



# THE JOURNEY

from Creation to New Creation

## Part 1 The Greatest Story Ever Told

### Introduction

These notes give guidance on how to lead the group through the questions and discussion. You may want to begin by asking if there was anything that particularly struck people as they watched the video. However, it would be wise to limit this part of the discussion to ten minutes at most.

Read **Genesis 1.1-10, 1.24-31, 2.8-10** and **2.15**.

### Question 1

The description of how God made man is rather different from the description of how He made everything else. In what ways? What does that show us about ourselves?

There are a number of ways in which God's creation of mankind is uniquely special.

- 1 God speaks with Himself before making mankind.** He's not recorded as doing this at any other point in creation. That suggests that we humans are very special.
- 2 God speaks to mankind.** And after God blesses humanity, we read: *"And God said to them, . . ."*. God relates to them.
- 3 God made us in His image.** We are like God in many ways. We'll look in more detail about being in God's image next session.
- 4 God gave mankind a vocation.** Only humans are explicitly given a 'job' to do. Adam and Eve were called to be *"fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth"* (1.28, see Psalm 8.6-8). And in Genesis 2.15, we read, *"The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it"*. We'll explore mankind's vocation in more detail in our next session.

Read **Revelation 21.1-4** and **Revelation 22.1-5**.

### Question 2

What things do you find in the passages in Genesis that we've read and also in these passages in Revelation?

- 1 Heaven and Earth.** In Genesis, God creates Heaven and Earth (Genesis 1.1). In Revelation He creates a New Heaven and a New Earth (Revelation 21.1).
- 2 Light.** In the beginning, God created light (Genesis 1.3-5). In the New Creation, God is its light (Revelation 22.5, see also 21.22-24).
- 3 A river.** There's a river watering the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2.10). In Revelation there's another river. It flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Revelation 22.1).
- 4 The tree of life.** There's a tree of life in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2.9). In Revelation 22.2 we see what seems like a whole grove of trees of life on either bank of the river.

### The Bible as a drama

Before going on to discuss Question 3, explain to the group what a drama is. You could mention examples of current or recent TV dramas (such as *Poldark* or *Downton Abbey*). A drama is a story. It has a beginning and an end, and a plotline running through it. A good drama progresses towards a climax. It holds your attention, grips your emotions and arouses your interest; you encounter unexpected circumstances or events along the way, and you don't quite know how things will work out until the very end. There may well be twists in the plot - events or circumstances that completely change the picture, that turn the tables in an unexpected way.

Explain to the group that the Bible story is a drama. One writer, Bernard Bell, explains: *"The Bible is like a*

mystery novel. In a well-written mystery, the reader doesn't learn 'whodunit' until the last page of the book, but then he realizes that everything written in the rest of the book leads up to that final page. The seemingly insignificant details turn out to be not insignificant at all. So it is with the Bible. Everything leads up to the end of the story, which we are given in Revelation 21-22."

As we saw in the video, the Bible is a drama in four acts — the good, the bad, the new and the perfect. In the beginning, God's world was good. But a catastrophe occurred. However was God going to sort out this mess? The whole of the rest of the Bible tells us how He did this. In the end we see a perfect world.

### Question 3

Our series of videos will trace the whole Bible drama from beginning to end. Do you think that seeing the Bible as a drama will help you? If so, in what ways?

As the leader, you may want to share one or more of these quotations.

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."

Someone who attended a course like this one some years ago wrote: "I have found it extremely useful to link the whole of the bible together. We 'dip' in here and there usually and I have learnt a lot of the bible stories etc. over the 49 years of hearing them but it was really good to get the overall picture of how they connect and to see God's plan working through it all from the beginning to our future."

Bernard Bell writes: "Psychologists know that a sense of purpose is essential to emotional and psychological health. We look for . . . an overarching story that makes sense of all of the little stories of our lives." As we learned in the video, we can only really make sense of our individual lives in the context of God's great Story, the Story we read in the Bible.



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## Part 2 In God's Image

### Introduction

These notes give some guidance on how to lead the group through the questions and discussion. *There are also additional Bible references in the notes, and you may like to ask group members to read out some of these, as appropriate.*

You may want to begin by asking if anything particularly struck people as they watched the video. However, it would be wise to limit this part of the discussion to ten minutes at most.

Read **Genesis 1.26-27.**

### Question 1

In this session we saw that God made us in His image. In what ways are we in God's image?

- 1 We have personality** Like God, we are personal beings. We have *personality* – that is, mind, heart and will. We have a *mind* – we can learn and think. We have a *heart* – we express emotions. But in the Bible, the heart is more than just the seat of our emotions. It's the innermost control centre of our personality. And each of us has a *will* – that is, the capacity to make choices and decisions. And so we're responsible for our actions.
- 2 We have moral capacity** We also reflect God in that we know what's right and wrong.
- 3 We communicate** Like God, we're able to communicate – by speaking, writing, or other ways.
- 4 We are creative** God is creative, and so are we. We can't create out of nothing, as God can. But we *can* create things out of what already exists. And we can procreate – children in our own image.
- 5 We have imagination** We reflect God, too, in being imaginative, inventive, and artistic.
- 6 We have an aesthetic sense** We're like God in being able to recognise and enjoy beauty.
- 7 We're able to love** At the heart of our Triune God's nature is *love*. God *is* love (1 John 4.8,16).

Love is at the very root of His Divine Being. Because God made us in His image, at the very core of our human nature is the capacity for *love*. Jesus said this: *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself."* (Matthew 22.37-39). We are *relational* beings. We find our true fulfilment and greatest joy in loving other people and, above all, in loving God. We're only truly human – as God intended us to be - as we enjoy vibrant, loving relationships with God, and with our fellow human beings.

Read **Psalms 139.1-16, Matthew 16.26.**

### Question 2

In this session we looked at our value as human beings. How does God value us? In what ways does that differ from how other people commonly value us? How should this affect how we think and live?

How does God value us? Because we bear God's image, we have value and dignity. We're very precious to God. The writer Derek Prince wrote this: *"For more than fifty years, I have tried to help people with innumerable problems in their lives. Eventually, I have come to a surprising conclusion: our basic problem as human beings is that we do not realize how valuable we are."*

Jesus said: *"What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?"* (Matthew 16.26 NIV). Jesus asks us to compare our souls - our 'selves' - against *"the whole world"*, or what one writer describes as: *"all the world's wealth, power, pleasure, glory, . . . all enjoyments, all achievements, all satisfactions."* And Jesus tells us that each individual person is far more valuable than all of this!

How do other people often value themselves and others? Other people often value themselves and other people by such criteria as looks, fashion sense, popularity, work role, income, titles, achievements, fame. Discuss how valid these criteria actually are. How should we, in fact, esteem ourselves? And how should we esteem others?

In the light of our value in God's sight, how should we live? We're very precious in God's sight. As God's image bearers we have value and dignity. We treat our most precious objects with great care. So we're to treat ourselves with great care, too. We're to take care about what we do with our bodies, what we fill our minds with, how we use our talents and how we spend our time.

In the light of other people's value in God's sight, how should we think and act toward others? If I'm so valuable, then so is my friend and my neighbour - and so is my enemy. This truth must govern how we treat each other (for example, see James 3.8-10).

Read [Genesis 2.18-25](#).

### Question 3

In this session we saw that the human race is a family. We're all related to each other. We're all connected. What implications does this have for our relationships to other people? And specifically, what implications does it have for our Christian lives?

We are all connected. God created the human race as a family "*from one man*" (Acts 17.26). Because of this, we instinctively need to feel part of a group. We fear exclusion, isolation, loneliness. Without human companionship and intimacy we find it hard, even impossible, to live. We are *relational* beings. John Eldredge writes: "*Aren't the greatest joys and memories of your life associated with family, friendship, or falling in love? Aren't your deepest wounds somehow connected to someone also, to a failure of relationship? That you were loved but are no longer, or that you never have been chosen? . . . . So, too, our greatest sorrows stem from losing the ones we love. . . . Loneliness might be the hardest cross we bear. Why else would we have come up with solitary confinement as a form of punishment? We are relational to the core.*"

We affect one another. We're all connected: this means that *we affect one another*. David Jeremiah comments: "*Every one of us leaves our spiritual fingerprints, metaphorically speaking, on the lives of other people . . . .*" Conversely, those we spend our time with shape the way we ourselves think and act.

So we have the power to be a blessing to each other. I am 'my brother's keeper' (compare Genesis 4.9). In the church, God has given each of us gifts to build up our brothers and sisters in Christ (see 1 Corinthians 14.12,26, and see also Ephesians 4.11-16).

Conversely, we have power to harm each other. One person's sin can defile many (compare 1 Corinthians 5.6 and Hebrews 12.15). We hurt people by breaking off relationships, refusing to forgive. *That's one reason why Jesus commanded us so strongly to forgive one another.*

We grow as Christians in community, not only as individuals. That we humans are all connected has enormous relevance to our life as Christians. When God speaks about the church as a body with many members (Romans 12.4-5), as God's household (Ephesians 2.19), this isn't a new idea. God built it into human nature right from the very beginning.

God wants us to grow to maturity as Christians. We cannot really do this alone. *We grow to Christian maturity in community – in the local church.* The writer to the Hebrews wrote, "*And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near*" (Hebrews 10.24-25). The writer also exhorts us to "*encourage one another daily*" (Hebrews 3.13 NIV). Our gatherings – both as a whole church and in smaller groups within the church - are places where we encourage each other and build each other up. So we're never to give up meeting together – *we put ourselves in grave danger if we don't gather together with God's people regularly and frequently.*

We're to love, care for and serve one another. You only have to count the number of times that "*one another*" and "*each other*" occur in the New Testament epistles to see how fundamental it is to share our lives. We're to confess our sins to one another and pray for one another (James 5.16); we're to bear with and forgive one another (Colossians 3.13); we're to teach and admonish one another (Colossians 3.16), encourage and build one another up (1 Thessalonians 5.11), bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6.2); and love one another (for example, 1 Peter 1.22, 1 John 4.7). We're to look out for others' interests (Philippians 2.4) and serve one another in love (Galatians 5.13). We're to show hospitality to others (for example, Romans 12.13).



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## Part 3 Crowned and Commissioned

### Introduction

These notes give some guidance on how to lead the group through the questions and discussion. *There are also additional Bible references in the notes, and you may like to ask group members to read out some of these, as appropriate.*

You may want to begin by asking if anything particularly struck people as they watched the video. However, it would be wise to limit this part of the discussion to ten minutes at most.

Read [Genesis 1.26-30](#) and [Genesis 2.15](#) again. If there is time, also read [Psalm 8.1-9](#).

### Question 1

What was mankind's 'job description'?

God gave us work to do. God commissioned mankind to multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over every living thing.

In fact, God called mankind to complete His work of creation. During the six creation days God brought order out of chaos. Then He filled the Earth. Now God wanted mankind, under His guidance, to continue His 'world project' and finish it. We were to go on forming the Earth – arranging, ordering, beautifying, just as a gardener or town planner strives to create order and beauty from a wilderness. And we were to continue filling the Earth - colonising the planet. In Albert Wolters' words, "[In a single word, the task ahead is civilization](#)". God wanted us to care for this planet, make it a beautiful and productive paradise, and build a rich and godly civilisation here.

And in calling us to complete His 'world project', God called us to be His partners. Hugh Whelchel writes: "[From the beginning, God is prepared to entrust the garden to man and for us to become his](#)

[co-workers](#)." God intended us to complete His 'world project' in dependence on Him and in relationship with Him. We were to be God's co-workers. We were to be guided and empowered in our task by His Holy Spirit.

God told Adam to "*subdue*" the Earth (Genesis 1.28). Subduing the Earth would be a challenge. Humanity's task was to make Earth a paradise. But this wouldn't happen immediately or without effort. Earth was to be brought under control by the exercise of power and authority. Our task would challenge us and 'stretch us'. It would engage all our physical, mental, imaginative, and creative powers to the utmost.

Read [Ephesians 4.28](#), [6.5-9](#), and [Colossians 3.17,22-24](#).

### Question 2

What should be our attitude to our own work (whether paid or unpaid, and whether at home or outside the home)?

To work is God-ordained. In fact, it's something that God Himself does. God "*formed the man of dust from the ground*" (Genesis 2.7) and "*planted a garden*" (Genesis 2.8). He "*formed*" beasts and birds "*out of the ground*" (Genesis 2.19). God, so to speak, did manual work! In Genesis 2.2 we read that "*on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done*".

So God is a worker. We humans are made in God's image. And so we are created to be workers, too.

Jesus Himself worked as a skilled manual worker - a carpenter (the Greek word can also mean 'builder') - for most of his adult life. We might have expected the Son of God to come as a great philosopher, or a noble statesman. But He didn't. He came as a worker, a carpenter.

Before Adam and Eve's rebellion against God, work was pleasurable and satisfying in every way. Now it is often not - but we are still called to work. Tim Keller writes: "The fact that God put work in paradise is startling to us, because we almost always think of work as drudgery or even a punishment. First, this shows us that work is as much a basic good need as food, beauty, rest, friendship, prayer, and sexuality. Work is not simply a 'drain' but an important means of fulfilling our deepest needs and thus an important component of the 'good life'."

Tim Keller writes: ". . . all kinds of work, both manual to mental, from simple to highly sophisticated, are noble and have dignity." All work of whatever kind, if done in obedience to God, is sacred and pleases God.

As Hugh Whelchel points out: "Paul . . . emphasizes a positive view of work, commanding all Christians to continue in their work and to work well. It is apparent from his own writings that he continued in his trade as a tentmaker during his church planting ministry."

### Question 3

What do we really need to experience true satisfaction and fulfilment in our lives?

