, they made a 'unilateral declaration of independence' from God. They were traitors, guilty of high treason against their Creator and King. Their only hope was a pardon from their King.

God could not simply forgive and forget mankind's act of revolt without dealing our sin. Why? Because if He did so, He would be acting contrary to His divine nature - His love, His holiness, and His righteousness and integrity. And that's something He can never do (compare 2 Timothy 2.13). In John Stott's words, if God "were ever to behave 'uncharacteristically', in a way that is out of character with himself, he would cease to be God, and the world would be thrown into moral confusion."

So how could God forgive us – and at the same time remain faithful to His own righteous character (see Romans 3.26)? That was the problem that faced God after the Fall.

### Mankind needed eternal life

People do not just sin, they have a *sinful disposition* – a natural inclination to disobey God. They are sinners, "*dead... in trespasses and sins*" (Ephesians 2.1). The only remedy for death is resurrection. God needed to raise people from spiritual death.

People's sinful disposition needs to be removed. And they need to be resurrected into a wonderful new life – a life of fellowship with God and with other people, a life free from bondage to sin and Satan's domination, a life of inner peace and newfound purpose.

### Our debt to God and other people needed to be repaid

We mentioned earlier that sin robbed God. And our sin has impacted other people's lives. Justice demands that these debts be repaid.

### Creation needs renewal and new management

Creation needs to be "*set free from its bondage to decay*" (Romans 8.21) and become the wonderful paradise God has always planned. We need new bodies, free from disease and death. And we need to be able to rule this planet wisely and well, as God had intended us to do.

### Satan had to be defeated and judged

Satan himself has to be finally disarmed and defeated. He must be judged and consigned to outer darkness.

### God must be vindicated

When Satan tempted Eve, he insinuated that God's word couldn't be trusted, and that God was withholding blessing from her. And he infected mankind with his own distrustful suspicion of God.

God had to show all mankind - and angels, both good and evil - that His word is always reliable, and that all He does is in purest love. Satan had to be proved a liar.



Every good drama has us on the edge of our seats wondering how the story will end. How will the hero battle against impossible odds to win through and seize the victory? How will the sleuth identify the murderer and bring him to justice? How will the boy win the girl he loves?

The Bible is the supreme drama. How would God overcome Satan and destroy him and his evil kingdom? How could He deliver mankind from Satan? How could He release us from sin and all its consequences, and make us His friends again? How could God create a paradise and live there with mankind again?

The rest of the Bible tells us how - a story that is, as Dorothy Sayers said, "the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man . . . .".

And - like every good drama - there's a dramatic and quite unexpected twist in the Bible's plotline. Look out for it on our journey!

## The Kingdom of God

From the moment of the Fall, God launches His plan to defeat Satan and deal with sin and all its consequences. He plans a new paradise where He could live with His people.

In other words, *God began to establish His Kingdom*. Stage by stage, He brought people under the blessings of His rule. The Kingdom of God is a theme that underpins the whole of the Bible story.

We explain a little more about God's kingdom on the last page of this study.

There's also a separate one-page guide to the Kingdom of God available, showing how this theme unfolds through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

## Covenants

But we're not to think that God's Kingdom is like an earthly empire. It's not so much His empire as His *family*. God is our *Father* and our *Husband*.

► **As individuals**, God's people are His treasured **children**. Our King is our Father. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He began, "*Our Father . . . Your kingdom come, . . .*" (Matthew 6.9-10).

► **Corporately**, God's people are Jesus's beloved **Bride** (Revelation 19.6-9, 21.2,9-11). Jesus is our Husband.

So deep is God's love for His people, that He describes it in terms of these two most intimate human relationships - the love between a man and a woman, and the love of a parent for their children. In His Kingdom, God nourishes and guides and protects and instructs and cares for His family - His children and His Son's Bride. Even earthly despots accord their wives and children wealth and privilege. How much more our King!

How does God make people part of His family? By making a **covenant** with them. He wants to join Himself to His people in an unbreakable bond of loyal, selfless love. In fact, our own two closest human relationships are also based on covenants.

● In marriage, **husband and wife** commit themselves to love, care for and protect each other until death parts them. That is a covenant.



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A re-enactment of a traditional Jewish wedding at the annual Klezfest, July 2011, in Lviv, Ukraine.

● The relationship between **a parent and their child** is also covenantal. We don't usually think of this relationship in this way. But it is. It's most obvious when people adopt a child. There comes a moment when the parents-to-be commit themselves to take on the



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A couple adopt a child. This image is of the actual adoption ceremony and beautifully captures the new parents' joy and the little boy's newfound security and future.

responsibility to love, care for and protect their new child – that is, to act just as if they were the child's natural parents. Just as marriage initiates a bond of love, care and commitment, so does adoption.

