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WHAT'S IN THIS WORKBOOK

The heart of this workbook are the *Studies* that comprise the *Overview* course. Each study consists of:

- A brief introduction to the passage that sets the scene for the study, gives us some of what we need by way of context and reminds us of the key relevant truths we've discovered so far.

Questions designed to help us think about the passage we are studying. We'll get much, much more out of our times in our study groups if we come having begun to think seriously about the passage we'll be studying. These questions are designed to help us do this, so do come having worked through them. Some are distinctly harder than others, but do have a go at all of them, even if you're not convinced that you can do justice to the question. It will mean the discussions in the groups will be much more informed and thought through.

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

Finally, there is an *Introduction* to the Workbook, which is designed to help us get the most out of the course. The three main things in this Introduction are:

- A guide to studying passages in the *Overview*. We'll find that there're a few differences involved in studying passages in the *Overview*, and this guide gives some suggestions about how to tackle these.
- An outline of the Bible's story. This gives us a birds eye view of the whole Bible, and shows us where we are in the overall story at any point in the course.
- Schematic diagram of the historical events of the Bible and a map of the area covered by the Bible. Referring to these as appropriate will help us place the events we're studying in their context.

STUDYING THE OVERVIEW

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

- *In general we'll not have studied what happens immediately before the passage we're looking at.* In the *Overview*, we're trying to find out what happens in the Bible as a whole. In order to do this we need to go through the entire Bible, focusing on the key events and seeing how these relate to each other. The constraints of time mean we'll usually not study much of the immediate context of the event. It's an axiom of good Bible study that we must put the passage in its context, both immediate and biblical. In most Bible study, limitations of time mean we focus on the immediate context at the expense of the overall biblical context, but in the *Overview* it's the other way round.
- *Many of the passages we'll be studying are much longer than we're used to.* This is partly a result of the need to study at least some of the immediate context of the key events. More importantly, it is also a result of trying to get the whole of a major event into one study in order that we might understand it and not get distracted by detail. Finally, much of the OT is written to be read in relatively large sections, so we won't do justice to it if we don't study it in large sections.
- *Much of the OT can't be applied in the way we're used to doing in the NT.* One reason is that the OT books are written to or about people who're very different to us. They are usually Israelites rather than Christians and they are often unique figures with unique roles in God's plan. This doesn't mean we can't learn from them, but we'll need to think harder before we can make the transition from them to us. Far more crucially, *much of the Bible is not actually about us and what we should do, but rather about God and what He is doing*, and we don't know how to apply this sort of material. This is true in the NT as well, but it is more obvious in the OT.

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

Putting passages in their context

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

Studying long passages

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

In order to focus on the author's main points, we must first identify them. One of the best ways to begin to do this is to see what are the main steps in the author's argument, i.e. how the passage 'subdivides'. There are two reasons for doing this:

- Dividing the passage into 'subsections' which deal with one sub-point makes the passage's argument more manageable. These subsections are often the right level of detail to work at, better than verses or sentences. If we get them 'right' then we're working with the steps the author himself used. In order to be clear about what sub-point is being made in a subsection, it is well worth working out a 'subtitle' for each subsection which summarises the sub-point clearly, accurately and succinctly.
- Once we've worked out the main steps in the argument we can then see how they fit together and so see what the argument as a whole is all about. In practice, when we do this we'll often find that the subsections we initially identified don't fit together well, i.e. we haven't got the right subsections. This may appear depressing, but it's actually a key step in grasping the passage better. It shows us that we're not yet on the author's wavelength and we need to think further to work out what his argument really is. We mustn't give up, but must keep mulling over the passage until the pieces do fit. When we eventually do see how the author's argument is developing and how all the steps fit in, then we'll not simply be thinking on the biblical author's wavelength, we'll be thinking on God's wavelength (since He chose to use these authors), and this is a prize worth working hard for.

Subdividing and subtitling a passage is thus both an important exercise and a difficult one. It's one we need to begin to do near the beginning of our study, but we'll need to keep refining our conclusions as we come to understand the passage better. In order to remind us to engage in this exercise – and to help us get into the habit of doing this with every passage we study – a question on subdividing and subtitling the passage comes in every study. Often it's the first question, but don't simply do it quickly and then forget about it. Work at it, and keep revising it as your study progresses. In a few studies you'll be explicitly asked to revise your subdivisions and subtitles later in the study, but constraints of space mean this can't be done too often. Even if you're not specifically asked to do this, do try to do it. Subdivisions and subtitles that accurately reflect the author's argument are an extremely useful 'end-product' of a study. They give us a 'handle' on the passage, something to remember the passage by and the foundation for applying it to ourselves correctly.

Applying what we learn from the Overview

Many Christians find the OT hard to apply. The reason for this is that, often, the way we expect the Bible to change us is not the way God intends the Bible to change us! Clearly, this is something we need to resolve for all our Bible study, even though it's in our study of the OT that the problem is most acute.

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

God wants to transform *us*, i.e. our attitudes, aspirations and hopes and the way we think,. This is why His Word emphasizes the need for us to change the way we *think*. For example, Romans 12:2 tells us to be transformed by the renewing of our *minds*; in Ephesians 1:17-18, Paul's constant prayer is that the Ephesians would come to *know* God better and to *know* what He has done and will do; Ephesians 4:17-18 says the problem with Gentiles (i.e. non-Christians) is their futile *thinking*, their darkened *understanding* and their *ignorance*; Colossians 1:21 describes the Colossians prior to their becoming Christians as being enemies of God in their *minds*; and, finally, in Colossians 1:28-2:3, Paul says that the thing he is labouring towards with all his energy is that all the Christians he is involved with would *completely understand* and *know* Christ. In other words, the Bible wants to change our *mind-sets* and *world-views*. It wants to continue and deepen the changes that began at our conversion. Thus, genuine biblical application is about changing the way we perceive and view God, what He's doing, the world, ourselves and our place in the world, etc.. If this occurs, then radically changed lives will follow naturally and inevitably.

The goal of all Bible study, therefore, should be a transformed world-view, but this is particularly true of the *Overview*. This is because, as we study the whole Bible, we'll find it's all about God and what He's doing. The only thing we can do with this, and the thing we *must* do with this, is to allow it to transform our world-views. In other words, to come to see God more and more at the centre of the universe He's made and rules, instead of seeing ourselves there, and to come to see that what He's working towards is so much greater than what we originally wanted that we'll start to want it and work towards it as well.

What this means for us as we work through the *Overview* is that we shouldn't look for what the Bible is telling us to *do*. Rather, we should allow it to communicate its main message and let it tell us about God and what He's doing (this is not something we'll need to work at, it'll jump out and hit us between the eyes!). What we *will* need to do is allow this to challenge what we previously thought. For example, is the God we see in the Bible the God we believe in? If not, we'll need to change our perception of God. Or, is what we see Him doing what we think He ought to be doing? If not, we'll need to change our understanding of what we think He ought to be doing. Again, is the world as we see it described in the Bible the world we think we know? If not, we'll need to change the way we perceive the world.

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

THE PLOT OR 'STORY LINE' OF THE BIBLE

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

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

1 The Creation and Fall (Genesis 1-11)

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

2 From Abraham to Egypt (Genesis 12-50)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6 Return from exile (Ezra & Nehemiah)