- ▶ **A relationship with God** In Saint Augustine's words, "You made us for Yourself, and our heart is restless, until it rests in You." We are naturally drawn to worship God and find our life in Him. Our deepest yearning is to know God as our *Father*. At the Last Supper, Philip said to Jesus: "*Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us*" (John 14.8). Jesus came to show us what the Father is like (see John 14.9). And He came to *bring us to Him* – as He said, "*No one comes to the Father except through me*" (John 14.6)
- ▶ **An eternal destiny** Western society lives, to a large extent, in a world from which the supernatural and the eternal is excluded. Our human nature rebels against this. C.S. Lewis remarked: "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."
- ▶ **To belong to a family and community** Mankind is a family. We instinctively long to be part of a group. We feel the need to belong. We crave fellowship, friendship, love. We dread exclusion

and loneliness. The sense of being unwanted crushes us.

- ▶ **Respect** Alongside this need to belong, we look for respect from others. We need to know we have a place of value and honour in the eyes of others, however helpless or lowly we may be.
- ▶ **To rule** God gave mankind the mandate to rule this Earth (see Genesis 1.26,28, Psalm 8.6). God made us to be His royal family! However, because of humanity's rebellion against God, that urge to rule descends so often into ruthless oppression of man and beast, and wasteful looting of Earth's resources. But the basic urge to rule is good. God built it into us.
- ▶ **To have significance and purpose** Bernard Bell writes: "Psychologists know that a sense of purpose is essential to emotional and psychological health." We need to know our lives count for something, that there's a reason for our existence, that we have a purpose in life.

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# THE JOURNEY

## from Creation to New Creation

### Part 4 Rebellion in Paradise

#### Introduction

These notes give some guidance on how to lead the group through the questions and discussion.

You may want to begin by asking if anything particularly struck people as they watched the video. However, it would be wise to limit this part of the discussion to ten minutes at most.

Read [Genesis 3.1-24](#).

#### Question 1

The *"knowledge of good and evil"* seems a good thing. So why does God tell Adam not to eat the fruit of *"the tree of the knowledge of good and evil"*? (Genesis 2.17)

What does *"the knowledge of good and evil"* mean? It's wider than just moral knowledge. For example, we use the phrase *"a good idea"* or *"a bad idea"* for ideas that are respectively wise and unwise - their morality may well not be at issue. The *"knowledge of good and evil"* doesn't primarily mean knowing right and wrong. It's *the ability to make wise decisions*. One writer says: *"in the Bible 'knowing good and evil' (or some approximation of that phrase) refers to the kind of wise discernment and discrimination exercised by mature and capable adults"*.

But only God knows everything. Only God is all-wise. *So we humans must depend on God to understand what's really wise and unwise, to know what choices to make, to know how to live our lives.* Adam and Eve still had to learn life's most important lesson - that God loved them, that He was trustworthy and good, that He could always be depended on to know what was wise, what was good for them and what was bad for them. God wanted Adam and Eve to love and trust Him, not themselves. As the writer of the Proverbs tells us: *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding."* (Proverbs 3.5).

*By planting the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden, God was giving them a choice. Would*

*they love and trust and obey Him? Or would they reject God's authority and decide for themselves what was wise and unwise, to decide for themselves how to live? As C.S. Lewis said: "From the moment a creature becomes aware of God as God and of itself as self, the terrible alternative of choosing God or self for the centre is opened to it." Who would be the first love of their lives? Would it be God, or themselves?*

The fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil wasn't a 'magic' fruit. Neither was it a poisonous fruit that would kill anyone who ate it. So, what exactly was so special about it?

Eating the fruit was an ordinary physical act. But this ordinary physical act carried enormous spiritual significance. If Adam and Eve had refused to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, it would have been *an act of commitment to God*. It would have demonstrated that they had decided to love and obey God.

God said to Adam that he would die if he ate the forbidden fruit. But He didn't explain further. Adam and Eve simply had to trust that God loved them and had their best interests at heart. They just had to obey Him - even though they didn't know exactly *why*. In short, they had to live by faith in God. Right through the Bible we see God looking for and rewarding faith in Him (see especially Hebrews 11).

But Adam and Eve decided that they didn't want to remain under God's supervision. They decided that they would do what they wanted. In eating the fruit of this tree, Adam and Eve were saying to God, in effect: *"I know better than You. From now on I'll decide for myself what's wise and unwise. From now on I'll decide what's best for me."* In so doing, Adam and Eve made themselves their own gods.

In the same way, when we act independently of God, we make *ourselves* gods; we make *ourselves* the ultimate standard of judgment by which we live. *Ask the group this question: are we also tempted to do this in our lives? If so, in what ways are we tempted to do this?*

## Question 2

What tactics did the serpent use to deceive Eve and persuade her to eat the forbidden fruit? Does he still use these same tactics with us today?

Paul says *"the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning"* (2 Corinthians 11.3). Satan is cunning. He's a deceiver.

- 1 He hid his true identity. He appeared as a serpent – one of the beasts *"of the field that the LORD God had made"* (Genesis 3.1). The serpent was at least his mouthpiece. He may, in fact, have been Satan himself in disguise. It wasn't at all obvious at first that this serpent's words were the words of an evil being.
- 2 He invited Eve to question God's word. He said to her *"Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"* (Genesis 3.1).
- 3 He tempted Adam and Eve to think wrongly about God - that God wasn't trustworthy, that He didn't love them, that He was selfish, and that He didn't have their best interests at heart.

Satan focused Eve's mind on God's one restriction, rather than His generosity. God said: *"You are free to eat from any tree in the garden;"* (Genesis 2.16 NIV). Satan said *"You shall not eat . . ."* (Genesis 3.1). So he misquoted God. He robbed God's command of its liberal generosity, and portrayed God as a mean oppressor, rather than a generous provider.

Satan said *"You will not . . . die, . . . For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."* (Genesis 3.4-5 NIV). We can paraphrase and expand this as follows: *"God is lying. You won't really die if you eat this fruit. God is being mean. He's keeping something back from you. That 'something' is freedom. God is free to do whatever He likes. But He doesn't want you to be free. Go eat from that tree. Choose for yourself what's good for you and what's bad for you. Only then will you be truly free! Only then will you have a life that's really worth living!"*

Satan slandered God to Eve. Satan pretended to be her friend; he portrayed God as her rival and enemy.

He made Adam and Eve think wrongly about God - something he tries to do to all of us. One lie underpins all the Devil's lies - that God does not love. Satan wants us to think God doesn't love us and hasn't got our best interests in mind.

God is love (1 John 4.8,16). Love is, so to speak, at the very root of Who He is. Satan was slandering the very core of the character and nature of God.

- 4 He tempted Adam and Eve to think wrongly about themselves. He tempted her to think that she could do without God and decide for themselves how to live. In short, he made them think that they could be their own gods.

## Question 3

God said, *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."* (Genesis 3.15 NIV). What did God mean when He said *"he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."*?

This is the very first prophecy in the Bible about Jesus. Try to help the group understand this verse. It's a key to the whole of the rest of the Bible. From this point onward in the Bible, we'll be looking forward to the Person Who will crush Satan. That Person is Jesus Christ.

- *"I will put enmity between you and the woman"* This enmity began with the serpent and the woman as individuals – *"between you and the woman"*.
- The hostility is also *"between your offspring and hers"*. The offspring of the serpent and of Eve are involved, too. Through the Bible, we read about these two 'offsprings', God's offspring and Satan's offspring, *"the children of God, and . . . the children of the devil"* (1 John 3.10) – in other words, people, organisations, governments and ideologies that are under Satan's control, and those people who are loyal to God. Through the ages these two 'offsprings' have been enemies locked in mortal combat.
- But the woman's *"offspring"* is also an individual. These words *"he"* and *"his"* ultimately refer to a single offspring. That offspring is Jesus. He's the unique *"offspring"* of Eve, Who crushes the serpent's head – in other words, puts him out of action fully and finally. The big showdown was Jesus's crucifixion. On the Cross, Jesus turned the tables on Satan. He defeated him and all his forces. And He rose again, victorious over all the powers of darkness. He's now *"seated at the right hand of the throne of God"* (Hebrews 12.2). Satan's power over God's people is broken (see, for example, James 4.7). One day, Satan's defeat will be complete and final. He'll be *"thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur"*. (Revelation 20.10).

# THE JOURNEY

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## Part 5 Cataclysm and Covenant

### Introduction

These notes give some guidance on how to lead the group through the questions and discussion. *There are also additional Bible references in the notes, and you may like to ask group members to read out some of these, as appropriate.*

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Read **Genesis 6.1-8**.

### Question 1

Sin continued after the Flood. So what did God achieve by sending the Flood?

God dealt with *the particular kind of sin* committed by the *"sons of God"*. Who were these *"sons of God"*? The most likely explanation is that they were evil angels. Angelic beings are called the *"sons of God"* in Job 1.6 and 2.1. Other explanations are (1) human tyrants, perhaps possessed by fallen angels, or (2) descendants of Seth who were intermarrying with girls descended from Cain. These explanations are not so likely.

If so, these angels were marrying human women. The children from such unnatural marriages would have been abnormal. In Genesis 6.4 these offspring are called *"the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown"*. They were great and famous warriors. It seems likely that they were giants – men of great stature. The passage also mentions the mysterious *"Nephilim"*. These Nephilim may well be the same as the *"mighty men"*.

If all this is correct, then these evil angels were degrading the human race. In the last session, we learned that God promised Eve that one of her descendants would defeat Satan (Genesis 3.15). If our human race was indeed being degraded like this, then Eve's own family line would have been threatened. Her promised descendant might never

be born and be the perfect Human that God needed Him to be to defeat Satan. If this had happened, *no human could be saved*.

The idea that angels were marrying humans seems very strange. But in the ancient world, stories were told of sexual relations between gods and humans, whose offspring were said to have abnormal powers. For example, Hercules, famous for his strength, was believed to be the son of the god Zeus and the mortal woman Alcmena. It may well be that these myths were based on the historical events described in Genesis 6.

Jesus said that, after their resurrection, people *"neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven"* (Matthew 22.30). The angels in heaven don't marry. So how could these angels marry humans? Jesus was speaking about good angels. But these angels were evil. And they were marrying *humans*, not other angels.

Whatever was going on, it's clear that there was wickedness of a horribly loathsome and perverted kind. It would, it seems certain, have brought our human race totally and permanently under Satan's control – and so achieve his goal: to rule this world as if he were God.

God would not allow this. So He stepped in to stem the hellish tide of sin. He sent the Flood to deal with this vile wickedness, and to preserve the integrity of the human race and eliminate the threat to the promised Offspring.

But how can we reconcile the death and destruction that God brought about by the Flood with His love? Firstly, our God is a righteous and holy God and therefore He judges and punishes sin. *But it's also important to remember that the Flood removed the threat to God's plan of salvation*. The Flood was not only an act of righteous judgment *but also a supreme act of mercy and grace*. God changed the course of history, so He could work out His plan of salvation for mankind and for this world.

Read **Genesis 9.1-7**.

### Question 2

How does God's covenant with Noah (Genesis 9.1-7) reflect what God said to Adam in Genesis 1.28-30? What's the significance of this connection?

Notice the similarities between God's covenant with Noah and what God said to Adam:

- ▶ God blessed Adam and Eve (Genesis 1.28); He blessed Noah and his sons (Genesis 9.1).
- ▶ God commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply and fill the Earth (Genesis 1.28); He did the same to Noah and his sons (Genesis 9.1,7).
- ▶ God gave Adam and Eve dominion over animals (Genesis 1.28); God gave Noah and his sons power over all beasts, birds and fish (Genesis 9.2).
- ▶ God appointed Adam and Eve's food (Genesis 1.29); He appointed food for Noah and his sons (Genesis 9.3-4).

Noah was like another Adam. Adam lived in a newly created world. After the Flood, Noah stepped out into a newly cleansed world. It was like a new creation. It was a new beginning for our world.

Adam was the father of the human race. Noah was a new father of our race. From his three sons "*came the people who were scattered over the whole earth*" (Genesis 9.19 NIV).

Read **Genesis 11.1-9, 12.1-3, Hebrews 11.8-10**.

### Question 3

How do God's words to Abraham link to the story of the tower of Babel, and what's the significance of this connection?

As Michael Williams puts it: "*God graciously promises to Abraham the very things Babel coveted . . .*" They wanted to make "*a name*" for themselves (Genesis 11.4) – to find enduring fame. And they wanted to build a *city* and a tower. Neither a name nor a city are, in themselves, bad things; their sin lay in the fact they wanted to get these things *their way*, and for *their* purposes. God promised Abram exactly these two things – a *name* and a *city*.

- ▶ God said to Abram: "*I will . . . make your name great*" (Genesis 12.2). God was going to make Abram's name famous - not because he had made himself great, but because God had blessed him.
- ▶ And Abram looked for a city - not a city built by humans for human glory, but "*the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God*" (Hebrews 11.10).

God commanded mankind to multiply and spread across the globe (see Genesis 1.28). But the people of Babel didn't want to be "*dispersed over the face of the whole earth*" (Genesis 11.4). Instead, they wanted a secure power-base, a united strong society where their god lived among them. In other words, they wanted to live in a paradise in the presence of their god (in fact, the name 'Babel' in the local language Akkadian is *bāb-ili*, meaning 'gate of god'). But it was a false paradise in the presence of a false god.

God wanted this world to be a place where His people lived in His paradise in His presence. The people of Babel tried to bring this about themselves – on their own terms, and for their own selfish purposes.

Satan dreamed of a godless 'utopia' – a human civilisation united under his domination and in rebellion against God. The city and tower of Babel was an early attempt to achieve this.

So, once again, God changed the course of history, so He could work out His plan - *His people living in His presence in His paradise*.