God made a number of covenants with His people. But the final, most wonderful, covenant is the New Covenant (Matthew 26.28, Luke 22.20; see Hebrews 8.6-12, which quotes Jeremiah 31.31-34; and see Hebrews 12.24). It's under *this* covenant that He makes His people His sons, and marries them to Jesus.

## The search for the Serpent-Crusher

But how will God do all this? He'll do it through a Man – a Member of the very race that Satan had seduced!

God said to the serpent, Satan: *"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"* (Genesis 3.15). A descendant of Eve would - though suffering fearfully in the process – defeat Satan and release an uncountable multitude of people from his grasp. He would satisfy God's righteous justice, pay sin's debt, and enable us to be forgiven and become God's friends. Through this man, people would be given eternal life. Through this Man, there would be a new Heaven and Earth.

And that's why the Bible includes a number of genealogies. These long lists of ancestors seem rather boring and unimportant to us. But actually they're a vital part of the story. These genealogies lead us down the generations to this descendant Who will strike the mortal blow against Satan and provide salvation for us and our world. In Vaughan Robert's words, *"The rest of the Bible can be seen as a 'search for the serpent-crusher'"*. That serpent-crusher is Jesus Christ.



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Creation *"waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God"* (Romans 8.19) - it longs for the glorious transformation of God's people when Jesus returns. But for now, creation is now *"subjected to frustration"* (Romans 8.20 NIV). But when Jesus comes again, it *"will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God"* (Romans 8.21). Then God's people will govern creation wisely and well, as God has always intended.

## Act 4 Re-Creation



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Sunlight dispels the shadows on a woodland trail. One day, Heaven will invade Earth; Heaven and Earth will be blended in a way we cannot now imagine. God's presence will fill the whole Earth.

Let's fast-forward to the end of the story. In the last chapters of the Bible, we read: *"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. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 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.' . . . 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 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."* (Revelation 21.1-3, 22.1-2)

Let's take a closer look at what John saw.

### 1 God's paradise where He lives

God creates a New Heaven and Earth. Out from God's throne gushes a river of living water. On its banks are trees of life. Doesn't this remind you of the Garden of Eden we read about earlier? What John saw was a new paradise.

The loud voice from God's throne says: *"Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man"*. That's the most wonderful thing about this paradise – God Himself lives there. Remember what we said at the beginning: God

created Earth to make it His home. He plans to live here with His people. We, God's people, will live in His immediate presence for all eternity!

### 2 God's people whom He loves

John sees New Jerusalem coming down out of Heaven (Revelation 21.2). This holy city is a picture. It symbolises God's people living in God's presence in paradise. It's a picture of God's new world.

Notice that New Jerusalem doesn't stay in Heaven. John sees it descend from Heaven. There will be Heaven on Earth. God will live with His people on Earth.

John sees the New Jerusalem *"prepared as a bride adorned for her husband"* (Revelation 21.2). God's people are Jesus's Bride (Revelation 19.7, 21.9). The Bible is – at its heart – a love story. The goal of history is a wedding! At the end of the Bible, we see God's people pictured as a Bride, arrayed in finest linen, radiantly glorious, made ready to marry God Himself and live with Him for ever – *"He will dwell with them, . . . God Himself will be with them . . ."* (Revelation 21.3).

And there's more. Just a few verses later, God says, *"The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son."* (Revelation 21.7). Individually, we will be God's children.

God loves us, His people with the love of a Husband and a Father. And He wants to live with us in paradise for ever!

So let's go back to the beginning and set off on our journey. Our next session will tell the story of creation

and explore this spectacularly wonderful and beautiful Universe that God has made.

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD

### God's people in God's presence in God's paradise

On our journey we'll track key themes and ideas woven through the Bible. As we've already said, the one that underlies them all is **the Kingdom of God**.

What is God's Kingdom? The simplest way to explain it is this: **God's people living in God's presence in God's paradise**.

► There's a foretaste of God's Kingdom at the very beginning of the Bible. There are two people living in God's paradise, a garden where He Himself was present, "walking" there "in the cool of the day" (Genesis 3.8).

► And at the very end of the Bible, we read "the dwelling place of God is with man". God's resurrected people are living in God's presence in God's paradise for ever. This is the Kingdom of God, in its final and eternal glory.

There are other themes that run through the Bible too. **They all relate – in one way or another – to the Kingdom of God**.