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

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

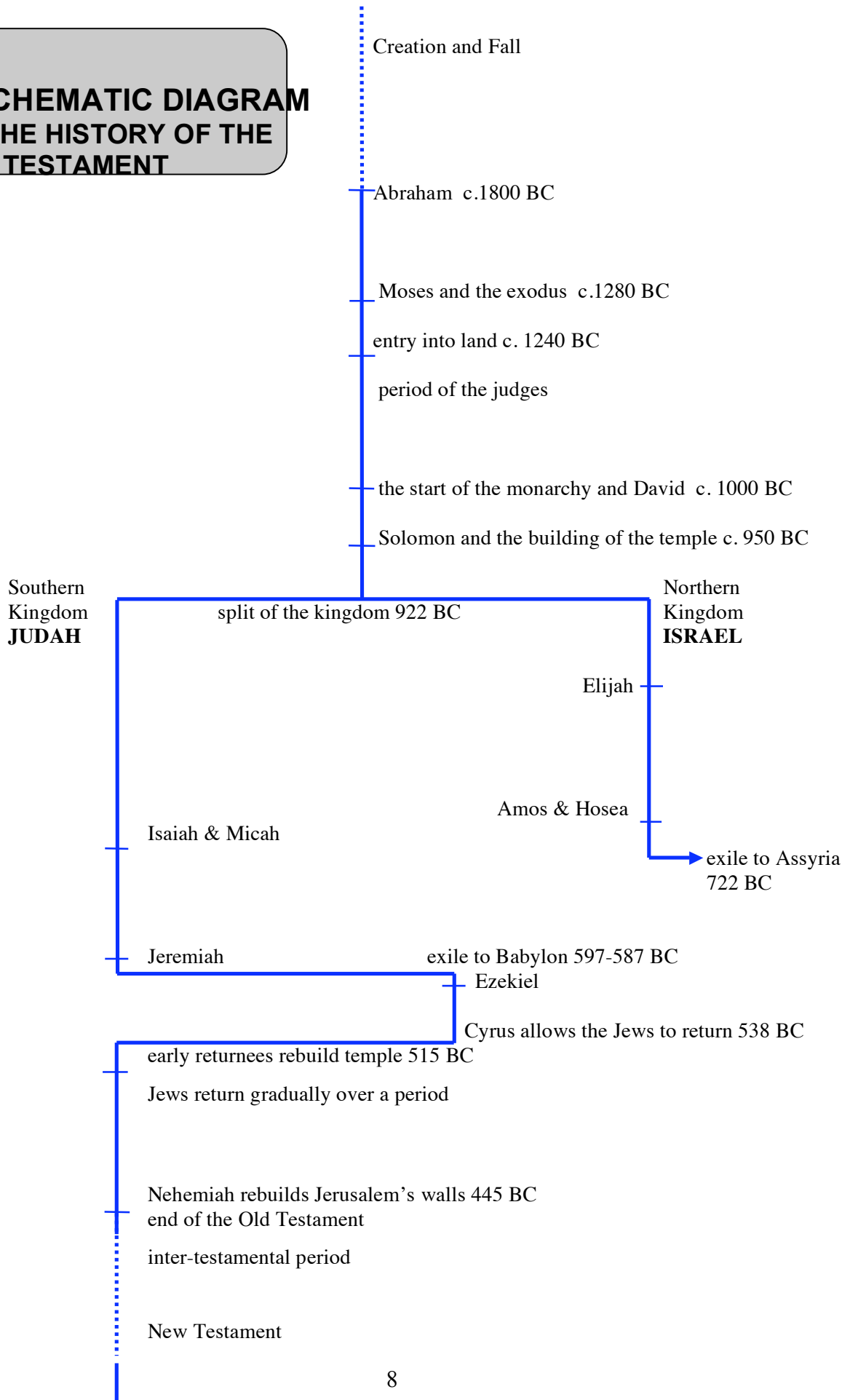
God's promises first really begin to be fulfilled some 400 years later, in the NT, with Jesus' birth, death and resurrection. In Jesus, God provides the king who is indispensable to the fulfilment of all His other promises. In Jesus, God begins the rescue of His people that He promised in the prophets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

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

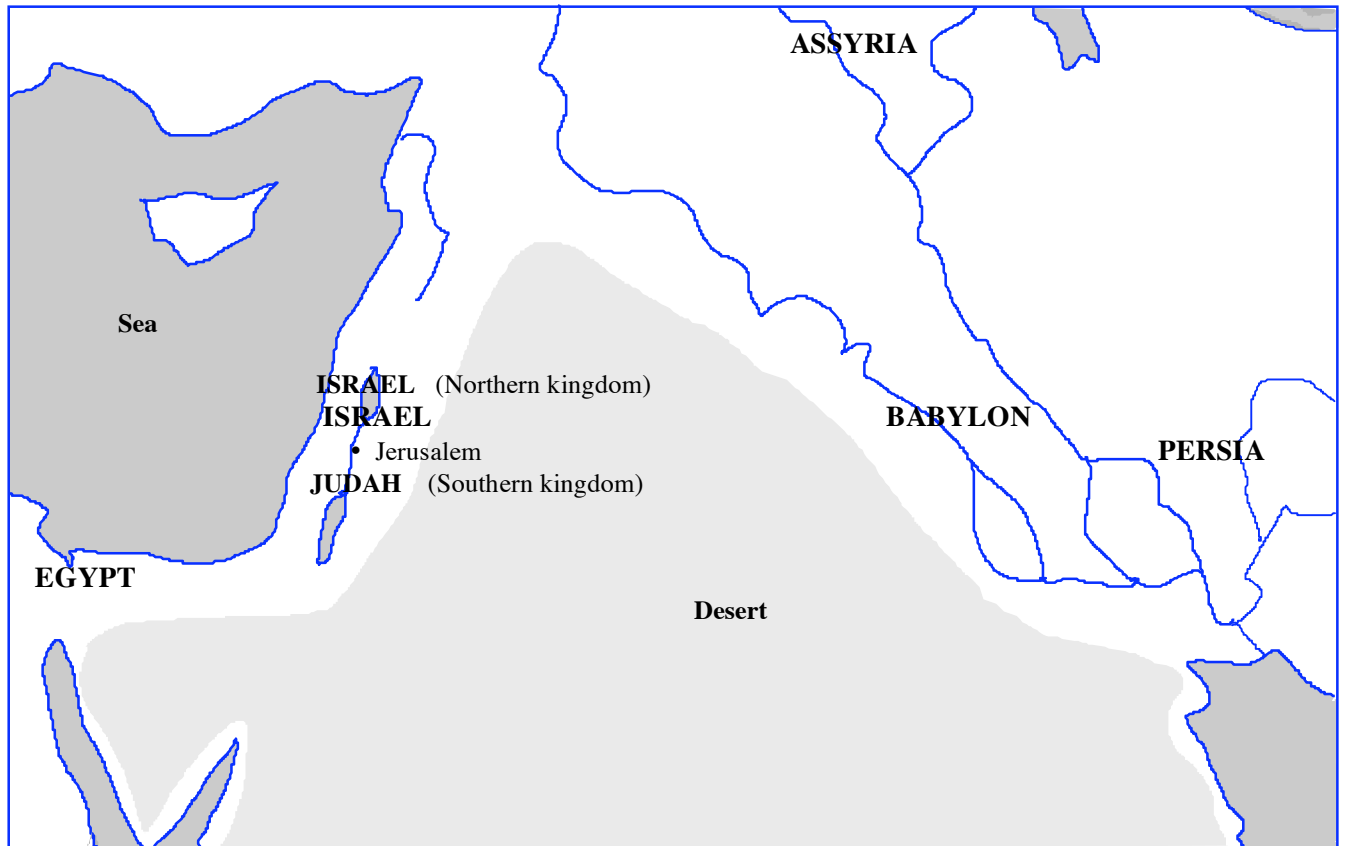
8 Jesus' second coming and the new creation

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

**A SCHEMATIC DIAGRAM
OF THE HISTORY OF THE
OLD TESTAMENT**



MAP SHOWING ISRAEL AND THE MAIN NATIONS AROUND HER



- 5 Note Paul's prayer in 1:15-19a. How is the prayer influenced by God and His plan as described in 1:3-14 (note the 'For this reason')? What is Paul's main underlying request?

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

- 6 What does 1:19b-23 teach us about God's power? How does God's power relate to His plan, i.e. why is Paul telling us about God's power here?

- 7 How does this passage shape your understanding of what God is doing and of what the gospel is all about?

BRIEFING 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE OVERVIEW

WHAT IS THE OVERVIEW?

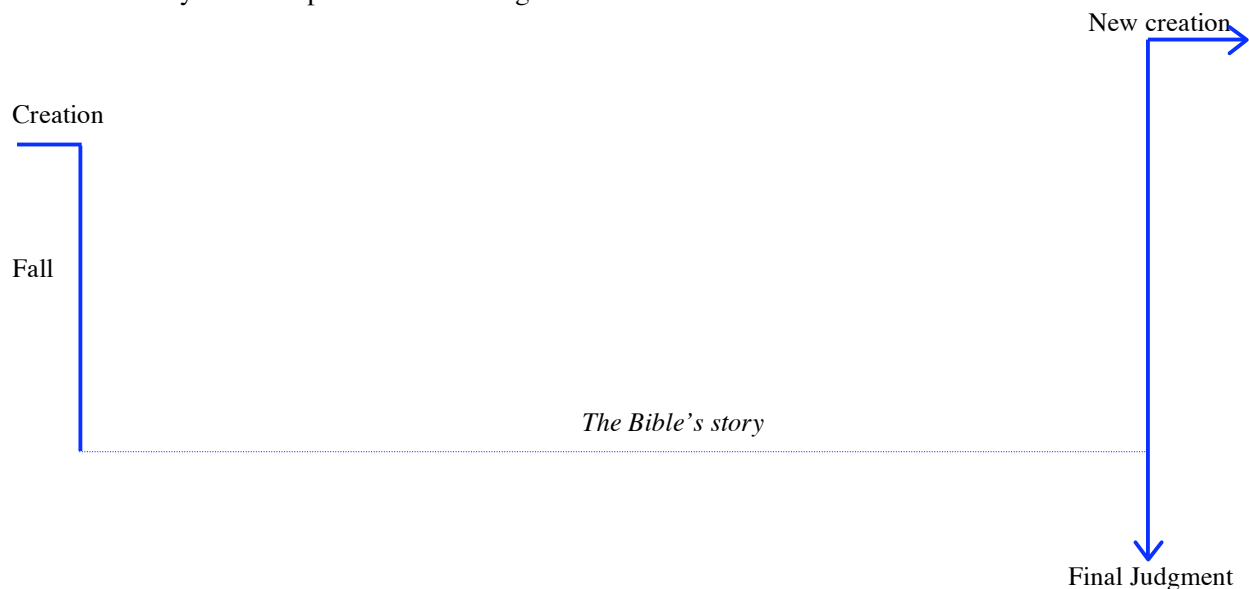
The Bible is one book written by the One God telling us about His one plan for all time and eternity. The *Overview* is a look at the whole Bible in twenty-seven studies which aims to see what this One God has revealed of Himself and to understand what this one great plan for all eternity is and why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

THE BIBLE'S BASIC 'PLOT' OR STORY LINE

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

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

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



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THIS ONE OVERALL STORY?