We can view the Bible as *a tale of two cities* - mankind's city and God's city. These two cities symbolise something. A city is a commercial hub and a cultural centre (see the description of Babylon in Revelation 18.11-19). It's also typically a seat of government, whether local or national (or both). A city symbolises civilisation. *Babylon and New Jerusalem respectively represent Satan's and God's vision of what this world should be like*.

Babylon represents, in Vaughan Roberts' words, "*human attempts to create a perfect world by our own efforts*." It symbolises a false paradise, a global society under Satan's dominion and in rebellion against God. In contrast, New Jerusalem pictures *God's perfect world* - a world where God lives with His people in paradise.

The contrast between Satan's city and God's city begins here in Genesis. It comes to its vivid finale right at the end of the Bible, in the Book of Revelation. At the close of history as we know it, God will judge and destroy mankind's city Babylon (see Revelation 18.1-19.4). (*Babylon* is another name for Babel, and links us back to the city and tower of Babel in Genesis 11.1-9.) Then God will bring His holy city, the New Jerusalem, out of heaven onto earth (Revelation 21.2). God will live together with His people in His new perfect world.

# THE JOURNEY

from Creation to New Creation

## Part 6 God's Nation is Born

### Introduction

These notes give some guidance on how to lead the group through the questions and discussion. *The additional Bible references in the notes give more details that you may find useful. You may like to ask group members to read out a few of these, as appropriate.*

You may want to begin by asking if anything particularly struck people as they watched the video. However, it would be wise to limit this part of the discussion to ten minutes at most.

Read **Genesis 1.28, 2.8, 15, 12.1-3.**

### Question 1

What does God promise to Abraham? How do these promises reflect God's commission to Adam? What's the significance of this link?

God reinforced and expanded on His promises to Abraham recorded in Genesis 12.1-3. He did this a number of times over many years: (1) Genesis 12.7; (2) Genesis 13.14-17; (3) Genesis 15.1-21; (4) Genesis 17.1-21; (5) Genesis 18.9-15; (6) Genesis 21.12; (7) Genesis 22.15-18.

- ▶ **A paradise.** God sent Abraham to Canaan. Canaan was like a new Garden of Eden (see Deuteronomy 8.7-10, 11.10-12).
- ▶ **A people.** God commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply. God promised Abraham that he would be fruitful and multiply. He was going to father a great nation (Genesis 12.2). Abraham fathered the nation of Israel. Later, God promised that Abraham would be "*the father of a multitude of nations*" (Genesis 17.4). As well as Israel, Abraham fathered the Ishmaelites through Hagar (see Genesis 17.20, 21.13, 25.12-18), the Midianites (among others) through Keturah (Genesis 25.1-4), and the Edomites through Isaac and Rebekah (see Genesis 25.19-26, 36.1-43).

- ▶ **A blessing.** God blessed Adam and Eve. God promised that He would bless Abraham. And Abraham would himself be a blessing (Genesis 12.2); through him all the nations of the Earth would be blessed (Genesis 12.3, 18.18, 22.18).

What's the significance of these three links? It's this: *Abraham was another new Adam. Abraham's call launched a whole new phase in God's rescue plan for humanity and for this planet.* Adam was the father of rebellious humanity. Abraham was the father of a new humanity – God's people. That includes us Christians!

God's promises to Abraham find their final fulfilment through Jesus Christ.

- ▶ **The ultimate paradise** One day, Abraham's offspring – those who belong to Jesus Christ (Galatians 3.29) – will rule with Christ over a new paradise - the new Heaven and Earth.
- ▶ **The ultimate people** In Galatians 3.16, we read about "*Abraham and . . . his offspring*". This "*offspring*" is a single person. He is Jesus Christ (Galatians 3.16). But God also had many offspring in mind. Christ is the unique "*offspring*". But all those who belong to Christ – and this must ultimately include both the Old Testament and New Testament believers – are also "*Abraham's offspring*" (Galatians 3.29).
- ▶ **The ultimate blessing** The apostle Peter preached to the crowd in the Temple: "*You are the sons . . . of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.*" (Acts 3.25-26). In Galatians, Paul writes: "*so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.*" (Galatians 3.14). The blessing of Abraham is *salvation* - being made right with God through Jesus Christ.

Read **Luke 24.25-27, 24.44-47**. (Jesus is speaking to two disciples on the Emmaus road, and then to the 11 disciples.)

### Question 2

In this session, five people, events or passages point forward to Jesus. What are these? Has this impacted your view of the Old Testament and its importance to us as Christians?

- ▶ In Genesis 15.7-21 we read about how God sealed His covenant with Abraham. In those days, when two kings made a covenant, they would offer a sacrifice. If one of the kings was less powerful, he might have to walk between the pieces of the sacrifices. This act signified that if he ever broke the covenant, he would have to die. Abraham was the junior partner in this covenant with God. *He* should have walked between the sacrifices. But instead God walked between them. It seems quite possible that God was saying, in effect, **“if this covenant is ever broken, I myself will suffer the penalty of death.”** Abraham’s descendants, God’s people, did break the covenant. They should have suffered the penalty of death. But – as we’ll see later in our journey - *the Son of God, Jesus Christ, paid that penalty for them. He died in their place.*
- ▶ God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on a mountain in the land of Moriah (Genesis 22.2). Solomon built the Temple **“in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah”** (2 Chronicles 3.1). The mountain in the land of Moriah may well be the Mount Moriah at Jerusalem. This was close to where Jesus was crucified. But in any case, *Moriah* and *mount* (or *mountain*) link the two events. *Abraham’s sacrifice of his only son looks forward to the sacrifice of God’s only Son on the Cross.*
- ▶ Joseph is a picture of Jesus. *Joseph was rejected by his family. Jesus was rejected by his own nation. Joseph saved people from starvation. Jesus saves people from spiritual death – that is, from being cut off from relationship with God for ever.*
- ▶ Before he died, Jacob prophesied over his son Judah: **“The sceptre will not depart from Judah, . . . until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his.”** (Genesis 49.10 NIV). A King was going to come, who would be a descendant of Judah. This King would rule the world. *Ultimately, this prophecy was fulfilled by Jesus.*
- ▶ The Passover meal (Exodus 12.1-13) points forward to Jesus. *He is our Passover Lamb. The Passover lambs died instead of the firstborn sons. Jesus died*

*instead of us. Jesus died to save us from spiritual death. And He released us from slavery - not from slavery to human masters, but from slavery to sin. We’ll look at this more later in our journey.*

Read **Exodus 14.19-31, Genesis 1.1-2,9-10, 8.1**.

### Question 3

How does the Exodus relate to the great Flood, and also back to the original creation of the Earth? Why is this significant?

On all three occasions God brings about *a new land* and *a new people* through *water*.

- ▶ **At the original creation**, dry land emerged from the waters covering the Earth (see Genesis 1.9-10 and 2 Peter 3.5). And God created the first humans.
- ▶ **After the great Flood**, dry land emerges from the waters covering the land. And, as we learned in session 5, Noah was a new Adam. He was the father of a new humanity. The Flood, so to speak, brought about a new creation.
- ▶ **At the Exodus**, God’s people **“passed through the sea”** (1 Corinthians 10.1). Paul calls it a baptism (1 Corinthians 10.2). At the Passover and Exodus, God created a new people – Israel. For the first time in the Bible, we read of **“the congregation of Israel”** (Exodus 12.3,6,19,47). God’s nation, Israel, was born. God appointed the month in which Passover occurred as the first month of their calendar year (Exodus 12.2). We celebrate our birthdays every year. God’s people celebrated *their* national birthday every year at the Festival of Passover and Unleavened Bread (see Exodus 12.14-20,24-27, Leviticus 23.5-8). And the Promised Land that God was leading Israel to was a new paradise.

In these three events, we can see this wonderful truth: *God is the God of new beginnings.* We’ll see this time and again through the Bible. And believers are new creations, too. Paul writes **“ . . . if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.”** (2 Corinthians 5.17) We’ll explore this truth more in session 12.

*One Hebrew word links all three occasions. God’s Spirit (Hebrew *rûach*) moved over the Earth at the beginning (Genesis 1.2). After the Flood, **“ . . . God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided.”** (Genesis 8.1). The Hebrew word for **“wind”** here is *rûach*. At the Exodus, God sent a **“wind”** (Hebrew *rûach*) over the sea (Exodus 14.21).*

# THE JOURNEY

from Creation to New Creation

## Part 7 A Wedding in the Wilderness

### Introduction

These notes give some guidance on how to lead the group through the questions and discussion. *The additional Bible references in the notes give more details that you may find useful. You may like to ask group members to read out a few of these, as appropriate.*

You may want to begin by asking if anything particularly struck people as they watched the video. However, it would be wise to limit this part of the discussion to ten minutes at most.

Read [Genesis 3.8](#), [Exodus 40.34](#), [1 Kings 8.10-11](#), [John 1.14](#), [1 Corinthians 6.19](#), [Ephesians 2.19-22](#), [Revelation 21.1-3](#).

### Question 1

These passages are all linked by a single theme. What is that theme? What's the significance of this theme for us as God's people (especially in [1 Corinthians 6.19](#) and [Ephesians 2.19-22](#)).

At this point in our journey through the Bible, it's helpful to see one of the key themes that links the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation. The theme is this: [God living on Earth with His people](#).

- ▶ [The Garden of Eden](#) This was God's first home. This is suggested by the fact that God used to walk there *"in the cool of the day"* ([Genesis 3.8](#)).
- ▶ [The Tabernacle](#) But sin spoiled this world. So God had a sanctuary made where He, the Holy God, could live here in this world soiled by sin. That sanctuary was the Tabernacle. The Most Holy Place was His special room, where He lived on Earth.
- ▶ [The Temple](#) Centuries later Solomon built a Temple that replaced the Tabernacle. This Temple was rebuilt after the exile although (interestingly) we don't read that God filled it with His presence.
- ▶ [Jesus Christ](#) Jesus *"tabernacled"* or *"lived in a tent"* ([John 1.14](#), literal translations) on Earth. God was present here on Earth in the Person of Jesus Christ.
- ▶ [The Church](#) God poured out His Holy Spirit on the

Day of Pentecost and God's people became *"a holy temple in the Lord"* ([Ephesians 2.21](#)). And individual believers are temples of the Holy Spirit ([1 Corinthians 6.19](#)). *You may want to discuss how this should impact our corporate life as a church, and our own individual lives.*

- ▶ [The New Heaven and Earth](#) Finally, in God's new creation, God will have no need for a special sanctuary. There'll be no evil in the new creation to make that necessary. His presence will fill the entire Universe. [God's people will live in God's presence in God's paradise for ever.](#)

Read [Matthew 22.35-40](#), [Leviticus 11.45](#).

### Question 2

The Hebrew word for 'law' is *torah*, meaning 'instruction' or 'guidance'. Why did God give the Law to His people? How is it relevant for us believers today?

God gave His Law to Israel:

- ▶ [To reveal His nature and character](#) - His holiness, goodness, righteousness, justice, graciousness and mercy and love.
- ▶ [To show His people how to live](#). The Law shows what sin is (see [Romans 7.7](#)). Sin defiles people. Jay Sklar comments: *"The results of sin are always catastrophic, . . . Sin is an acid that mars and destroys whatever it touches. The Lord is not being a killjoy by forbidding sin; he is being a loving Savior"*. The Law showed God's people how to avoid sin, and how to live properly – and so enjoy life to the full.
- ▶ [To teach about holiness](#) God said *"You shall . . . be holy, for I am holy"* ([Leviticus 11.45](#)). God's holiness is more than His moral purity; it is the sum of His divine attributes that sets Him apart from everything that He has made. God is uniquely holy in a way that is totally unattainable by any created being. He is uncreated, eternal, transcendent, glorious in majesty, infinitely perfect, immaculately pure, faultlessly righteous, completely selflessly

and sacrificially loving. So God is uniquely holy in a way that no created being can be.

But people, things, places and periods of time (such as the Sabbath) can also be holy. What does it mean for them to be holy? *It means that they are set apart for God in a special way.* The Tabernacle was holy (Exodus 40.9), because God was present in its innermost room. The priests were holy (Leviticus 21.6) because they were appointed to serve God in a special way. The whole nation was holy (Leviticus 19.1-2), because they belonged to God. The Sabbath was holy (Exodus 31.14) because God had set it apart from the other days of the week for His purposes.

Jay Sklar imagines an Israelite asking this question: "How in the world can the holy and pure King of the universe dwell among his sinful and impure people? How can he live here, in our very midst, without his holiness melting us in our sin and impurity?" The Law showed God's people how to keep His Tabernacle, the camp (and later the Promised Land), and their bodies in a state fit for God to live amongst them - in other words, how to keep them holy. It also provided the sacrificial system to deal with sin and impurity.

- ▶ To restore relationships broken at the Fall. Sin shattered our relationships. The Law showed how these relationships were to be restored. (1) With God The Law showed God's people how to worship and serve God properly. They were to love Him with all their heart, soul and strength (Deuteronomy 6.5). And the Law instituted the priesthood. A key function of the priests was to lead the nation in their worship and service. (2) With other people The Law taught people how to behave toward each other. The undergirding principle was this: "you shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Leviticus 19.18). (3) With creation The Law required people to care for their animals. Oxen weren't be muzzled when threshing corn (Deuteronomy 25.4); livestock, as well as people, were to rest on the Sabbath (Exodus 20.10).

Jay Sklar writes: "... the book of Leviticus ... casts a vision that takes the Israelites back to the Lord's intent for humanity from the beginning of the world: to walk in rich fellowship with their covenant King, enjoying his care and blessing, and extending throughout all the earth his kingdom of justice, mercy, kindness, righteousness, holiness and love."