On our journey, we'll focus particularly on seven of them:

- 1 **The MESSIAH** – the Man Who brings us into God's kingdom.
- 2 **NEW ADAMS** through whom God's people come into being.
- 3 **The EXODUS** – the route into God's kingdom.
- 4 **The COVENANTS** – the bonds joining God and His kingdom people.
- 5 **The MEAL** – symbolising fellowship in God's kingdom.
- 6 **The SABBATH AND JUBILEE** – picturing life in God's Kingdom - liberty and rest.
- 7 **The CITY** – **New Jerusalem**, a picture of God's kingdom; Satan's counterfeit kingdom is another city, called **Babylon**.

Some of these themes may be unfamiliar to you. But as we travel through the Bible, we'll point them out and explain them. You'll see how they relate to God's Kingdom.

And as you see these themes unfold through the Bible, you'll see more clearly how the whole Bible 'hangs together'. Though written by many different authors over a vast period of time, the Bible is a single book telling a single story..

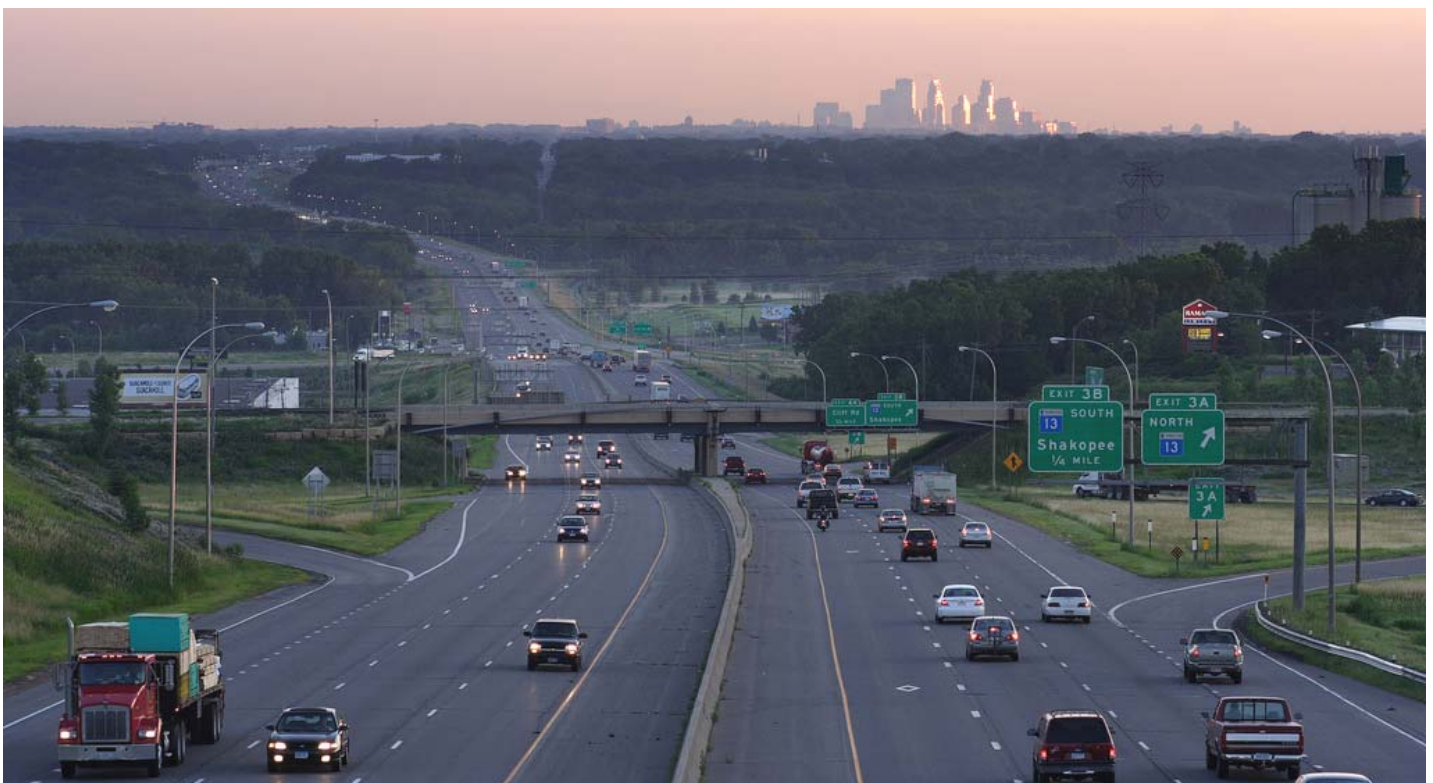


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Interstate Highway 35 heading towards downtown Minneapolis, USA, which can be seen in the distance. Our big journey, too, ends in a city – God's city, New Jerusalem, that comes "down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21.2)..

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