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

- **The Bible's main overall story communicates the most important lessons God wants us to learn.** Like most good authors, God's main message is seen in what His book *as a whole* is about, not in just what some corners of it are about. The individual parts of the Bible are important because they contribute towards the whole, but they are just parts, each teaching only one facet of God's truth. When we have the 'big picture' of the Bible it will become much clearer which issues are central to God's revelation and what exactly God is saying about them. Understanding the Bible's overall story, therefore, will help us focus on and understand correctly the most important issues God is communicating and it will prevent us from being distracted by less important issues. What we will see over the year is that the Bible's overall story is of God and His one great plan for all eternity.

The Bible's overall story is particularly important today because Christians are losing sight of what God is really doing i.e. that He is working out His plan for all eternity, and so is working on an infinitely bigger scale and for infinitely more important ends than we usually think. Christians, increasingly, are concerned with what is happening in this world here and now and, in particular, with themselves. We badly need to regain the biblical picture of the God who created and rules the whole world and who is working towards His great eternal goal of putting everything under Jesus. Seeing the Bible as a whole will give us this biblical picture and show us that it is not simply one truth among many, but *the* truth the whole Bible is teaching.

- **The Bible's overall story is the best way to learn more about God.** By far the best way to know God better is to see what He does, because He acts in accord with His character. In fact, time and time again in the Bible God says that He wants to be known through what He does (e.g. Exodus 6:6-8, 9:14-16, 10:1-2). However, the main thing God is doing is working out His big, overarching plan, so the best way to get to know God better is to see Him working out this plan. This will show us what His main concerns are, how He goes about achieving His purposes, what His main attributes are, how the various facets of His character fit together, etc. Knowing God better is one of the most important things a Christian can do, since the first and greatest commandment is to love Him with all our hearts, souls, minds and strength (e.g. Mark 12:29-30), and we must know Him to do this.
- **The Bible's main overall plot enables us to make much more sense of all the many different things God is doing and revealing in the Bible.** God and His one great plan for eternity gives us the *context* for every individual part of the Bible. Almost everything God does and says is making a contribution to this overall story and is meant to be understood in this way, not taken on its own out of context. If we study the individual books in this context it will be far clearer what is being said in each of them and why it matters.

HOW SHOULD STUDYING THE OVERVIEW CHANGE US?

Many Christians think that applying the Bible means trying to change their lifestyles; adding, removing or modifying things they *do*. However, genuine biblical application involves far more fundamental changes than this. Biblical application is about changing who we *are*; changing our attitudes, ambitions, priorities and world-views, i.e. what we think life is all about and where we fit into the world.

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

For more about how to apply the *Overview*, see the Introduction to this Workbook.

STUDY 2 - GENESIS 1-3

BEGINNINGS AND ENDS

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

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

1 Divide Genesis 1-3 into its main sections and give each section a title that summarizes what is happening.

2 What are 3 or 4 important things Genesis 1-2 teaches us about God?

What are 3 or 4 important, basic things Genesis 1-2 teaches us about creation as God originally made it?

3 In what ways do Adam and Eve go wrong in 3:1-6? In the light of Genesis 1-2, why is their sin so serious and what is at the heart of it?

- 4 What are the main things that happen as a result of their sin (both immediately and as a result of God's judgment)?

How is God's original creation, as we saw it in Genesis 1-2, changed as a result of Adam and Eve's sin?

- 5 What does Genesis 3 teach us about God? Is there any evidence of hope in this chapter?

- 6 Look ahead to Revelation 21:1-5, 22:1-5. What happens at the end of the Bible to the consequences of Adam and Eve's sin?

What does this glimpse of the end of the story suggest about what God is doing in the rest of the Bible (i.e. from Genesis 4 to Revelation 20)?

- 7 How does Genesis 3 help us to understand the world today? Why is that important?

STUDY 3 - GENESIS 6, 8:13-9:29

THE FLOOD

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

- 1 Read Genesis 6-9 to set this passage in its context. Divide these chapters into their main subsections and give each subsection a summarizing title.
- 2 What are the main things 6:5 teaches us about human sinfulness?
- 3 What are 3 or 4 important things 6:5-6:22 teaches us about sin and how God responds to it?
- 4 What are the main things 6:5-6:22 teaches us about God's rescue of Noah. What was Noah's role in this?

- 5 What does God tell Noah in 8:13-9:17? What similarities are there with Genesis 1:26-29 (and the significance)?

- 6 What do the events of 9:18-29 add to the story? What is the significance of God's promise in 8:21-22, 9:8-17?

- 7 What remained the same as a result of the flood? What changed? So what did the flood achieve?

- 8 What are the 2 or 3 main things this teaches us about what it will take actually to solve the problem of the Fall?

- 9 What implications do the lessons of the flood have for us today?

STUDY 4 - GENESIS 12 & 15

GOD'S PROMISES TO ABRAHAM

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

- 1 Read Genesis 11-17 to put chapters 12 and 15 into their context. Divide chapters 12 and 15 into their main subsections and give each subsection a title.

- 2 Summarize the main things God promises Abraham in 12:1-7. What are the key additional promises God makes in 15:1-7 and 17:1-8?

In what ways do these promises in Genesis 12-17 relate to what happened at the Fall and what does this teach us about what God is beginning to do?

- 3 What do you think is the significance of God beginning His plan for Abram and his descendants with promises?

- 4 Did anything prompt the promises of 12:1-3? Under what circumstances will they be fulfilled?

What does God's answer in 15:9-21 to Abram's question in 15:8 mean? (cf. Jeremiah 34:18-20 in its context of 34:8-20, but note that Jeremiah 34 refers to a totally different covenant.)

- 5 How long is it before God begins to fulfil the various elements of His promise to Abram and what does this teach us?

- 6 How does Abram respond to God's promises in 12:1-9 and 15:1-6 and what does this teach us about what faith is?

What does 12:10-20 reveal about Abram, and why does the Bible want us to know about this side of his character?

- 7 How do these promises to Abram affect our understanding of what Jesus came to do (since he came to fulfil them, e.g. Luke 1:68-73, Galatians 3:14)?

BRIEFING 2

GOD'S PROMISES

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GOD MAKING PROMISES

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

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

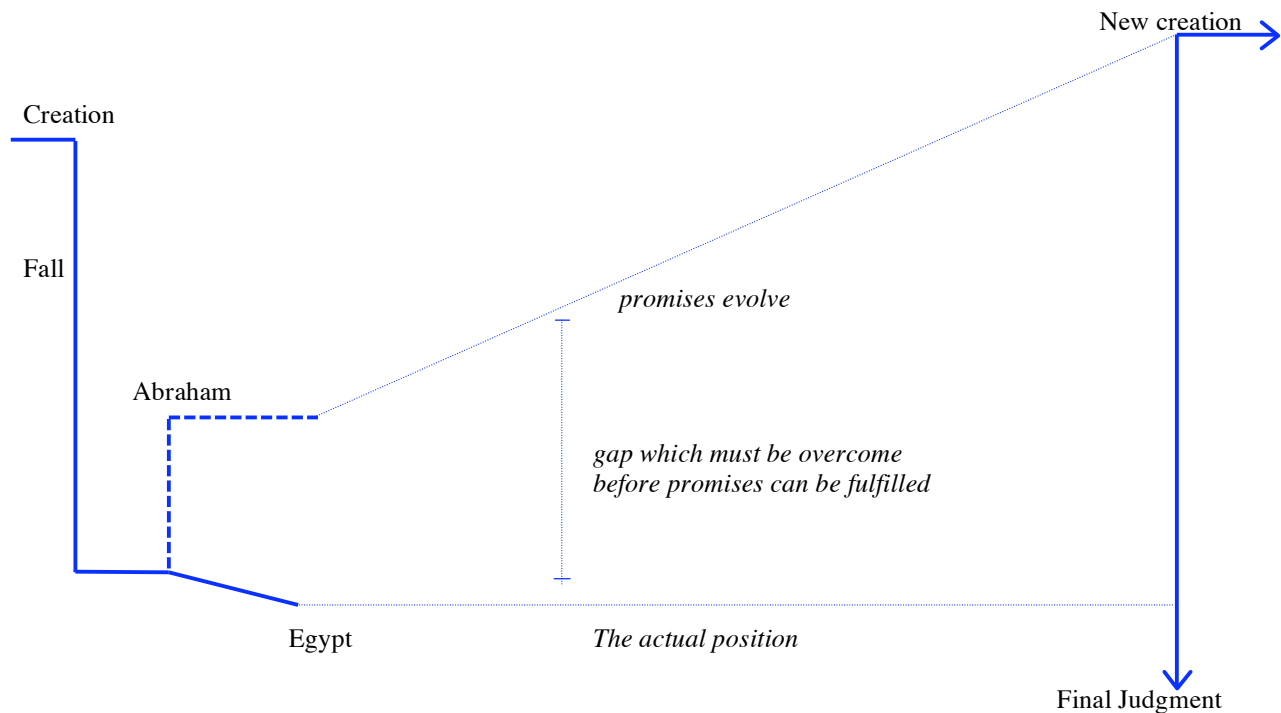
THE FUTURE OF GOD'S PLAN

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

As we examine how God goes about reversing the Fall there are three issues we must think about, and most of what we'll be doing in the rest of the *Overview* is seeing what happens to these. They are:

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

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



STUDY 5 - EXODUS 2:23-6:8

'I AM WHO I AM'

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

- 1 Read Exodus 1:1-6:8 to put this passage in its context. To what extent have God's promises in Genesis 12-17 been fulfilled by Exodus 2:23?