- ▶ To prepare His people to meet Jesus And the Law prepared God's people for Jesus's coming (see

Luke 24.27). Allen Ross says, "... when Christ came God did not have to teach people what atonement was, for they had been taught this for 1400 years in the Law and the drama of the ritual."

Read Exodus 20.8-11, Colossians 2.16-17.

### Question 3

One of the Ten Commandments was to keep the Sabbath? Why did God give this commandment? In what way is it relevant for us believers today?

On the seventh day, after He had created everything, God rested (Genesis 2.2-3, Exodus 20.11). His creation was complete. All was in perfect harmony. But humanity's rebellion shattered that harmony. It fractured our relationships. And God judged Adam and Eve. Now they would both endure pain. And God said to Adam "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread" (Genesis 3.19).

God's people were to observe the seventh day of each week as "a day of sabbath rest, a day of sacred assembly." (Leviticus 23.3 NIV). This suggests that God's people were to meet together to worship God on that day. God's people were to do no work on the Sabbath. It was a day of freedom from toil – a day of release from this effect of the Fall. So, released from toil on that day, God's people could gather together to worship Him and learn from His Scriptures.

The Sabbath was a signpost to the future, "a shadow of the things to come" (Colossians 2.17), a foretaste of what life would be like on the New Earth, when the effects of the Fall would be no more. *Life on the New Earth would be like a great unending Sabbath* – a time of freedom from toil and pain and sweat, when God's people would worship and serve Him perfectly.

As Christians, we're free not to observe the Sabbath (Saturday) (Colossians 2.16-17). Given this was one of the Ten Commandments, this may seem astonishing. In fact, the early Church seems to have gathered regularly on the first day of the week, Sunday, not the Sabbath. Why? Through Jesus, God gives people true rest in their innermost beings (compare Matthew 11.28-30 and Hebrews 4.3,9-11). We believers can enjoy that rest all the time. Is that, perhaps, why it's customary for us to meet on the first day of the week? Rather than ending each week in rest, as the Old Testament believers did, we begin each week in rest to show that we may now enjoy God's spiritual rest the whole week through.



# THE JOURNEY

from Creation to New Creation

## Part 8 Into the Promised Land

### Introduction

These notes give some guidance on how to lead the group through the questions and discussion. *The additional Bible references in the notes give more details that you may find useful. You may like to ask group members to read out a few of these, as appropriate.*

You may want to begin by asking if anything particularly struck people as they watched the video. However, it would be wise to limit this part of the discussion to ten minutes at most.

Read **Deuteronomy 8.7-10, 1 Kings 8.41-43, Ezekiel 5.5.**

### Question 1

God chose to locate His people in Canaan. What's so significant about this land?

God's paradise home – the Promised Land - is at the centre of the world. It's at the crossroads of the world, a bridge between three continents- Asia, Africa and Europe. It was God's bridgehead into a world under Satan's domination. As Michael D. Williams tells us, "Rather than send his evangelists and witnesses out to the far-flung corners of the earth, as he does in New Testament times, God set a mission station in the midst of the nations for all to see." They were to be a light to the nations.

Through the Law, through their festivals and special days and years, through the sacrifices, and through the peace and wellbeing of the nation, *Israel would show what God was really like* - not unclean, cruel and capricious like their own gods, but holy, trustworthy and kind (compare Deuteronomy 4.5-8). And so Israel was to draw people to worship the true God.

And in their politics and economics and culture, *God's people would show the nations what God intended mankind to be.* They were to be, as John Durham explains, "a display-people, a showcase to the world of how being in covenant with Yahweh changes a people."

Because Israel was at the crossroads of the world – on trade routes linking Europe, Asia and Africa - people from many surrounding nations would pass through the land and see and experience God's blessing on Israel for themselves. Some might even find themselves settling there. They could actually become members of God's covenant people.

Read **Numbers 14.2-4,26-34, Deuteronomy 8.2-5.**

### Question 2

Why does God make His people wait for 40 years before leading them into the Promised Land?

While they were encamped in the Wilderness of Paran, Moses sent 12 men, one from each tribe, to spy out the Promised Land. The spies returned bearing grapes, pomegranates and figs – proving the Promised Land to be a paradise. But there were powerful people in the land, who lived in fortified cities.

Two spies, Caleb and Joshua, were confident that God would enable them to conquer the land. The other ten weren't, and their report won the day. The people wailed, "*Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?*" (Numbers 14.2-3). God had promised that He would clear the land of its inhabitants. The Canaanites themselves were cowering in dread of God and His people (as we learn from Joshua 2.8-11). Israel's unbelief was rank disobedience.

God couldn't work with people who distrusted Him. So He said that every Israelite eligible for military service – except for Caleb and Joshua - would die in the desert. These warriors – who should have spearheaded the conquest of the Promised Land - would now never enter it. But Caleb and Joshua did trust God. They did enter the land. So, for 38 years, God's people wandered in the desert. They remained there until all the faithless warriors had died. Tim Gallant comments, "In a rather practical way, those

who wished to go back to Egypt . . . got their wish: God 'stopped time' and treated them as if the exodus had never occurred." During these 38 years, a new generation of warriors came into being – a generation who *did* trust Him and obey God and who *would* conquer the land.

And during those years in the wilderness, God was testing and disciplining His people. He wanted to know what their basic attitudes were, whether they would wholeheartedly keep His commandments or not. God let them hunger and fed them with manna so that they might learn that people do not live by bread alone, but by *"every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD"* (Deuteronomy 8.3). God was teaching them to depend on Him for all their needs, and to obey Him.

Read **Deuteronomy 6.4-15, Deuteronomy 28.1, Judges 2.8-12.**

### Question 3

Did God's people learn the lessons God taught them in the wilderness? How is that relevant to us today?

Ultimately, God's people failed to learn the lessons God taught them and to benefit from their time in the wilderness. There are a number of reasons for this:

- ▶ They failed to keep God's word in their hearts, and obey it. God said *"these words that I command you today shall be on your heart"* (Deuteronomy 6.6). They were to treasure God's word to them, make sure they never forgot it, and diligently obey all His commandments.
- ▶ They failed to complete the conquest of the land. And so the wicked Canaanites continued to live alongside them in the land.
- ▶ They committed spiritual adultery by abandoning God and worshipping pagan gods.
- ▶ They failed to pass on the knowledge of God and His law down the generations. God commanded them to teach the law to their children (Deuteronomy 6.7). Their failure to do this is clear from what we read in Judges 2.10: *" . . . there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel"*.
- ▶ Ultimately – there was something fundamentally wrong with their character. God needed to do something radical in them. He need to give them *"a new heart"* (Ezekiel 36.26). We'll explore this in our next session.

*You may want to explore how Israel's failures are relevant to us as God's people today.*

Read **2 Samuel 7.8-17, Psalm 89.3-4.**

### Question 4

God made covenants with Noah, Abraham, Israel (at Mount Sinai), and David. In our next session, we'll learn that God promised to make a new covenant with His people (Jeremiah 31.31-34). Why does God keep making covenants with people?

A covenant is an agreement that brings two parties into relationship with each other. In the ancient Near East a covenant was a means to bring people who weren't blood relatives into a relationship. They would agree to act as if they were family – with all the privileges and responsibilities that entailed. In a covenant, one or both parties make promises under oath to do, or not to do, certain things in relation to each other. If the parties had equal status, they might now speak of each other as *brothers*. If one party exercised dominion over the other, they might speak of each other as *father and son, or lord and servant*.

We today have such covenantal arrangements, too. When parents adopt a child, they incorporate that child into their family. Another example is marriage. By the legally-binding process of marriage, a man and a woman who are not (at least closely) related commit themselves to care for each other as close family – in fact, closer than any blood relative.

Making covenants is a natural thing for God to do. Why? The reason is this: God is a relational Being, and covenants are to do with relationship. God is Triune – He is One, yet He is also Three Persons. In Donald Macleod's words, *"The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit live in community and fellowship."* God is love (1 John 4.8,16). Love is at the very root of Who God is. God wants to be in relationship with people. So it's no surprise to find Him making covenants with them.

And, as we saw just now, covenant partners in the Bible world made promises to do, or not to do, certain things in relation to each other. So when God made covenants with people, He made promises to them. God has wonderful plans to establish His Kingdom on Earth – to live together with His people in His paradise.

# THE JOURNEY

from Creation to New Creation

## Part 9 From Solomon to the Coming Saviour

### Introduction

These notes give some guidance on how to lead the group through the questions and discussion. *The additional Bible references in the notes give more details that you may find useful. You may like to ask group members to read out a few of these, as appropriate.*

You may want to begin by asking if anything particularly struck people as they watched the video. However, it would be wise to limit this part of the discussion to ten minutes at most.

Read **Genesis 12.1-3, 15.18, 1 Kings 4.20-21, 1 Kings 8.41-43.**

### Question 1

How were God's promises to Abraham being fulfilled through Solomon?

At this moment in His people's history, God fulfilled His promises to Abraham in a wonderful new way:

- ▶ He promised them a land – now they are in that land! Solomon's empire (mapped out in 1 Kings 4.21,24-25) stretched from the upper Euphrates to Egypt's border. This was the extent of the land that God promised Abraham (Genesis 15.18).
- ▶ He promised Abraham that he'd father a great nation. Israel is as many as the sand on the seashore (1 Kings 4.20), just as God promised.
- ▶ And He promised Abraham that in him all the families of the Earth would find blessing. Israel, the seed of Abraham, was beginning to be a blessing to the nations around. (1) The Temple that Solomon built was a place foreigners could come and pray to the True God (1 Kings 8.41-43). (2) We also read that "... people of all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, . . ." (1 Kings 4.34)

One day, of course, those promises to Abraham would be fulfilled in an even greater way, as we shall see later in our journey. But this time in Israel's history was a glorious foretaste of what was to come.

Read **Deuteronomy 17.14-20, 1 Kings 10.14-15,26, 11.1-4**

### Question 2

How did Solomon go wrong? What lessons can we ourselves learn from this?

God had told His people what their kings should be like (Deuteronomy 17.14-20).

- ▶ They were not to acquire (1) lots of horses - used primarily for chariots and cavalry; (2) many wives, or (3) great stores of gold. Power, women and wealth - these are a man's three key temptations. Rich and powerful as he was, Solomon was bound to be fearfully tempted in all three ways. He fell for every one.
  - (1) Solomon amassed stupendous quantities of gold till it seems that he really didn't know what to do with it all (1 Kings 10.14-21). God gave Solomon riches (1 Kings 3.13) But the question is not how much wealth we have, *but what we do with it, and what place it occupies in our hearts.* Solomon could have used this wealth to benefit his people and the nations around (compare Deuteronomy 15.6).
  - (2) Solomon had 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horsemen (1 Kings 10.26).
  - (3) Solomon married many wives from the idolatrous nations around, whom God had expressly forbidden Israelites to marry (1 Kings 11.1-3). And, in addition, he gathered many concubines (in other words, mistresses), too. In the later part of his reign, Solomon's wives led him into idolatry (1 Kings 11.4-8, Nehemiah 13.26).
- ▶ The king was to *"write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them"* (Deuteronomy 17.18-19). He wasn't to use a manuscript already written with God's Law, or get someone else to write it for him.

He was to write a copy of God's law himself! To do this would impress God's law on his memory. Then he was to read it all the days of his life. And he was to obey God's Law. God's law was to be a foundation for his own character and reign, and for the life and character of the nation.

Solomon's father David commanded him to *"keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn"* (1 Kings 2.3). Solomon may well have written a copy of God's law for himself (we aren't told). But, in his later years, he disobeyed God's law.

Read **Jeremiah 23.7-8, Ezekiel 36.24-28, Luke 9.28-31, Romans 6.6, Colossians 2.13.**

### Question 3

The passages in Jeremiah and Ezekiel are prophesying about another Exodus that outshines even the Exodus from Egypt. What was this second Exodus?

God rescued His people from Egypt and led them through the sea to the Sinai Peninsula (Exodus 14.1-31). This is called the Exodus. But in the Old Testament prophetic books, we read that there'll be another Exodus (for example Isaiah 11.10-16, 43.14-21 and the passages we have already read).

What was this new Exodus? Was it the return from exile in Babylon? Partly, yes. In the centuries after their return from exile, Israel did experience some degree of renewal as a nation. Israel never committed idolatry on such a scale as it had done before the exile. And the Scriptures were established as the basis for the life of God's people.

But the return from exile didn't really fulfil the glorious new Exodus that the prophets spoke about. When its foundations were laid, the old men who had seen Solomon's Temple wept with disappointment – from which we may infer that it was far less magnificent than Solomon's splendid Temple (Ezra 3.10-13). The Ark of the Covenant - God's Throne - was missing, never to return. The Bible doesn't record God filling the new Temple with His presence (as He did in the Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple). Judah was still under Persian control. There was no king of David's line on the throne. And the people were still backsliding (see, for example, Nehemiah 13.15-18). *Their sin had cost them their land, but they don't seem to have learned their lesson.*

The second exodus that the prophets are foretelling is

clearly a much more wonderful and glorious event. So what was this event? The clue is in something Jesus said. At His transfiguration Jesus talked with Moses and Elijah about *"his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem"* (Luke 9.31). The word *"departure"* here translates the Greek word *exodus*. The 'exodus' that Jesus spoke about here was His death and resurrection and ascension. And when someone truly believes in Christ and is born again, they share in Jesus's death, resurrection and ascension! Paul tells us that each true believer:

- ▶ has died with Christ. Their *"old self"*, which was enslaved to sin, has been *"crucified with him"* (Romans 6.6, and compare Colossians 3.9).
- ▶ has risen with Christ into resurrection life (Ephesians 2.6, Colossians 2.12-13). They have new life. Paul writes: *"... if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."* (2 Corinthians 5.17).
- ▶ has ascended with Christ. Paul says: *"God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus"*. (Ephesians 2.6 (NIV).