- 2 Divide 2:23-6:8 into its main subdivisions and give each subdivision a title that summarizes what is happening.

- 3 In 2:23-3:10, what are the two main things God says He will do? Why does He need to do both?

- 4 In 2:23-3:10, how does God intend to rescue Israel? In 3:11-4:17, what objections does Moses raise and how does God answer each one?

- 5 What responses does Moses get from the Israelites and from Pharaoh? What issues are at stake at the close of chapter 5?

Why is God concerned that Israel should see what He will do and know what He is like (6:1,7)?

- 6 What do we learn of God in 2:23-3:10?

In the ancient world – and particularly the biblical world – a person’s name revealed a lot about them (e.g. what they did, so ‘Smith’ was the blacksmith). What does God’s revelation of His name in 3:14-15 teach us about Him? What does 6:1-8 add to this?

- 7 Why do you think God chose to reveal these particular truths about Himself to the Israelites in Egypt?

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

- 4 What is Israel rescued *for* (see e.g. 6:8, 7:16, 8:1,20, 9:1,13, 10:3, 12:25) and why are both these important? What else does this passage teach us about the subject of God's rescue of his people?

- 5 What is Israel to do in order to remember these events? Why does Israel need to remember (e.g. 12:24-27, cf. 3:15, 6:6-8)?

- 6 To whom is God revealing Himself in the plagues and what do they reveal about Him (see 7:3-5,17, 8:10,22-23, 9:14-18,24,29, 10:1-2,6,14, 11:7-9)? Why is God concerned to do this?

- 7 What were the main implications of the plagues and the Passover for Israel at the time? What relevance do these events have for us today?

- 8 How does this passage's revelation of God and what He is doing challenge your concept of what God is like?

STUDY 7 - EXODUS 19,20 & 24

AT MOUNT SINAI

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

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

- 1 Summarize the message of Exodus so far (prior to chapter 19). What has it taught us about the purpose and character of God?
- 2 Divide the passage into its main subsections and give each a title.
- 3 In chapter 19, how will Israel be blessed if she keeps the covenant that God makes with her? What does this mean, and why is it a great blessing?

What relationship is there between this blessing and those promised to Abraham?

- 4 What must Israel do to obtain this blessing? How does this differ from the Abrahamic covenant? What does this imply about the relationship between the Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants?

How does Israel respond to God's covenant in this passage (e.g. in 19:8, 20:18-19, 24:1-7)? What does this show they are failing to understand?

- 5 What are the main things revealed by the manner of God's appearance in 19:10-25? Why does God want Israel to understand all this (see 20:20 for part of the answer)?

- 6 What are the two main dimensions to the law God gives Israel in 20:2-17? How do the first 4 commandments (i.e. 20:3-11) relate to what we have seen in Exodus so far?

- 7 Summarize the main things God is teaching Israel about the relationship with Himself that He's calling her into. Reflect on what that means for you and your own relationship with the Lord.

BRIEFING 3

DEALING WITH THE CAUSE OF THE FALL

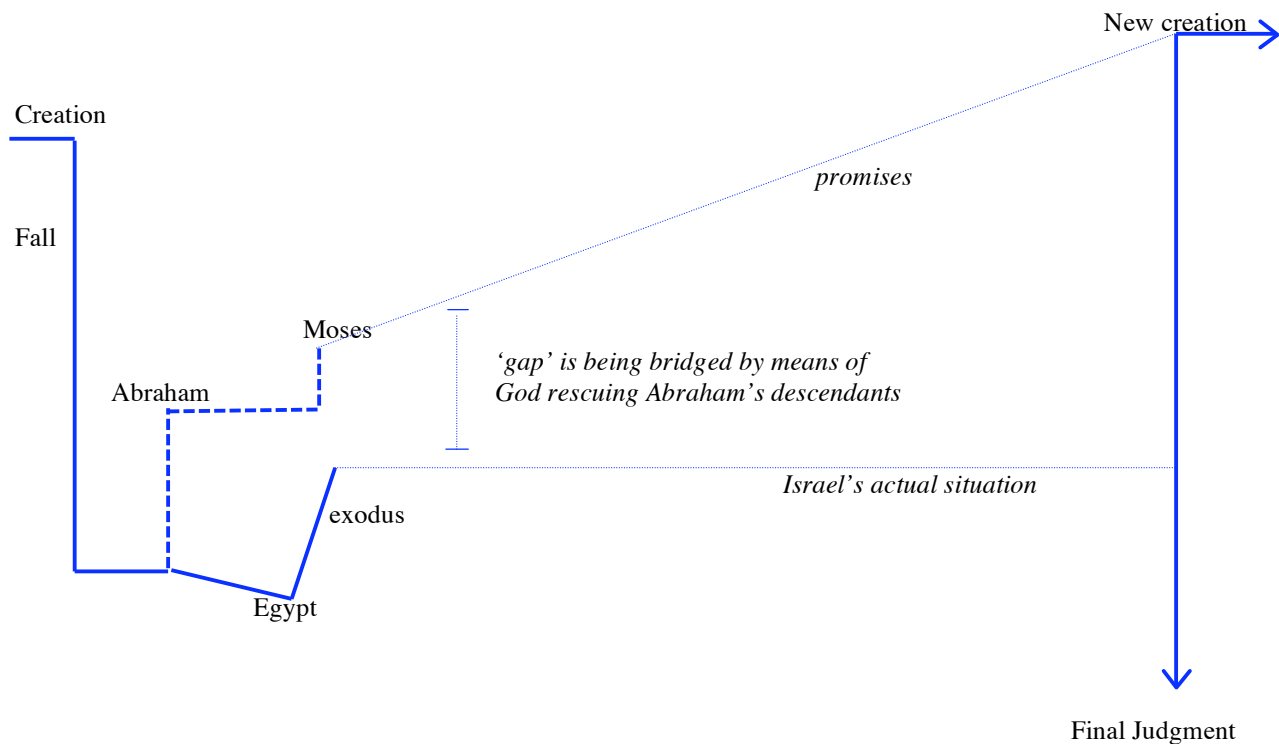
THE MOSAIC COVENANT OFFERS GREAT BLESSINGS

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

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

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

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



BUT THE CAUSE OF THE FALL MUST BE DEALT WITH FIRST

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

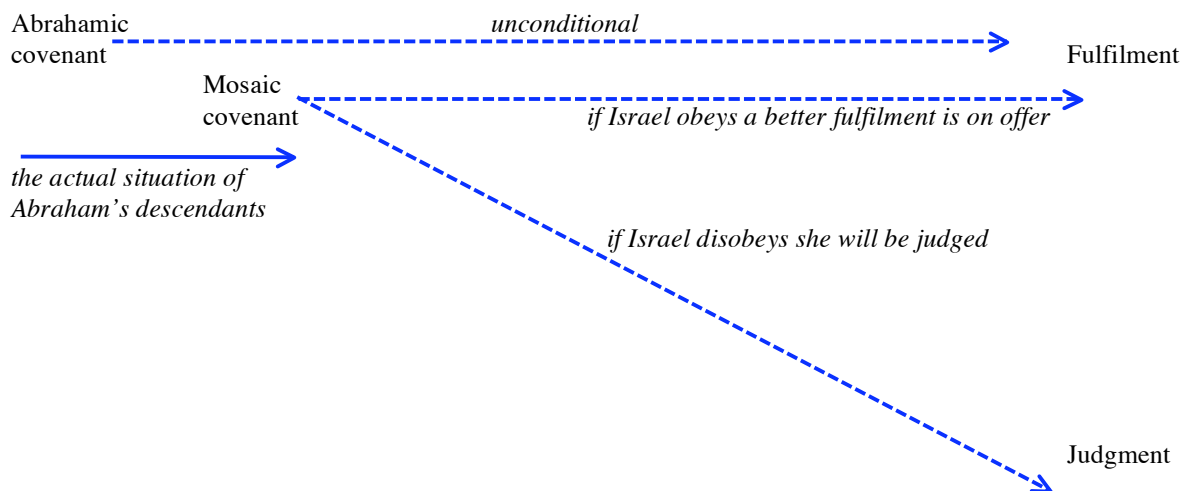
The reason for this difference is that in the Abrahamic covenant God committed Himself to dealing with the *effects* of the Fall, but said virtually nothing about the *cause* of the Fall, i.e. sin. That was not an oversight, it simply wasn't the issue when He made His covenant with Abraham. Now that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

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

At first sight it might appear that the Mosaic covenant contradicts the Abrahamic covenant, but this is not the case. God is still committed to fulfilling His promises: the Mosaic covenant is simply the *route* He is using at this stage in His plan to fulfil His promises. If this route does not work He will find another route to fulfil His promises. But the Mosaic covenant reveals the crucial truth that whatever route God eventually uses to fulfil His promises, it must deal with the cause of the Fall. It also reveals much about how God will eventually deal with the problem of sin, as we'll see in the next few studies. The Mosaic covenant is not a mistake or a digression, but rather a huge and crucial step forward in God's plan.

One of the most important things to notice about the Mosaic covenant is that in it God is promising to deal with the effects of the Fall *Himself*, but He is giving *Israel* a large and crucial responsibility for dealing with the cause. When God rescued Noah, He committed Himself neither to dealing with the cause of the Fall, nor reversing its effects, and we saw how little that rescue accomplished. Now, in His rescue of Israel, God is committing Himself to dealing with more than half the problem, and the question is: will that be enough to deal with the problem of the Fall?

The diagram we have been using is useful for showing the way God deals with the effects of the Fall, but a different diagram is better for showing how the cause of the Fall is dealt with and how the covenants relate to each other. Again, the dashed lines represent promises while the solid line shows what is happening historically.



STUDY 8 - EXODUS 32-34

THE GOLDEN CALF

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

- 1 What are the main things God has revealed about Himself to Israel so far in Exodus? What has He said about how Israel is to treat Him?
- 2 Subdivide and subtitle the passage.
- 3 What implications does Israel's sinful behaviour in 32:1-6 have for Israel's chances of obtaining God's promises? What implications does this have for God's plan?
- 4 What are the grounds on which Moses pleads in 32:1-9 and what is God's answer? What lessons can we learn for how we pray?

STUDY 9 - LEVITICUS 16

A SACRIFICE FOR SINS

God has begun to fulfil His promises to Abraham and has rescued Israel from Egypt as the first step in this. Israel is now at the foot of Mount Sinai receiving the Mosaic covenant, and she is discovering how great God's promised blessings are. In particular, God is offering her a very privileged relationship with an incomparably great God. But there is one major problem. In order to enjoy what God has promised Israel must obey His commandments, and she has already failed spectacularly. God has relented and has not destroyed her, and instead He now dwells in the finished tabernacle in the midst of her (Exodus 40:33-38). However, Israel's predilection towards sinning raises all sorts of questions, e.g. how will Israel inherit the promises if she continues to sin? How can God continue to dwell in the midst of a sinful people and not destroy them? Leviticus highlights the problem by showing the Israelites more about how 'unclean' they and the things around them are (i.e. how unacceptable to God, e.g. Leviticus 11-15). It also shows how the sacrificial system begins to answer the questions that have been raised, and the Day of Atonement gives us the greatest example of the sacrificial system and what it accomplishes.

1 What is the Most Holy Place (see also Hebrews 9:1-8)? What restrictions and conditions are there on entering it and why are there these restrictions and conditions (see also 10:1-3)?

2 What are the five sacrifices that Aaron has to offer? How, where, when and why are each of these offered?

What truth does the scapegoat illustrate and what truth does the killed goat illustrate? Why are both pictures given? How do these pictures help us to understand more about what Jesus has done?

- 3 What questions were we left with in Exodus 32-34, and how does the Day of Atonement begin to answer these?

- 4 So, how successful was the Day of Atonement at dealing with the problem of sin? What then does 16:30 mean (see also Hebrews 9:9-13)?

- 5 So, does the Day of Atonement help in any way to avert the problems we saw in Exodus 32-34? What clues does it give us about how God will eventually properly solve the problem of sin?

- 6 What is the main thing you have learned from this study? How does this affect your view of God and what He is doing?

- 7 The problem of sin is one of the Bible's key themes. Summarize several of the main things we've learned about sin from Genesis 3 to Leviticus 16.

STUDY 10 - LEVITICUS 26 & NUMBERS 13-14

THE MOSAIC COVENANT

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

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

1 Subdivide and subtitle both Leviticus 26 and Numbers 13-14.

2 In Leviticus 26, what are the main areas (or categories) in which Israel will be rewarded if she obeys God? How do these areas of reward compare with the promises made to Abraham?

What are the main areas in which Israel will be punished if she disobeys? How do these areas of punishment compare with the promises made to Abraham?

3 How, therefore, does the Mosaic covenant relate to the Abrahamic covenant?

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

- 5 What is God's response to Israel's sin? How does this differ from His response to her previous sins and what does this teach us about God?

- 6 Summarize the main points being made in Leviticus 26:40-45. What do each of these mean and why are they important?

- 7 What do you think are the main lessons of these chapters for us today, and how should these affect our view of what God has done for us in Jesus?

- 8 What do these chapters add to your understanding of God's plan to undo, and to deal with, what went wrong at the Fall? (Use this question to review how all that we've studied so far fits together.)

BRIEFING 4

ENTERING THE LAND

THE EXODUS COMPLETED

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

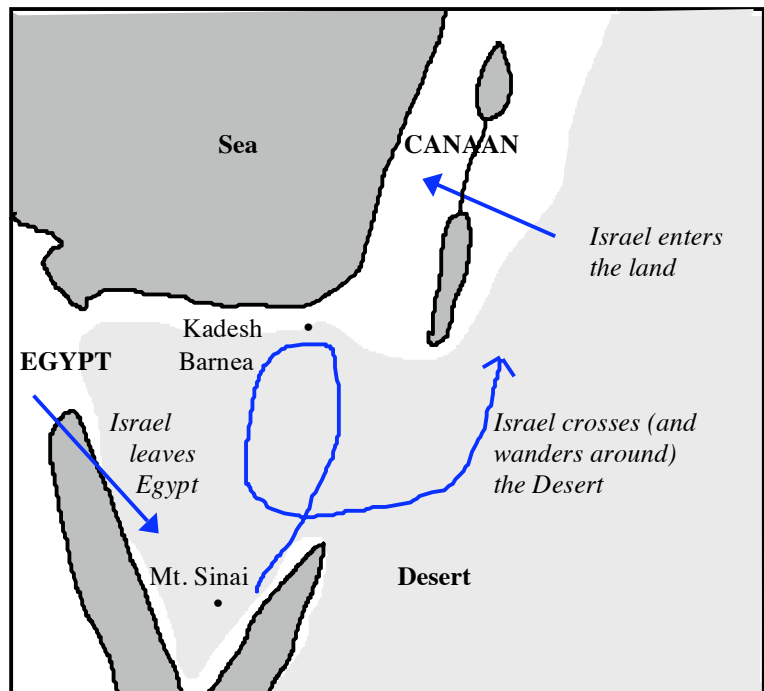
With the exodus completed we can now see that God's rescue of His people consists of three distinct elements. All three are integral to the rescue and all three have their parallels in Jesus' rescue of us, as we'll see when we get to the New Testament. The three phases of the rescue are:

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

THE FIRST 200 YEARS IN THE LAND

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

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



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THE PROMISES ARE, THEREFORE, ONLY PARTIALLY FULFILLED

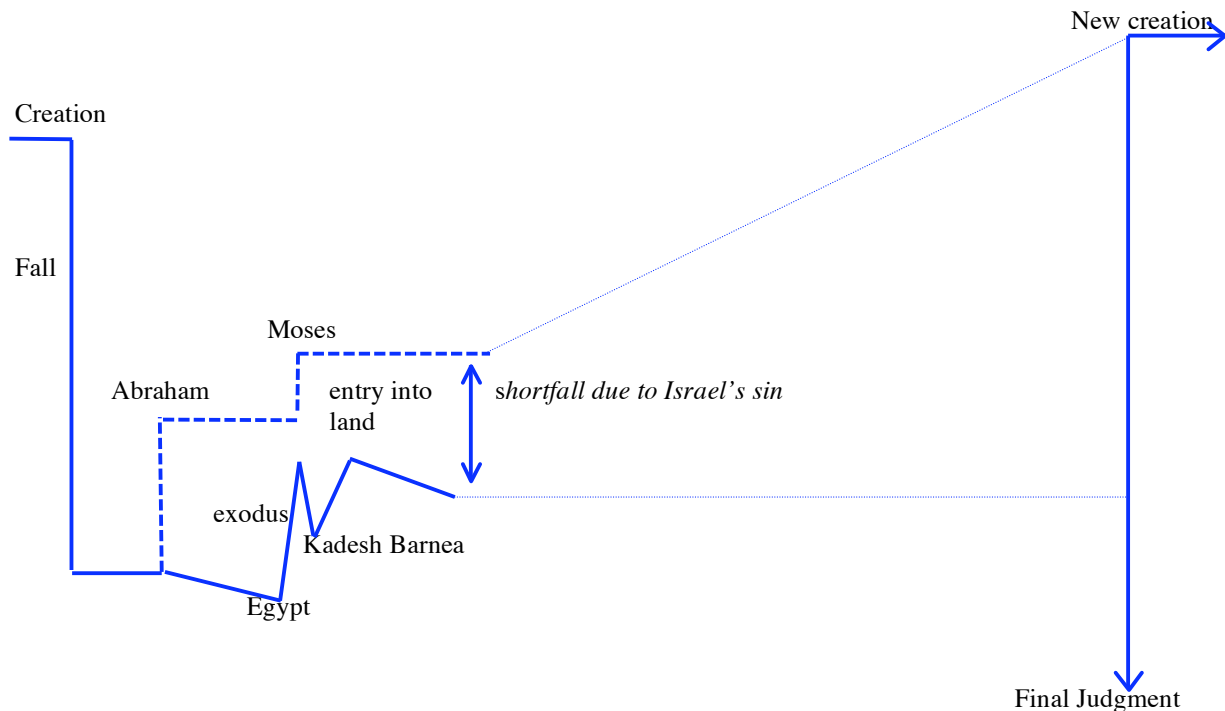
Thus, Israel is now in the promised land, but she only has a *limited* fulfilment of God’s promises to her:

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

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

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

Our diagram of the Bible’s story now looks as follows:



STUDY 11 – 1 SAMUEL 8 AND 15

THE START OF THE MONARCHY

The events of 1 Samuel 8 come some 250 years after those of Numbers 13-14. For details of this period, see the diagram of the '*Historical Overview: Exodus to David*' in the Introduction to this Workbook.

God's plan to put right what went wrong at the Fall appears to have stalled. Despite the fact that Israel is now in the land of Canaan (see *Briefing 4*), she is enjoying little of what God has promised. She occupies only some of the land, has little prosperity, has no peace and is far from a great nation. Worst of all, her relationship with God is tottering (e.g. Judges 17) and sustained only by God's grace. The direct cause of many of her problems is that she is oppressed by the other people inhabiting Canaan, particularly the Philistines (e.g. 1 Samuel 13:16-22). However, the ultimate cause of Israel's suffering is her unrelenting sinfulness (Judges 2). For God's plan to progress something must change.

- 1 Before studying these chapters we must establish their context by seeing what's been said about a king in Israel. Look at Genesis 17:6, 49:10, Numbers 24:15-19, Deuteronomy 17:14-20 and Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25. In principle, is the idea of a king in Israel good or bad? From Deuteronomy 17, what should the king be like?

What does the writer of Judges imply that a king might help with and why is this important in the context of the Mosaic covenant?

- 2 Read 1 Samuel 7-15 to get the flow of the story. Subdivide and subtitle chapters 8 & 15.
- 3 What are the two main things that chapter 8 implies that a king is expected to do? In Israel's historical context, why are these both important?

4 In chapter 8, what is wrong with the people's demand for a king? What does 8:20 show they have forgotten?

5 What are the main ways in which Saul sins in chapter 15, and what implications does his sin have for Saul himself and for the whole of God's plan?

What does Saul's sin here teach us about what constitutes serious sin in God's eyes?

6 How does this passage challenge your view of what sin is, the extent to which you sin, and how you should respond to this?

7 Summarize the main truths you have learned about the monarchy in Israel. How does this help us better understand Jesus our King?

STUDY 12 - 2 SAMUEL 7

THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

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

- 1 Subdivide and subtitle the passage. What is the main issue in this chapter?
- 2 What is symbolized by God dwelling in a house rather than in a tent?
- 3 What is the house that God promises David (v11)? In the context of what we've seen in the previous two studies, why is this house promised to David important?
- 4 What are the three or four main things God promises David's descendant? What is the idea that crops up in each of them? In the light of the Mosaic covenant, why is this important?

STUDY 13 - 1 KINGS 10-12 & 2 KINGS 17

THE DECLINE OF ISRAEL

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

1 Read 1 Kings 4:20-34, 6:1-7:12, 8:1-21, 9:1-9 in order to put the passage in context. Subdivide and subtitle 1 Kings 10-12.

2 To what extent are God's promises to Abraham and David and the blessings promised to Moses fulfilled in 1 Kings 4-10? What does this teach us about kings like David and Solomon?

To what extent are God's promises to Abraham and David and the blessings promised to Moses fulfilled in 1 Kings 11-12? So, is Solomon the descendant promised in 2 Samuel 7?

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

BRIEFING 5

A RULER FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

THE SEARCH FOR THE RIGHT RULER

One of the main strands of the story of Judges 1 to 2 Samuel 7 is that the right leader will help deal with Israel's sin and failure to inherit God's promises. Thus, Judges shows how a leader like a judge helps, but indicates that this is not enough. It implies that a better ruler, a king, is necessary, as we've seen.

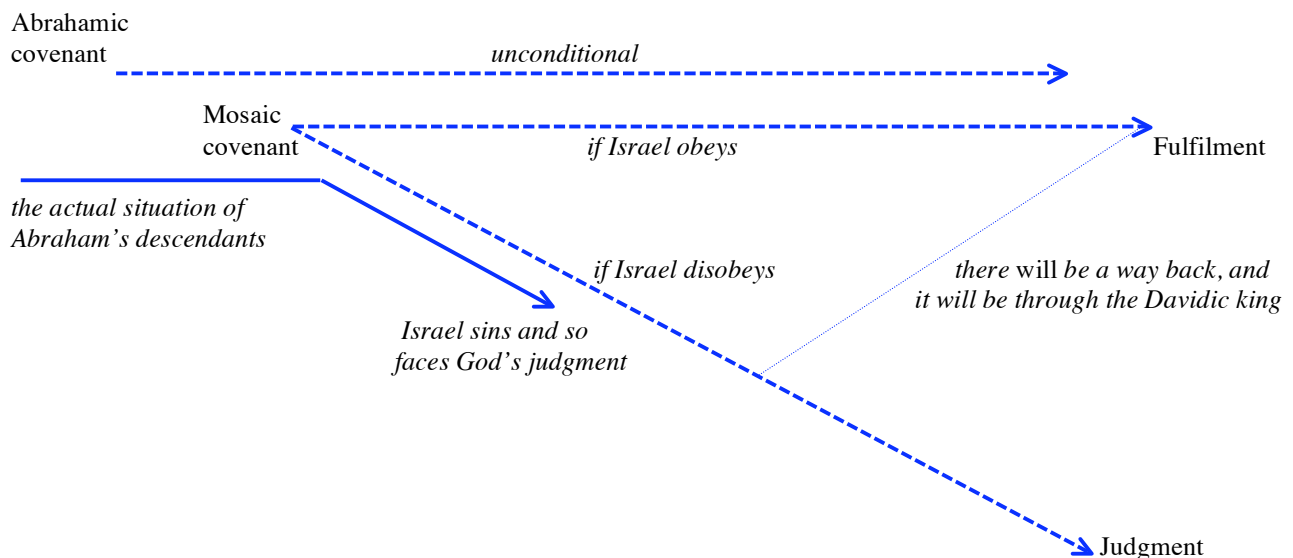
In 1 Samuel, the first candidate to be the necessary, right leader is the priest, but the sons of the priest sin (e.g. 1 Samuel 2:12), implying that the line of the priests cannot be entrusted with the job of providing Israel with ongoing godly rule. Similarly, the sons of even a godly judge like Samuel sin (1 Samuel 8:3). The next candidate for the job of leading Israel is the king, and at first this does not look promising either. The first king sins badly (e.g. 1 Samuel 15), as does the son of even a godly king like David, as we've seen. However, God makes His covenant with David, and this changes everything. We now know where the right ruler will come from, so from now on the search for the right leader narrows down to the search for the right king.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS COVENANT

God's covenant with David is vital. In it God is promising that David's descendant will not only help Israel do what is right, he will actually *succeed* in accomplishing what is necessary for God's promises to be fulfilled. Further, as a result of him Israel will enjoy these blessings *permanently*. They will have the land, peace in it, God dwelling with them and right rule forever. This is extremely important because at last we can begin to see the *means* by which God will fulfil His promises and plan.