What is the result?

- ▶ The believer is delivered from their past – from what they once were. The first Exodus released Israel from bondage to the Egyptians. Jesus has released every true believer from bondage – not to human slavemasters - but to sin. Their old self – their old character, has died with Christ.
- ▶ The believer enters a new future. At the first Exodus, God's people began a new life. They had a new future. God made a covenant with them, came to live among them, and gave them His law. And He guided them to His Promised Land. The true believer, too, begins a new life in God's kingdom. Jesus said that whoever hears His word and believes in God Who sent Him has *"crossed over from death to life"* (John 5.24 NIV and see 1 John 3.14). The Father *"has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son"* (Colossians 1.13).

*The first Exodus was preceded by sacrifice. Before that Exodus, Passover sacrifices were to be offered (Exodus 12.1-14,21-27,43-49). The Passover animals (lambs or young goats) died; the Israelites' firstborn sons were spared. The second exodus was also associated with a sacrifice – the sacrificial death of Jesus. He is our Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5.7). He died in our place.*

# THE JOURNEY

from Creation to New Creation

## Part 10 Immanuel, God With Us

### Introduction

These notes give some guidance on how to lead the group through the questions and discussion. *The additional Bible references in the notes give more details that you may find useful.*

You may want to begin by asking if anything particularly struck people as they watched the video. However, it would be wise to limit this part of the discussion to ten minutes at most.

Read **Matthew 1.18-25, Luke 1.26-38.**

### Question 1

Why is the virgin birth of Jesus so crucial?

J I Packer writes (in his book *Knowing God*): "It is here, in the thing that happened at the first Christmas, that the profoundest and most unfathomable depths of the Christian revelation lie. 'The Word became flesh' (John 1.14); God became man; the divine Son became a Jew; the Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless human baby, unable to do more than lie and stare and wriggle and make noises, needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child. . . . Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as is this truth of the incarnation."

Jesus was born of the virgin Mary. By His Spirit, through a miraculous creative act, we must assume that God fertilised Mary's ovum with the human component normally contributed by the male. So *Jesus was fully Human*. And at the moment of that creative act, the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God, took human nature into union with His divine nature. So *Jesus was fully Divine*. Jesus wasn't merely a Human indwelt by God's Spirit (as a true Christian is). He was fully God as well as fully Man. He possessed both a divine nature and a human nature, but He was a single Person.

- ▶ The virgin birth shows that salvation can only come from God. God miraculously intervened to provide our Saviour, Jesus Christ, God made Man.
- ▶ It shows that Jesus was fully divine and fully human. God was Jesus's Father. Mary was Jesus's

true biological mother. It seems that Luke 3.23-38 gives Jesus's genealogy through Mary; the most likely explanation is that Mary is Heli's daughter, but Joseph (as head of the household) is named as Heli's offspring instead. Mary was of King David's line. Jesus was a true descendant of David. And, through Mary, He was descended from Adam (see Luke 3.38). Jesus is biologically related to you and me, and to every person who has ever lived. It is vital that He should be. Only then could He be our Saviour.

- ▶ It shows that Jesus was sinless. Jesus was conceived "*from the Holy Spirit*" (Matthew 1.20). Jesus's conception was overshadowed by the Spirit in such a way that - though Mary, a sinner, was His mother - He was entirely without sin (see John 8.46, 2 Corinthians 5.21, 1 Peter 2.22, 1 John 3.5).

The author to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus: "*... had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest . . . , to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*" (Hebrews 2.17). Jesus's unblemished life from cradle to Cross qualified Him to be our High Priest. So, being "*made perfect*", fully qualified to be our Mediator with God, He became "*the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him*" (Hebrews 5.9).

Our forefather Adam was the only human created directly. All of us (except for Jesus) are descended from him through both our mother and our father. So Adam is the head of our human race. When Adam sinned, we were all (except for Jesus) *implicated* in that sin. We were "*made sinners*" (Romans 5.19). Our old head, Adam, failed.

So God gave us a new Head Who would not fail - the Man Jesus Christ. He is a new Adam, the second Head of the human race (see 1 Corinthians 15.21-22, 45-49 and see also Romans 5.12-19). As its new Head, Jesus has put right all the devastation caused by our first head, Adam, and made it possible for us to be part of a new humanity under His headship.

Read **Matthew 4.1-11, Genesis 3.1-6.**

### Question 2

Can you see similarities and contrasts between Jesus's temptation and Adam and Eve's temptation in the Garden of Eden?

After His baptism, Jesus was tempted by Satan. This links back to Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve.

- ▶ Would He meet His natural bodily desire for food, and eat what God had not given Him to eat? Jesus refused to do this. In contrast, Adam and Eve ate what God had forbidden them to eat.
- ▶ Would Jesus test God's protection of Him (promised in Psalm 91.11-12) through a presumptuously reckless act – to throw Himself off the pinnacle of the Temple? Satan tempted Jesus to test whether God was with Him and would protect Him from harm – in effect, to be like the Israelites in the desert, who said, *"Is the Lord among us or not?"* (Exodus 17.7). But, as R.T. France observes, *"The Son of God can live only in a relationship of trust which needs no test."* Satan tempted Adam and Eve to distrust God. They fell to that temptation.
- ▶ Thirdly, would Jesus take the easy crossless shortcut to His Messianic goal and grasp the kingdoms of this world? If He had done so, He would have transferred His allegiance from God to Satan. Satan tempted Adam and Eve to grasp power, too – power to be *"like God, knowing good and evil"* (Genesis 3.5), in other words, power to decide for themselves what was good for them, and what wasn't. This, too, meant transferring their allegiance from God to Satan (though deceitful Satan didn't tell Eve that grasping this power would mean coming under his dominion).

All three temptations boiled down to this: would Jesus trust God and obey Him? The temptation in the Garden also boiled down to this same issue – would Adam and Eve trust God and obey Him?

Notice that God's written words – the Scriptures – are a foundation for Jesus's life. Satan tempted Adam and Eve by questioning God's word – *"Did God actually say, . . ."* (Genesis 3.1). But Jesus obeyed God's word (He responded to Satan's temptations by quoting God's word from Deuteronomy 6.13, 16, 8.3).

Adam and Eve sinned under conditions that were supremely favourable to obedience – a paradise where all their needs were met bountifully. In contrast, Jesus obeyed God in conditions that were highly unfavourable – 40 days of hunger in a desert.

Jesus is a Second Adam. The first Adam fell to Satan's temptation. Jesus, the Second Adam, resisted Satan's temptation.

Read **Mark 1.14-15, Matthew 6.9-10, 13.41-43, John 3.3-5, Acts 1.3, Revelation 21.5-8.**

### Question 3

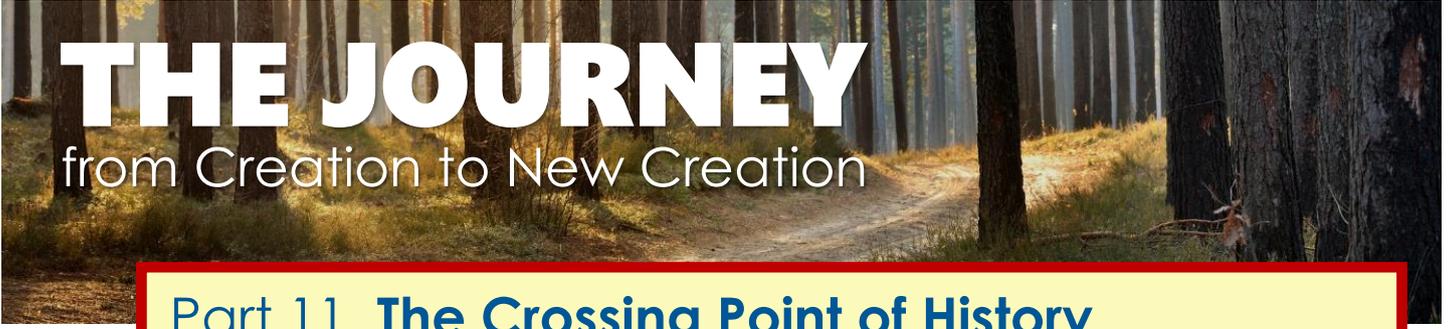
The Kingdom of God is the key theme in Jesus's teaching. What is the Kingdom of God? And how does someone enter it?

The Kingdom of God is the reign or rule of God in His creation. God's goal is that His Kingdom comes on Earth as it is in Heaven (Matthew 6.10). God's Kingdom on Earth can be expressed in this way: it is *God's people in God's paradise in God's presence*. From the creation of mankind, God began to act to establish His Kingdom on Earth. Mankind's sin has not deflected Him from this purpose. Jesus Christ's conception and birth was a new phase in His plan to establish His Kingdom on Earth. Jesus is the Messiah, through Whom God's Kingdom is being established.

And since the Day of Pentecost, God's Kingdom has been advancing across the globe. God's Kingdom will come in its final glory when Jesus returns to Earth. This Earth will be transformed, Heaven and Earth will merge and the New Jerusalem will come down out of Heaven from God. This city represents God's Kingdom come on Earth – *God's people in God's paradise in God's presence*.

Only those who are born again by the Spirit of God can enter God's Kingdom. Jesus said to Nicodemus: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."* (John 3.5). Jesus here refers to spiritual birth, which cleanses from sin and brings spiritual transformation and renewal. The water therefore seems to picture spiritual cleansing (rather than baptism). We might paraphrase what Jesus is saying here in this way: *"To enter God's Kingdom, you need to be baptised in the Holy Spirit. He will cleanse you and renew you. You will be a new creation."* Ezekiel prophesied: *"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. . . . And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."* (Ezekiel 36.25-27).

Other Bible passages reinforce the truth that we must be cleansed from sin to enter God's Kingdom – see Matthew 13.41-43, and compare Revelation 21.8. Only God can cleanse us. He does that on the basis of Jesus Christ's sacrificial death, and through His Spirit. Our part is to repent of sin, and trust in Christ (compare Mark 1.15).



# THE JOURNEY

from Creation to New Creation

## Part 11 The Crossing Point of History

### Introduction

In this session, we look at how Jesus died, rose again and ascended to His Father in heaven. These events are the great turning point in the history of this world.

These notes give some guidance on how to lead the group through the questions and discussion. *The additional Bible references in the notes give more details that you may find useful.*

You may want to begin by asking if anything particularly struck people as they watched the video. However, it would be wise to limit this part of the discussion to ten minutes at most.

Read [Exodus 12.21-23,50-51](#), [Exodus 24.3-11](#), [Matthew 26.2](#), [1 Corinthians 5.7](#), [1 Peter 1.18-19](#).

### Question 1 – Jesus’s death

What is the significance of the fact that Jesus was crucified at the Jewish festival of Passover?

It seems fairly certain that Jesus died around the time the Passover lambs were being sacrificed in the Temple - John 18.28 indicates this. The Passover lambs were killed on the 14th Nisan in the Jewish calendar (Leviticus 23.5) - around our Easter-time. Jesus is our Passover lamb (1 Corinthians 5.7).

Every time God’s people celebrated the Passover they recounted the story of how God saved their firstborn from death, defeated their Egyptian overlords and led them to safety through the sea. The firstborn sons of every Israelite family who sacrificed and ate the Passover lamb **were saved from death**. The Passover lambs died instead of them. Then God led His people Israel out of Egypt. He **released them from slavery**. Finally, God led them to Mount Sinai. There He **made a covenant** – in other words, a binding agreement - with them. Through this covenant God **brought His people into relationship with Himself**.

But the prophets told God’s people there would be another Exodus. The return from Exile in Babylonia did fulfil this prophecy in one way. But there would be another, more wonderful, Exodus.

What was this new Exodus? One pointer is something that we read in the account of Jesus’s transfiguration. Moses and Elijah appeared with Him. They spoke with Him about *“his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem”*. (Luke 9.31) The Greek word for *“departure”* here is, literally, *exodus*.

Jesus was crucified at the Festival of Passover **because He was going to bring about a new Exodus**. This new exodus was His departure – in other words, *His death and resurrection and ascension into heaven*. Through Jesus, God was going to:

- ▶ **save people from spiritual death**. Sin cuts people off from God, and being cut off from God is spiritual death. But on the Cross, Jesus suffered that penalty Himself; He was cut off from His Father. In the first Exodus, the Passover animals died instead of the firstborn sons. Jesus, our perfect Passover Lamb, died instead of us.

At the Last Supper, Jesus spoke about *“my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”* (Matthew 26.28). God forgives the sin of everyone who repents and trusts in Jesus Christ. Sin – which cuts us off from God - is dealt with, and we can be reconciled to God.

- ▶ **release people from slavery to sin**. God was going to put His law *“within”* His people, and *“write it on their hearts”* (Jeremiah 31.33). God’s people would have a new character. God would give them a new desire and ability to love and obey Him, and to love other people.

- ▶ **make a new covenant with people and bring them into a new relationship with Him**. God had promised, through His prophet Jeremiah: *“I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah”*. (Jeremiah 31.31 NIV). Like the old covenant that God made at Mount Sinai, this new covenant would bring people into relationship with God. But it would be *a completely new kind of relationship*. God was going to live within people (see John 14.15-17,23). They would know God personally and intimately.

Read **Romans 4.25, 1 Corinthians 15.12-24.**

### Question 2 – Jesus’s resurrection

What is the significance of Jesus’ resurrection for us as believers?