Thus, God's revelation of how He will deal with the cause of the Fall develops, just as His promise to deal with the consequences of the Fall develops. In the Mosaic covenant, He gives Israel the responsibility to deal with the cause by obeying His commands and not sinning. As Israel fails in this responsibility He provides the sacrificial system and leaders to help. Now He says that one day He will provide a leader who will actually solve the problem completely. Note, however, that we do not yet know how this Davidic king will solve the problem, nor has he yet come. All we have currently is the first explicit promise that there will be a solution. Meanwhile Israel continues sinning and heading for judgment.

Our diagram focusing on the covenants and the solution to the cause of the Fall now looks like this:



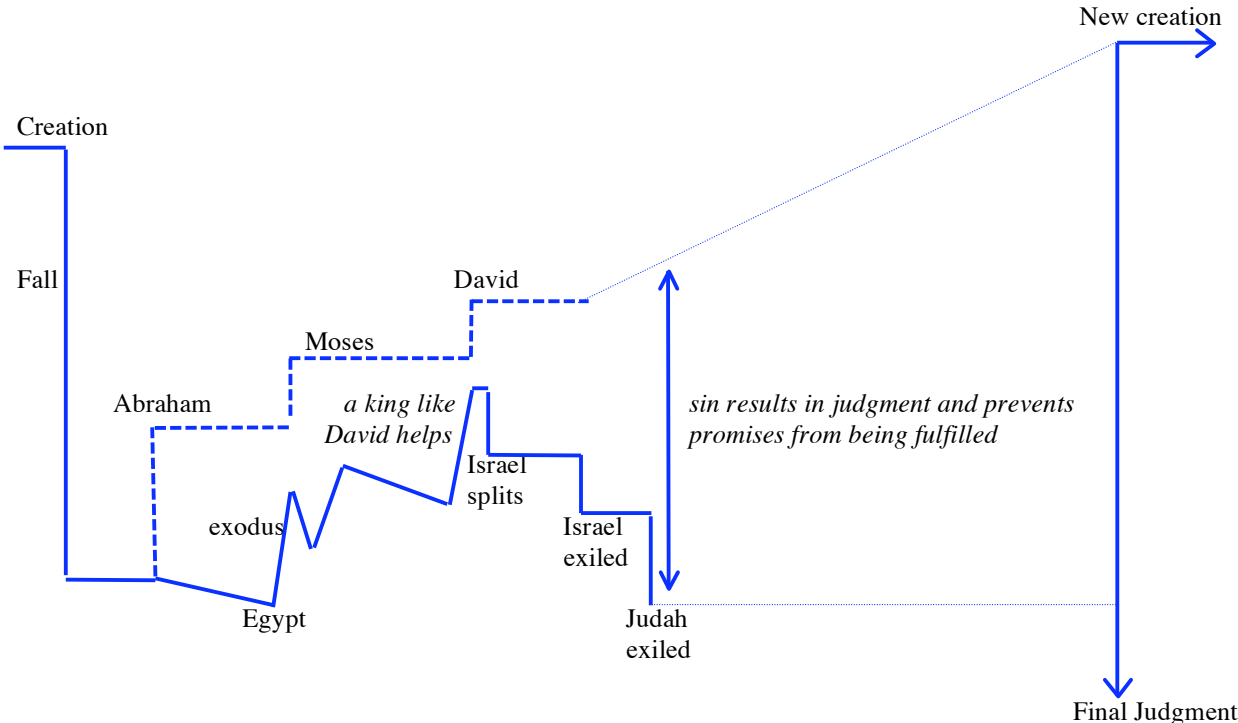
THE HISTORICAL FULFILMENT OVER THE NEXT 400 YEARS

The story of 2 Samuel 8–2 Kings 25 is of how the king promised to David is not found in the next 400 years, as we’ve already begun to see. Israel reaches her peak under David and Solomon, but even then the promises are still not quite fulfilled, as we’ve seen. Nevertheless, under these kings Israel comes nearer than at any other time to inheriting what God has promised. Godly kings like David and Solomon at the beginning of his reign really do help hugely. After Solomon, the state of Israel declines over the next 350 years until all the punishments of Leviticus 26 come to pass and she is conquered and exiled. The decline of Israel during this period is not uniform. There are good times and bad, with a few reasonably good kings and some dire ones, but never the promised one. However, there are 3 great, decisive steps down which culminate in the total demise of Israel as a nation, and we’ve just studied the first two. These are:

- *The kingdom of Israel divides into two.* This is a result of Solomon’s sin and takes place at his death in 922 BC, as we’ve seen. The northern kingdom is called Israel (which is confusing) and is the bigger, containing 10 tribes. The southern kingdom is called Judah and only consists of 2 tribes, but it also contains the key institutions like the Davidic monarchy, the city of Jerusalem that God has chosen and the religious centre – i.e. the temple with the ark of the covenant.
- *The northern kingdom, Israel, is conquered and exiled.* This occurs 200 years after Solomon’s death in 722 BC. Assyria, the emerging superpower in the area, conquers her and takes the survivors into exile, as we’ve seen, and there they disappear. This brings the northern kingdom to a total end. Assyria also invades Judah, but does not succeed in destroying her. While all this is happening, however, God is speaking to Israel through His prophets and revealing some key truths about what He’s doing through them. Amos and Hosea are based in the northern kingdom, while Isaiah and Micah speak to Judah.
- *The southern kingdom of Judah is conquered and exiled.* This happens a further 150 years later in two stages in 597 BC and in 587 BC. Babylon has replaced Assyria as the regional superpower and she conquers and destroys Judah and takes the survivors into exile into Babylon. Yet again God speaks through His prophets at this time of national disaster, this time through Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

The *exile* of Israel and Judah is probably the most important historical event in the OT, and over the next 6 studies we’ll examine what happens in it and what the prophets are saying at the time.

Our diagram of God’s plan to deal with the Fall now looks like this:



- 4 What do 11:1-5 add to what Isaiah has promised about the coming king (N.B. Jesse was David's father) and what is the significance of this?

- 5 What new things do we learn about the king in this passage, i.e. that we didn't see in the three previous studies? What does this teach us about how God is going to fulfil His plan?

This is the last of our studies focusing on Israel's king, so let's pull together what we've learned about this vital theme. What are the key things God has so far revealed about the king?

- 6 What is Isaiah promising in 9:4-5? What are the main things 11:6-10 add to this promise? What do these promises add to what we have previously seen of God's plan?

- 7 How should understanding what God is promising here affect the way we view (a) heaven, and (b) this world? How should it change the way we live in this world?

- 5 In chapter 9-10, what further acts of judgment is Ezekiel predicting will happen? How are these fulfilled in 2 Kings 24-25? In what other ways does God punish Judah in 2 Kings 24-25?
- 6 In chapter 9, who is saved from judgment and on what basis? Who is judged, and what does this teach us about God's judgment? How does this affect your view of God?
- 7 What is happening in 10:4, 10:18-19 & 11:22-23? (cf. 1Kings 8:6-13) How much does this matter, and why?
- 8 To what extent are the events of 2 Kings 25 a complete fulfilment of what is prophesied in Ezekiel 9-10? What implications does this have?
- 9 To what extent has Israel, by the end of 2 Kings, received what was promised in the Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic covenants? So, by the exile, what are the key things God has revealed about His plan to reverse the Fall?

BRIEFING 6

THE EXILE

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EXILE FOR ISRAEL

The exile is one of the two most important historical events in Israel's history. It radically changes the shape of the whole nation of Israel and in many ways brings to an end forever the nation that was created at the exodus and that we think of as 'Old Testament Israel'. Thus, at the exile:

- *Israel loses the land of Canaan.* The land was very special to Israel. It was one of the first things God promised Abraham and one of the two main things Israel was rescued for at the exodus. Now, after being there for 650 years she has lost it, effectively forever. Judah will return, to some extent, to the land about 60 years after she goes into exile, but for almost all the rest of the biblical period it will not actually be hers, it will be merely a province in somebody else's empire.
- *The people of Israel are scattered throughout the world.* This is the end of Israel as a nation. The ten tribes of the northern kingdom are lost forever, so scattered and intermarried that they cannot be identified as Israelites. Some of the people of Judah return at the end of the Babylonian exile, but many do not, as we'll see. Thus, even what remains of Israel is not united in one land. From this point on the Jews are a scattered people, not a nation.
- *The city of Jerusalem and its temple are destroyed.* The Jerusalem temple was the heart of the nation. It symbolized God dwelling with Israel in the place He had chosen (e.g. Deuteronomy 12:5). Now it is gone. Although both temple and city are rebuilt after the return from Babylon, it is a very long time before either is more than a shadow of what they were before the exile, as we'll see. Worse, many of the things that made the temple special, e.g. the Ark of the Covenant, are lost forever.
- *The Davidic monarchy comes to an end.* For over 400 years the Davidic line has ruled in Judah, and the fulfilment of God's promises is inextricably linked with the Davidic king. Now there is no king in Israel. In the 660 or so years between the exile and the end of the biblical period Judah will only have a king again for a few short decades, and those kings will not be from David's line.