Here are three things that we can be assured of because Jesus rose from the dead:

- ▶ Firstly, it proves that His death was fully sufficient to atone for all sin. The resurrection proclaims the fact that, as Martyn Lloyd Jones put it: “God is fully and completely satisfied with the work that His Son did upon the Cross.” It proves that Jesus has borne the full penalty of our sins, that all the consequences of sin have been dealt with, and Satan and his dark kingdom are utterly vanquished. Jesus cried triumphantly, *“It is finished”* – in Greek, *tetelestai* (John 19.30). In one New Testament Greek dictionary, we are told that the word “was used in ancient times in connection with the payment of rent or poll tax. Receipts were often introduced by the Greek phrase *tetelestai*, indicating that the debt had been paid in full”.
- ▶ Secondly, it means we can be saved from sin – specifically, it means we can have our sins forgiven and be declared righteous.

Paul tells us *“if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.”* (1 Corinthians 15.17). But Jesus has been raised, and so our sins can be forgiven.

Paul also tells us that Jesus *“... was ... raised for our justification.”* (Romans 4.25). To justify someone means to declare them righteous. One commentator explains that to be justified is *“to be acquitted by God from all ‘charges’ that could be brought against a person because of his or her sins.”* And, in addition, God credits them with Jesus’s perfect righteousness. He considers us to be as righteous as Jesus! How awesome is that!

How does Jesus’s resurrection connect with our salvation from sin? *Because we, as believers, are united with Christ.* We are, as Paul often says, *“in Christ”*. And that changes everything for us! Because we are united with Christ, we died with Christ – *“our old self was crucified with him”* (Romans 6.6). And we were raised with Christ (Ephesians 2.6, Colossians 2.12) into a new clean life. We are now justified. Our sins are forgiven. But, of course, this could not happen if Jesus had not been raised from the dead! So, His resurrection is vital to our salvation. *This glorious truth of our union with Christ is central to our salvation.* We’ll look at it more in the next session.

- ▶ Thirdly, we can be assured that we, as believers, will rise physically from the dead (1 Corinthians 15.20-23,35-49 Philippians 3.20-21).

Read **Ephesians 2.4-7, Hebrews 2.17-18, 4.14-16, 7.23-25, 10.19-22, 1 John 2.1-2.**

### Question 3 – Jesus’s ascension

What is the significance of Jesus’s ascension for our own personal Christian lives? For example, how does it encourage us to know that Jesus has experienced life as a human on this earth with all its challenges and temptations and is now at His Father’s side in Heaven as our great High Priest?

Jesus ascended to His Father and is seated at His right hand in Heaven, enthroned in absolute authority over all creation – including Satan and all the forces of evil. He is our great High Priest (Hebrews 4.14-16, 7.23-8.6, 9.11-14,23-26, 10.19-22). Here are some ways in which these truths can help us in our daily lives as Christians:

- ▶ Through Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, we have access to the Father. We may stand in God’s presence (see Ephesians 2.18, Hebrews 4.16, 10.19-22).
- ▶ Through Jesus as our great High Priest, we may *“approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need”*. (Hebrews 4.16 NIV).
- ▶ Jesus has experienced life as a human on this earth with all its challenges and temptations. He knows about our own struggles and temptations, and is able to help us. The author of the Book of Hebrews tells us *“because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”* (Hebrews 2.18).
- ▶ Jesus *“is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them”* (Hebrews 7.25 NIV).
- ▶ He is our Advocate with the Father (1 John 2.1-2). He stands for us against our accuser, Satan, and He speaks to the Father on our behalf. He asks for our acquittal on the ground of His sacrificial death. Jesus’s advocacy for us in Heaven as our great High priest assures us of forgiveness.
- ▶ We’re now seated with Christ in heavenly places (Ephesians 2.4-6). Of course, we’re not physically present in the heavenly realms! But, because we’re united with Christ (as we saw in the previous question) we share in His resurrection life. We may walk *“in newness of life”* (Romans 6.4). In addition, we participate in His victory over the evil powers.



# THE JOURNEY

from Creation to New Creation

## Part 12 A New Life in Christ

### Introduction

These notes give some guidance on how to lead the group through the questions and discussion. *The additional Bible references in the notes give more details that you may find useful. You may like to ask group members to read out a few of these, as appropriate.*

You may want to begin by asking if anything particularly struck people as they watched the video. However, it would be wise to limit this part of the discussion to ten minutes at most.

Read **Romans 3.21-26, Romans 5.1-2, Galatians 3.10-14.**

### Question 1

What does it mean that we are righteous before God – in other words, to use a Bible term, justified? What is the significance of this for our relationship with God, and for our daily lives as Christians?

When we repent of our sins, and trust in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation, God declares us **“Not guilty! You are cleared of all charges!”** *Jesus has borne the penalty for our sin and paid the debt that we owe to God and to other people because of our sins.*

And because we believers are united with Jesus Christ, *God also credits us with Jesus’s righteousness.* We receive **“the free gift of righteousness”** (Romans 5.17). God sees us in Christ Jesus. When God, so to speak, looks at us, He looks at His Son Jesus Christ, and sees us in Him. So – incredible as it may seem – He sees us as righteous as Jesus Himself!

Of course, we’re not perfect. We’re still a work in progress. We’ll look at this in our next question. Nonetheless, we do have a new legal status before God. To use a Bible word, God has *justified* us. We are right with God! *This new legal status is God’s gift to us. We can’t do anything to earn it.* We have been **“justified by faith in Christ”** (Galatians 2.16). In other words, we’re justified by repenting of our sin and trusting Jesus Christ completely for our salvation.

And so, as Paul writes, **“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** (Romans 5.1). What does it mean, to have **“peace with God”**? It means that God is no longer angry with us believers because of our sin. We were once His enemies. Now we are *reconciled* to Him. *We are His friends.* Paul writes, **“... while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, . . . .”** (Romans 5.10 NIV).

*All this has huge implications for our relationship with God, and for our practical daily lives as Christians.*

- ▶ Firstly, it means we have free access into God’s presence. We may confidently draw near to God (see Hebrews 4.16, 10.22). Paul tells us that, through Jesus Christ, **“we . . . have access in one Spirit to the Father.”** (Ephesians 2.18). In Christ, we have **“boldness and access with confidence”** into God’s presence (Ephesians 3.12). Of course, sin can cloud our sense of God’s presence. If this happens, we may repent and turn to God, and we may enter His presence again.
- ▶ Secondly, it affects the motivation for our Christian lives. Do we have to live righteously in order to gain God’s approval? No! We have been **“justified by faith”** (Romans 5.1). We can do nothing to earn our acceptance with God. Instead, we live righteous lives because we *want* to please God and glorify Him. This is our new heart’s desire as Christians. It gives us pleasure to please God.
- ▶ Thirdly, we can live free from Satan’s condemnation. Satan is our great accuser. He accuses us of sin and demands that God punish us. But now God has declared us not guilty! Paul writes: **“There is . . . now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”** (Romans 8.1). Satan has no legal case against us any more. We need to get hold of this truth and live free from Satan’s condemnation. (Of course, God’s Holy Spirit may convict us of sin – in other words make us aware of sin that needs to be put away. This is quite different from Satan’s accusations. Then we must confess our sin, repent and turn back to God.)

Read **Ephesians 4.20-24, Colossians 3.1-17, James 1.12-15.**

## Question 2

The Bible tells us that *"if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."* (2 Corinthians 5.17). So why does sin still trouble us? And how do we overcome sin?

Something fundamental and very wonderful has happened to us believers. We were once part of the old sinful humanity headed up by Adam. But when Jesus died and rose again, He 'included' in His death and resurrection all those who repent from their sin and trust Him alone for their salvation. Their *"old self"* – the old self-willed, self-reliant person that they once were – was *"crucified with him"* (Romans 6.6). And they were *"raised with him"* (Colossians 2.12). We are now part of God's new humanity in Christ. Paul tells us that God *"has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, . . ."* (Colossians 1.13).

But we are not automatically or instantly made perfect. We still face temptation daily. And we still – all too often – fall to that temptation. So how do we resist sin?

*Firstly, it is vital to understand that we have a new identity in Christ.* As believers, we are united with Christ, in other words, *"in Christ"* (2 Corinthians 5.17). And that changes everything. God has justified us (as we have already seen). We are reborn from above (John 3.3,7) into God's new humanity. God has given us *"a new heart"* (see Ezekiel 36.26). God has adopted us believers into His family. We can call God *"Father"* (Romans 8.15, Galatians 4.6) And God lives within us believers. We're in living relationship with God. Paul writes: *" . . . your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, . . ."* (1 Corinthians 6.19).

So, we have a new identity in Christ. *But we need to bring our behaviour in line with our new identity.* And so we have to *"put off"* our *"old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires"* (Ephesians 4.22). We have to put off our old way of life – our wrong attitudes, wrong ways of thinking and speaking, and sinful habits. And we have to *"put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness"* (Ephesians 4.24). New attitudes, right ways of thinking and speaking, and godly habits, have to be formed.

*That's where our will comes in.* We have to choose to obey God and live a life that is pleasing to Him. We must be intentional and diligent about this. We must turn away from sin and pursue righteousness and godliness.

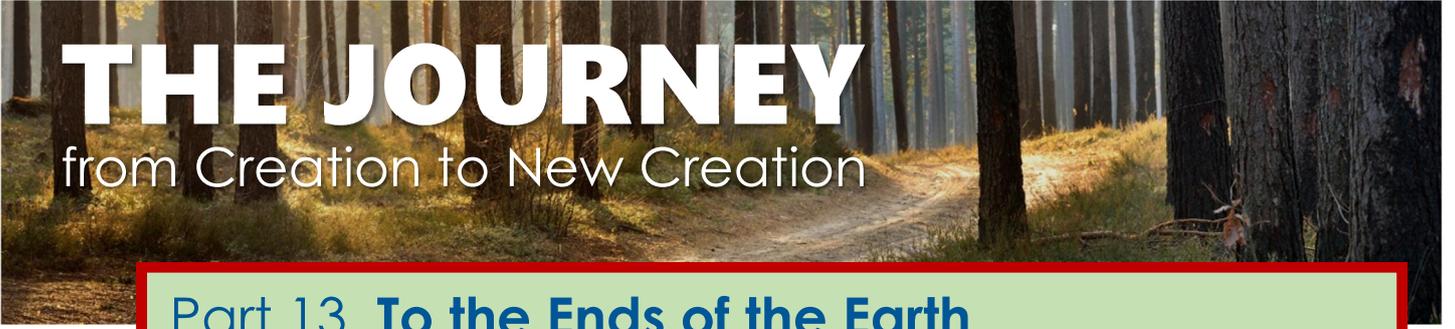
God's Holy Spirit lives in us. He guides us and gives us the power to say 'no' to temptation. Only the Holy Spirit can transform us; our part is to co-operate with Him. We must obey Him and make the right choices. Paul wrote: *"Let all you do be guided by God's Spirit, and you will not gratify sinful desires"*. (Galatians 5.16, author's paraphrase). Paul also wrote, *" . . . if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live."* (Romans 8.13 NIV).

In this present life in this world, we will always be subject to temptation. We can still be drawn into sin. Jesus taught us to pray to our Father: *" . . . lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."* (Matthew 6.13). This most likely means, *"Spare us from difficult circumstances that would tempt us to sin"* (compare Matthew 26.41). God never directly tempts believers (James 1.13). However, we will experience trials and hardships. Jesus tells us to pray that God will deliver us from situations of overwhelming trial that we cannot bear without falling into sin. And God will answer that prayer. Paul writes: *"God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."* (1 Corinthians 10.13)

What practical steps can we take to avoid and resist temptation? Here are four steps we can take:

- ▶ Do things that strengthen us and help us live holy lives – for example, reading the Bible and praying regularly, and meeting often with other believers.
- ▶ In moments of temptation, think of what God has said in the Scriptures, as Jesus Himself did when He was tempted (Matthew 4.1-10, Luke 4.1-12). And we must call out to God in prayer.
- ▶ Avoid things that are unprofitable and likely to tempt us – for example, places we could go to, books and magazines that we could read, TV programmes and films we could watch.
- ▶ Nip temptation in the bud. Temptation so often begins in our minds. Act at once, and resist it! There's an often-quoted saying that goes, *"We sow a thought and reap an act; we sow an act and reap a habit; we sow a habit and reap a character; we sow a character and reap a destiny."*

Paul said: *"sin will have no dominion over you"* (Romans 6.14). That's God's promise to every believer! We have no legitimate excuse for habitual sin. Paul writes *"you who were once slaves of sin . . . having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness."* (Romans 6.17-18).



# THE JOURNEY

from Creation to New Creation

## Part 13 To the Ends of the Earth

### Introduction

These notes give some guidance on how to lead the group through the questions and discussion. *The additional Bible references in the notes give more details that you may find useful.*

You may want to begin by asking if anything particularly struck people as they watched the video. However, it would be wise to limit this part of the discussion to ten minutes at most.

Read Acts 11.19-30, Acts 13.1-3, 14.26-28.

### Question 1

What practical lessons can we – as individuals and as a church - learn from what we read about the church at Antioch?

Those who fled Jerusalem after Stephen's martyrdom travelled northwards as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, preaching only to Jews (Acts 11.19). But, in Antioch some of these people took a momentous step forward. They preached Jesus as Lord and Saviour to Greek-speaking Gentiles. And *"a great number who believed turned to the Lord"* (Acts 11.21). God had opened the door of gospel outreach to the Gentiles at Cornelius's house in Caesarea. But now the mission to the Gentiles was beginning in earnest - the final stage of Jesus's plan for gospel outreach (Acts 1.8).

Antioch was over 300 miles north of Jerusalem, and a very different kind of city. It was a cosmopolitan commercial and political centre, the third largest city in the Empire, with perhaps around 300,000 inhabitants or more.

The Antioch church grew quickly. The apostles sent Barnabas to check out what was going on there (Acts 11.22). Big-hearted Barnabas was full of the Holy Spirit (Barnabas is a nickname meaning 'son of encouragement', Acts 4.36). He had a natural gift of encouragement. Barnabas didn't insist the believers get circumcised and keep the Law. He simply encouraged them all to stay resolutely faithful to God

(Acts 11.23-24). Here in Antioch, Jew and Gentile were able to eat together freely (which included celebrating the Lord's Supper).

- **The church was serious about teaching.** Barnabas recruited Saul (Acts 11.25-26) and for a year they taught and disciplined the church at Antioch. Teaching the believers in this new church was crucial. Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, highlights the importance of teaching as an essential aspect of evangelism (for example, Acts 2.14-36 and 13.16-41) and as a key way of bringing believers to maturity (for example, Acts 14.21-22, 18.11, and 20.17-35).

- **The church was serious about discipleship.** Here in Antioch, believers were first called 'Christians' (Acts 11.26) – a name either given to them by outsiders, or that they took themselves. The name suggests 'belonging to Christ' or 'people who habitually named the name of Christ'.

- **The church was serious about evangelism.** It began because of the evangelistic ministry of *"men of Cyprus and Cyrene"* who preached the Lord Jesus (Acts 11.20). And it's from the church here in Antioch that Paul and Barnabas set out on their first missionary journey. Paul set out on his two other missionary journeys from here, too.

- **The church was serious about including people of all kinds of backgrounds and ethnicities.** Antioch was a cosmopolitan city, with both Jews and Gentiles. It was a melting-pot of people from various races. And, it was a hotbed for philosophies, cults, and religions. The names of the leaders in Acts 13.1 suggest an ethnically diverse membership. Barnabas was from Cyprus. Simeon, called Niger, may have come from Africa. Lucius of Cyrene came from North Africa. Manaen was brought up with Herod, the ruler of Galilee when Jesus was born (Luke 3.1) and Saul was from Tarsus in what is now southern Turkey, around 150 miles from Antioch.

- **The church was serious about giving to the poor and those in need** (Acts 11.27-30) – they gave money to provide food for the Christians in Judea. We find this trait in the church in Macedonia (2 Corinthians

8.1-4); Paul encouraged the Corinthian church to follow suit (2 Corinthians 8.6-15,24).

● It seems clear that the church was serious about the participation of every member. We can see something of from the list of *"prophets and teachers"*. (Acts 13.1).

● The church was serious about the use of the gifts of the Spirit. In one of his lists of gifts Paul writes, *"... God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, ..."* (1 Corinthians 12.28). In the church at Antioch, we see all three gifts operative – apostles (Paul and Barnabas), prophets and teachers (the men listed in Acts 13.1). We can be sure that many other gifts were being used in the church at Antioch, too.

● The church was committed to worship. Acts 13.2 tells us that the prophets and teachers were *"worshipping the Lord and fasting"*.

● The church was serious about asking God for His direction. They prayed and fasted as they sought God's will. We read that, while they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, *"the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off."* (Acts 13.2-3).

Read Acts 2.22-41, Acts 10.34-44, 17.22-32.

### Question 2

The passages above include Peter's very first sermon (to Jews), and Peter and Paul's sermons to non-Jews (Gentiles). How can their messages to the people help us in our own evangelism as individuals and as a church?

The basic thing it shows us is *what the early apostles preached about – the content of their gospel message*. Notice that the gospel (the good news about Jesus Christ) is a *word-based gospel*. The apostles declared the word of God with astonishing power and fluency (see Acts 2.14-40, 3.12-26). God's word spread, grew and multiplied (Acts 6.7, 12.24, 19.20). God, Who created the heavens and the Earth by His word (Genesis 1.3,6,9 etc., 2 Peter 3.5, Hebrews 11.3) now created and shaped a new people for Himself through His proclaimed and preached word.

Here are some key things that were included in the early preaching of the Gospel. This is the heart and core of the gospel. It is a life-transforming message.

- ▶ Who God is and what He is like (Acts 10.34-35, 17.24-29)
- ▶ Jesus' life – He did good, and did many miracles (Acts 2.22, 10.37-39).
- ▶ Jesus's death by crucifixion (Acts 2.23,36, 10.39).

▶ Jesus's resurrection (Acts 2.24-32, 10.40-41, 17.31-32).

▶ Jesus's exaltation God exalted Him to His right hand as Lord and Christ. (Acts 2.33-36, 10.36).

▶ Fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies (Acts 2.16-21,25-31,34, 10.43).

▶ Repentance People are exhorted to repent (Acts 2.38,17.30)

▶ Salvation People are exhorted to believe in Jesus and are promised forgiveness (Acts 2.38, 10.43).

▶ Pouring out and gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2.33,38-39).

▶ Baptism People are exhorted to be baptised (Acts 2.38)

▶ Judgment Jesus Christ will judge everyone (Acts 10.42, 17.31).

*The facts of Jesus's life, death and resurrection and exaltation are foundational to the Gospel message.* The Gospel message and offer of salvation rests upon *what actually happened*. Christianity and the whole Biblical record are embedded in history. It is not fundamentally a moral code or a philosophy.

There is also something at first sight rather puzzling – the three sermons in the passages we've read don't mention God's love. In John's Gospel we read *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."* (John 3.16). Peter and Paul may well have mentioned God's love, of course, but this isn't recorded. Why do you think this is?

The apostles' first sermons made Jesus's resurrection a key point of their preaching. Dr Simon Greenleaf, a famous professor of law at Harvard University, examined the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He applied the principles in his study *An Examination of the Testimony of the Four Evangelists by the Rules of Evidence Administered in the Courts of Justice*. He concluded that there is more evidence for Jesus's resurrection than for just about any other event in history.

The New Testament writers took pains to emphasise that the resurrection actually happened and could be verified (Acts 1.3, Acts 2.32, 1 Corinthians 15.3-8). Declaring that Jesus has risen from the dead was part of what someone must believe and confess in order to be saved (see Romans 10.9). Paul, too, emphasises how crucial the resurrection is. *"... if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain."* (1 Corinthians 15.14)



# THE JOURNEY

from Creation to New Creation

## Part 14 God's New Humanity

### Introduction

These notes give some guidance on how to lead the group through the questions and discussion. *The additional Bible references in the notes give more details that you may find useful.*

You may want to begin by asking if anything particularly struck people as they watched the video. However, it would be wise to limit this part of the discussion to ten minutes at most.

Read Acts 2.42, Acts 13.1-3, 1 Corinthians 14.1-5, 26, 1 Timothy 4.13, Hebrews 10.24-25.

### Question 1

What is the purpose of our church gatherings?

Acts 2.42 seems to suggest a broad outline for what happens in our gatherings – “teaching”, “fellowship”, “breaking of bread”, and “prayers”. The word “fellowship” translates the Greek word *koinōnia*. This word suggests partnership in something done together.

What should a gathering of the local church include? There might be teaching and public reading of the Scriptures. There may be praise, thanksgiving and adoration of God – both spoken and sung. There may be prayer for the needs of people or situations. There may be prophecy, messages of wisdom or knowledge, words of encouragement, tongues and interpretations. There might be testimonies – that is, people sharing what God has done for them. Not all these things will necessarily occur in every gathering. Each time we meet will be a unique occasion. And there may be times when the main focus of the meeting is, for example, prayer or teaching.

Everything that takes place when we meet together should build up the body. Paul writes: “Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.” (1 Corinthians 14.26 NIV). For example, too, those that prophesy, do so for believers’ “upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.” (1 Corinthians 14.3). It seems clear from the New Testament that there

should generally be opportunity for a variety of people to contribute. We can *all* take part in encouraging and building up our fellow-believers.

The Lord's Supper is central to the life of a local church. It's a shared meal that celebrates the new covenant between God and His people (prophesied in Jeremiah 31.31). This new covenant was sealed with Jesus's blood. Through His blood – in other words, His sacrificial death – Jesus paid the penalty and made full amends for our sin. Now we can come into relationship with God. We can be bound to Him by the New Covenant.

In the Lord's Supper, the bread symbolises Jesus's body given for us. The wine symbolises His blood shed for us. When we eat the bread and drink the wine, we remember that it was His death that enabled us to be in covenant relationship with God – and to enjoy all the blessings that this brings.

All believers are bound to God by His New Covenant. And that means we're bound to each other, too. We are one body. The Lord's Supper is a time of fellowship with God. *And* it's also a time of fellowship with each other. The Lord's Supper provides an opportunity for believers to reflect on their relationship with God and with other believers. Are they really living according to the terms of the New Covenant, loving and obeying God, and loving and serving their fellow-believers?

Read Exodus 40.34-35, 1 Kings 8.10-11, John 14.23, 1 Corinthians 3.16-17, 1 Peter 2.4-5.

### Question 2

The Church is God's temple. What implications does that have for our lives?

The church is God's temple - the place where God lives. Each believer is a temple – as Paul tells us: “*your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you*” (1 Corinthians 6.19). God lives within them (John 14.16-17, 23). The whole Church, too, is a temple (1 Corinthians 3.16-17, 2 Corinthians 6.16, Ephesians 2.21-22).

God is holy (for example, Leviticus 11.44-45, Isaiah 6.3). His holiness is more than His moral purity; it is the sum of His divine attributes that sets Him apart from everything that He has made. He is the Uncreated, eternal, transcendent, divine Being, overwhelmingly and awesomely glorious in majesty. He is absolutely separate from evil, infinitely perfect, immaculately pure, faultlessly righteous. Central to God's holy being is love – perfect, pure love.

When the Tabernacle was complete, *“Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.”* (Exodus 40.35). God's glory filled the Temple, too, at its dedication ceremony (1 Kings 8.10-11). Remember, too, Mount Sinai quaked and smoked as God descended on it (Exodus 19.18). Now God lives in each believer, and among us as a local church! The lesson is clear: *we, and our church, must be in a state fit for God to live amongst us.* In other words, we have to be holy. Peter writes: *“... as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”* (1 Peter 1.15-16).

God is uniquely holy in a way that is totally unattainable by any created being. But we believers are holy, too, in the sense that *we now belong to God.* We are His own special, distinctive people, set apart for His purposes. God made us believers holy (or, to use another Bible word, *“sanctified”* us) the moment we became a child of God. We're *“sanctified in Christ Jesus”* (1 Corinthians 1.2).

Yet becoming holy (in other words, our sanctification) is also a process that continues throughout our lives. We're to turn away from sin and pursue godliness. We have to put off our old way of life – our wrong attitudes, wrong ways of thinking and speaking, and sinful habits. New attitudes, right ways of thinking and speaking, and godly habits, need to be formed (see Ephesians 4.21-24, Colossians 3.5-17). God's Holy Spirit guides us and gives us the power to do all this. But we must co-operate with Him and obey Him. As we obey Him, His Spirit purifies us, so that all that we think and say and do reflects more and more exactly the character of the holy God Who lives in us.

A vital part of our obedience to God is this: we're to read the Bible and pray regularly, and meet often with other believers (see Hebrews 10.24-25). These things will strengthen us and help us to live holy lives.

Holiness means *to belong to God for His purposes.* Our purpose as God's people is to be a community of people who extend His Kingdom across Earth through the power of His Spirit. Each believer has a special role in this magnificent calling. But to fulfil our role,

we must be holy. *So you can see how crucial our own personal holiness is to God's plan for this world.*

Read **Romans 12.3-8, 1 Corinthians 12.12-27, Ephesians 2.19-22.**

### Question 3

What do these three images of the Church – a human body, a temple, a household - have in common? And what is the significance of this for our corporate life as a church?

Three ways in which the Church is pictured in the Bible are as a temple, a body, and a household. A temple is a single structure made up of many different components. A body is a single organism comprising a complex assembly of cells, tissues and organs, each of which has a part to play in the health and function of the whole body. A household is an economic and socially interdependent group of people who share a common life.

Each of these three images implies an integrated, interdependent community. Why is there such emphasis on community and interdependence? Because that's how God made us. As we saw in Session 3, mankind isn't just a group of unrelated individuals. The human race is a family, all descended from Adam and Eve. We're all connected. John Donne wrote: *“No man is an island, entire of itself. . . .”* At the heart of our beings is the capacity for love. We are relational beings. Donald Macleod wrote: *“A life lived apart from community is a life that violates human nature”.*

So when God speaks about the Church as a temple, a body, and a household, it isn't a completely new idea. He built the idea of community into human nature right from the beginning. The Church is God's new humanity. The Church is a community of people who love each other, support each other and share their lives with each other. When people see a local church functioning as a community as God intended, they are seeing what it really means to be human.

And all this means that we affect one another – for good or bad. ● We have the power to be a blessing to each other. In the church, God has given each of us gifts to build up our brothers and sisters in Christ (see 1 Corinthians 14.12,26, and see also Ephesians 4.11-16). ● Conversely, we have power to harm each other. Failing to use my gifts damages the body. One person's sin can defile many (compare Hebrews 12.15). We hurt people by breaking off relationships, or refusing to forgive.

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# THE JOURNEY

from Creation to New Creation

## Part 15 The Clash of the Kingdoms

### Introduction

These notes give some guidance on how to lead the group through the questions and discussion. *The additional Bible references in the notes give more details that you may find useful.*

You may want to begin by asking if anything particularly struck people as they watched the video. However, it would be wise to limit this part of the discussion to ten minutes at most.

Read [John 17.15](#), [Colossians 2.13-15](#), [Ephesians 6.10-18](#).

### Question 1

How does Satan attack us? How can we resist him?

Although Satan is defeated, God hasn't yet removed him from creation. Satan still fights against God and His people. We believers are in a battle against Satan.

Satan is cunning. He is *"the deceiver of the whole world"* (Revelation 12.9). We face deception, sabotage, subversion. Satan blurs the line between truth and error. He tempts us to compromise with worldly things. He targets our weaknesses. He lays false trails to try to take us off course and waste our gifts and resources.

Paul pictures us believers as Roman soldiers. He writes: *"Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil."* (Ephesians 6.11). The armour is a picture of the spiritual resources that God has given to us in Christ.

- We're to stand *"having fastened on the belt of truth"* (6.14). The *"truth"* here is God's truth as revealed in the gospel (Ephesians 1.13, 4.21). And it's to be outworked in our lives. We're to live lives that are consistent with the truth of the gospel (see 2 John 4, 3 John 4).

- We must put on *"the breastplate of righteousness"* (6.14). We must put on *"the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."* (Ephesians 4.24 NIV). We must live righteous, godly lives.

- We're to have our feet properly shod with *"the readiness given by the gospel of peace"* (6.15 – the gospel of peace is language drawn from Isaiah 52.7). What is the gospel of peace? Ephesians 2.14-18 shows us – Jesus has created in Himself a new humanity that is at peace with God. We're to understand this gospel of peace and allow that gospel to shape our thinking and our lives. And we're to proclaim that gospel through our lips and our lives.

- We must grasp *"the shield of faith"* (6.16 and compare 1 John 5.4-5). Resolute confidence in God's power and faithfulness to us will quench Satan's assaults and temptations.

- We must put on *"the helmet of salvation"* (6.17) – the firm assurance that God has saved us – that He has rescued us from Satan's dominion, raised us with Christ and seated us with Him in heavenly places (Ephesians 2.4-7).

- We must use *"the sword of the Spirit"* (6.17). We must take hold of God's word – *"the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation"* (Ephesians 1.13), and speak God's truth – to ourselves as well as to others – in the power of His Spirit. That means we must *know* God's truth. And so we must know what God says in the Bible – something we look at in the third question.

Paul emphasises the word *"stand"* (Ephesians 6.11,13-14). It's vital to remember that *Jesus Christ has already defeated Satan*. We believers share in Christ's victory. We must *stand firm* in the victory Jesus has given us. We must remember that Satan can no longer accuse us (Romans 8.1,31-34, Revelation 12.10-11). And we're to refuse Satan even the smallest foothold in our lives or in the life of our church.

Paul concludes: *"pray in the Spirit on all occasions"* (6.18 NIV). Prayer is central to our warfare – both individually and as a local church.

A key battleground is the daily routine of ordinary life. Day by day we must learn to trust God fully, and obey Him in everything – in the small things, and the things that other people don't see, as well as in the big things. *That's* where our victory must first be won.

Finally, two key points about soldiers are these:

- ▶ **Soldiers are under orders.** We, too, need to learn how to obey God – just as Jesus Himself did (see John 4.34, 6.38, 8.29, Matthew 26.39). Submitting to God is vital if we are to resist the Devil (compare James 4.7).
- ▶ **Soldiers work as a team.** The lone Christian, like the lone soldier, is at great risk. Teamwork, and 'looking out' for one another, are essential to any military operation. *They're essential to our spiritual warfare, too.* We need to gather together often with other believers (see Hebrews 10.25). We're to support one another in all kinds of ways. For example, we're to teach and admonish one another (Colossians 3.16), encourage and build one another up (1 Thessalonians 5.11), and pray for one another (James 5.16). All this will strengthen us in our battle against Satan – as individuals and as a church.

Read 1 Peter 2.5,9, Revelation 1.6, 5.10, Romans 12.1-2, Hebrews 13.15-16, Philippians 4.18.

### Question 2

In the video we learned that one of the key things that the Reformers believed in was 'the priesthood of all believers'. We are a "*priesthood*". How do we, in practical terms, actually function as priests in our daily lives, and in the life of our church?

In Old Testament times priests worshipped and served God in His Tabernacle and in the Temple. Now we, God's people, *are* the Temple! His Spirit lives in us. As God's priests, we may live in His presence and worship and serve Him all the time.

A key duty of the Old Testament priests was to offer sacrifices. That's what we're to do as well (1 Peter 2.5). What sacrifices do we offer? Jesus provides our answer. He offered His Father *obedience* – unhesitating, heartfelt obedience (see Matthew 26.39, John 4.34, 6.38, 8.29). We're to offer God *our* obedience, too. We're to serve and glorify Him. This can outwork in so many ways – for example, praise and thanksgiving to God (Hebrews 13.15); or "*to do good and to share*" (Hebrews 13.16, and compare Philippians 4.18). And when we serve and minister to others, we are also fulfilling a priestly ministry. Our priestly role includes praying for others, too (see Ephesians 6.18, 1 Timothy 2.1).

And as God's holy priesthood, we're to bring His blessings to this broken world. God is blessing "*all peoples on earth*" (Genesis 12.3 NIV), just as He promised Abraham. The blessing of Abraham (see Acts 3.25-26, Galatians 3.14) is repentance, and the salvation provided by Jesus the Messiah.

Read 2 Timothy 3.14-17.

### Question 3

In the video we learned that William Tyndale gave his life to get the Bible translated into English. Others risked their lives to translate the Bible, too. How important is reading the Bible? How can we encourage each other to read it more?

God has given us the Bible to help bring us to maturity in understanding and in holiness. Reading and knowing the Bible, understanding what it says – and obeying what God tells us in it – is vital for our spiritual growth. How can we help ourselves, and encourage others, to read and understand it more?

- ▶ **Setting aside time each day to read it.** It would help to use one of the many Bible reading plans available that will take us through the whole Bible in a set period of time (for example, 3 years).
- ▶ **Using some Bible helps.** There is a huge range of good Bible helps – for example, overviews, commentaries, concordances, word studies, dictionaries and handbooks – available both in print and online, to help us understand the Bible better.
- ▶ **Memorising the Bible.** This is hugely beneficial. As we do so, we will find our minds will be increasingly filled with God's truth; sinful and unhelpful thoughts will be pushed out of our minds, and we'll be protected against Satan's lies. It will help us to meditate at any time on God's truth. And God's Spirit will increasingly bring Scriptures to our minds and speak to us through them. There are a huge range of tools available, such as 'phone apps, that can help us to memorise Bible passages.
- ▶ **Hearing the Bible being read out loud in our gatherings.** Paul tells Timothy: "*devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, . . .*" (1 Timothy 4.13). It's really important to have portions of the Scripture read out regularly and clearly in our church gatherings. And we need to gather regularly with God's people to hear it being read, and explained.
- ▶ **Reading and studying the Bible with others.** It is a great encouragement and support to read and study the Bible with others in twos or threes, and in Home Groups. Even if we don't find it possible to meet with others regularly, there is still value in teaming up with one or two others, studying the same passages together, and communicating what God has shown us – things we want to share, as well as things we don't understand and need help with, via text or a messaging service.

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# THE JOURNEY

from Creation to New Creation

## Part 16 All Things New!

### Introduction

These notes give some guidance on how to lead the group through the questions and discussion. *The additional Bible references in the notes give more details that you may find useful.*

You may want to begin by asking if anything particularly struck people as they watched the video. However, it would be wise to limit this part of the discussion to ten minutes at most.

Read **Revelation 21.1-4, 22-27, 22.1-5.**

### Question 1

In Session 1, we saw several things in both the first two chapters of Genesis and the final two chapters of Revelation. What do we find in the new creation that we do *not* find in Genesis? What does this tell us about our future lives in the new creation that we look forward to?

In our first session, we highlighted four things found both in the original creation described in Genesis and in the new creation described in Revelation:

- ▶ **Heaven and Earth.** In Genesis, God creates Heaven and Earth (Genesis 1.1). In Revelation He creates a New Heaven and a New Earth (Revelation 21.1).
- ▶ **Light.** In the beginning, God created light (Genesis 1.3-5). In the new creation, God is its light (Revelation 22.5, see also 21.23-24).
- ▶ **A river.** A river waters the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2.10). In Revelation, we see a river flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Revelation 22.1).
- ▶ **The tree of life.** There's a tree of life in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2.9). In Revelation 22.2 we read that *"on either side of the river"* is *"the tree of life"*.

The most obvious difference between the original creation and the new creation is this: in the original creation there was a garden – the Garden of Eden; in the new creation there's a city – a garden city. This city is the New Jerusalem. It's where God lives (Revelation 21.1-3,22). New Jerusalem is a real place, of course – though it won't be like any city we've seen here on Earth. But it also symbolises something.

What is a city? A city – any city – is an *interdependent community*. God's people – God's community - live in New Jerusalem. God lives there with His people. In the city is *"the river of the water of life"* and *"the tree of life"*. New Jerusalem is a garden. This city is a picture of God's people living in God's presence in God's paradise – in other words, the Kingdom of God. New Jerusalem symbolises God's perfect world.

There's something else that distinguishes the new creation from the Garden of Eden. God is present in both the garden *and* the new creation. In the garden He is *"walking"* (Genesis 3.8). But in New Jerusalem He is enthroned. God reigns there in all His glory. There's no temple in the city (Revelation 21.22) - *"its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb"*. *The whole city* is the temple, the dwelling-place of God. God's presence fills the entire city. The city's shape tells us that. It's a cube (Revelation 21.16). That's like the Most Holy Place, both in the Temple (1 Kings 6.20) and in the Tabernacle (this can be calculated from the description in Exodus 26.1-37). The Most Holy Place was the innermost sanctuary, the place of God's immediate presence (see Exodus 25.22, Numbers 7.89). The whole city is the eternal Most Holy Place, where God lives on Earth. So *everyone in the city* is in the Most Holy Place, too. Once, only one man could enter the Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle and the Temple, and only under the strictest conditions. Now *all* God's people live there in His immediate presence!

Read **Romans 14.10-12, 2 Corinthians 5.10, 2 Peter 3.11-14, Revelation 20.11-15.**

### Question 2

Jesus has justified us believers; our names are written in *"the book of life"*. Nonetheless, *"each of us will give an account of ourselves to God"* (Romans 14.12 NIV). How should this impact our priorities in life, and what we think, say and do?

After we die, we will all stand before God's judgment seat. In Revelation 20.11, John does not say whether the Father or the Son is seated on the *"great white*

*throne*" of judgment. But we know that the Father has handed over all judgment to the Son (John 5.22,27, Acts 10.42, 17.31, Romans 2.16). It's reasonable to conclude that Jesus will be our Judge.

Why has God given Jesus this role? One reason is surely this: because Jesus is not only God, but a *human being like us*. People can't say to Him: "*You have no right to judge us; you don't know what it's like to be human - you've never suffered like we have, you've never been tempted*". He has. In life as well as in death, Jesus suffered more than we could ever know. He was tempted just as we are (Hebrews 4.15).

When Jesus returns we will all stand before Him. Each one of us "*will give an account of ourselves to God*" (Romans 14.12 NIV). Sam Storms comments: "*Is it not sobering to think that every random thought, every righteous impulse, every secret prayer, hidden deed, long-forgotten sin, or act of compassion will be brought into the open for us to acknowledge and for the Lord to judge? And all this, we are reminded, without any 'condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus'* (Romans 8.1)."

We are accountable for our lives. In the end, none of us can blame heredity or environment, or what others have done to us, for the kind of person we are. It's our reactions - what we have thought and said and done *in response to* the circumstances of life - that makes us what we are at the moment of death.

Our childhood years were our 'formative' years. Our present life on Earth, too, is like a childhood. These are our 'formative years', a period of training and maturation that's preparing us for our life in the world to come. We will reap what we sow (Galatians 6.7-9).

God is laying a foundation in our lives, and we must co-operate with Him. How much do we allow God's Spirit to mould us into the image of His Son (see 2 Corinthians 3.18)? Are we presenting our bodies "*as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God*" (Romans 12.1)? Are we allowing the Spirit of God to transform us by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12.2)? Are we allowing Him to refashion the way we think, to come to see things as God sees them - so that we discern what His will is, agree with it and do it?

Have we yielded our lives fully to God? Have we walked in the Spirit, rather than in our own strength? Have we resolutely trusted God, come what may?

Our faith is proved by acts of obedience (James 2.14-26). Have we obeyed God - in the small things that other people don't see, as well as the big things? Have we overcome temptation, compromise and persecution for Jesus's sake? Have we loved? Have we forgiven?

Read **Romans 8.18-25, Colossians 1.3-5, 1 Peter 1.3-9.**

### Question 3

We have a glorious hope of heaven - that is, living in the New Heaven and Earth with all God's people in God's paradise in God's presence. How has this session helped you in your understanding of heaven? How should the hope of heaven affect how we live?

We need to remind ourselves - and each other - often that our eternal home will be the New Heaven and Earth, where we will see God and be part of His royal priesthood, sharing in Christ's rule over creation and serving God and other people in unimaginably wonderful ways - as we saw in the video. In fact, *that is the world that God made us for.*

We should keep "*the hope laid up*" for us "*in heaven*" (Colossians 1.5) at the centre of our thinking and allow it to mould our lives - our relationship with God, our ambitions, our friendships, how we spend our time and money, and how we treat other people.

Keeping our minds on the world to come gives true perspective to our present lives. C.S. Lewis wrote, "*A man who has been in another world does not come back unchanged.*" When we see what the Bible teaches about the world to come and allow these truths to sink in to our minds and penetrate our hearts, we will not be unchanged.

The hope of heaven has a special impact on how we view the struggles and disappointments and sufferings that we experience in our present lives. Peter writes, "*In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials,*" (1 Peter 1.6; the phrase "*in this*" refers back to the whole of the previous verses 3-5, in other words, "*a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. . . an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, . . .*"). Randy Alcorn, in his excellent book *Heaven*, writes, "*Anticipating Heaven doesn't eliminate pain, but it lessens it and puts it in perspective. . . . suffering and death are temporary conditions. . . . The biblical doctrine of Heaven is about the future, but it has tremendous benefits here and now. If we grasp it, it will . . . radically change our perspective on life. This is what the Bible calls 'hope', a word used six times in Romans 8.20-25, the passage in which Paul says that all creation longs for our resurrection and the world's coming redemption.*"

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