THE PLACE OF THE EXILE IN GOD'S PLAN

The exile is crucial in Israel's history, but it is even more important in God's revelation of Himself and His plan. Thus, around 45% of the OT is written at or around this time. This emphasis means the exile must play a major part in the Bible's overall story, i.e. God's plan to put right the Fall.

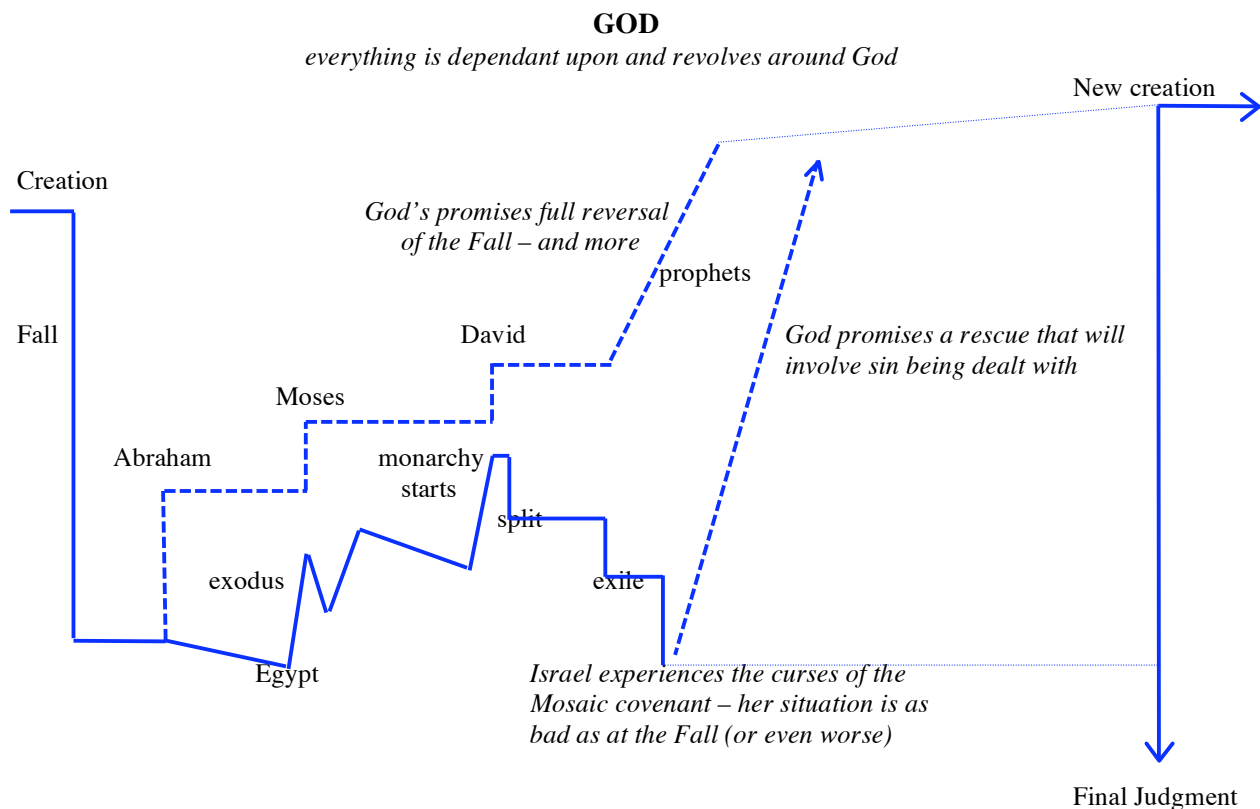
The exile is important because it is where it becomes clear that God is working towards a *full* reversal of the Fall. Up to this point, the elements of God's activity have fitted together, but apparently only for an *amelioration* of the effects of the Fall. We've assumed from the start that God is actually working for a complete reversal of the Fall since the NT (e.g. Revelation 21-22) has indicated this, but the exile is the place where this becomes clear for the first time. The exile teaches us five main things about God's plan:

- *The exile shows that something radical needs to happen to the Mosaic covenant before God can fulfil His plan to reverse the Fall.* Israel has shown that it is impossible for her to obey the Mosaic law. As a result, she has lost all she ever had of the blessings of the Mosaic covenant and is experiencing all its curses. She is now as badly off as she was before the exodus, i.e. as badly off as the rest of humankind. Thus, Israel cannot obey the Mosaic covenant and will not inherit God's promised blessings through trying to obey it. However, God did not make a mistake in the Mosaic covenant. He has been teaching her many key lessons through it. Thus, He has shown her (a) her need – a need all humankind shares, but only she languishing in exile really appreciates, (b) that her predicament is the result of sin, (c) that she is incapable of doing what is right in God's eyes, (d) that sacrifices can help, though animal sacrifices are not enough, and (e) that there is hope because God is a merciful God.
- *At the exile, God, for the first time, promises things which fully reverse the effects of the Fall.* Prior to the prophets, all God explicitly offers is some compensation for what was lost at the Fall (though Hebrews 11 says that those who had faith knew all along that He was offering a new creation). Now God explicitly promises a new creation (e.g. Isaiah 11:8-9, 65:17) and a solution to death (e.g. Isaiah

25:7-8). These cannot be fulfilled in this world and represent a massive step up in what He is promising. He is now promising a full reversal of the effects of the Fall – and more, as we’ll see.

- *At the exile we see the need for God to rescue His people.* The gap between what God is promising and what Israel is experiencing has now become a vast chasm. Before she can enjoy what He is offering He must rescue her from her predicament, just as He rescued her from a similar predicament in the exodus. A ‘second exodus’ is precisely what God promises at this time (e.g. Isaiah 11:11-16), but there is one major difference between this rescue and the exodus: this time the rescue will have to be even more spectacular since what God is promising is infinitely greater. This is the rescue that God is primarily concerned with and that all the other rescues in the Bible have been illustrating. When this rescue is complete God will have accomplished what He’s been working towards from the beginning.
- *At the exile, God promises to deal with the cause of the Fall – i.e. sin – as well as its effects.* One of the main lessons of the Mosaic covenant was to show how great a problem sin is, how Israel can’t deal with it herself, as we noted above and how the rescue can’t succeed until it has been dealt with. Now in the exile God promises to deal with this, as we’ll see in the next few studies.
- *At the exile we see that the rescue will – and can – only succeed because of God and, further, that it is centred on Him.* At the exile God reveals many vital truths about Himself, as we’ll see. Most of what He reveals about Himself is not new, but He reminds Israel of them because His rescue depends on Him being as He reveals Himself to be. For example, the promised blessings are incredible, but God reveals Himself to be great enough to fulfil them. Similarly, the barriers to Israel obtaining the promises appear insuperable, but she can be confident that she’ll receive them because God has committed Himself to giving them to her, and He is faithful. Thus, God’s revelation of *Himself* is not incidental to His revelation of what He is going to *do*, but rather the two are inextricably linked.

Our diagram of God’s plan to rescue humankind from the Fall now looks like this:



STUDY 16 - EZEKIEL 34:1-36:15

THE SHEPHERD

Israel is in exile and is as far from enjoying what God wants to give her as Adam and Eve were at the Fall. In fact her situation is worse since she is experiencing the additional punishment of the Mosaic covenant, for example, by being in slavery. However, God has promised to restore some of what was lost at the Fall, and even as Israel enters her darkest hour God is expanding and fleshing out these promises, making it clear that He is really promising a full reversal of the Fall. One of the most important expansions He makes to His promises is that He commits *Himself* to removing the obstacles to Israel inheriting what He has promised. This development of God's promises is the subject of this passage.

Ezekiel divides into two. Chapters 1-32 are largely (but not exclusively) about God's judgment, while chapters 33-48 focus on God's promises of hope (again not exclusively). The watershed comes in 33:21 with the news that Jerusalem has fallen. Thus, this passage comes just after the Jews hear of the destruction of all they held dear, when their fortunes are at rock bottom. Note that this passage comprises the first two of a loosely linked set of oracles, and we are looking at the next three in the next study.

- 1 Divide the passage into sections and give each a subtitle.
- 2 In 34:1-10, who exactly are the shepherds and what is God's complaint against them? What have been the consequences of their failings?
- 3 In 34:10-24, what are the three overarching things God is promising to do for the sheep? Why is each of these three necessary?
- 4 In 34:10-24, who will be the shepherd? How can v15 and v23 both be true, and why is it important that both are true?

- 5 Isaiah described God's rescue of Israel as being like the exodus (e.g. Isaiah 11:16). What parallels are there between God's rescue described in Ezekiel 34 and the original exodus?
- 6 In 35:1-36:7, God intends to destroy Mount Seir (i.e. Edom) and the nations it typifies. Why is God doing this and why does He need to do this before He can rescue Israel?
- 7 List the main promises God makes in 34:23-30 and 36:1-15. How does what is promised here compare with the Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic covenants?
- 8 In summary, in 34:11-36:15, what are the main things God says He will do? Why does He place such emphasis on what *He* will do (note how often He uses the pronoun 'I'), and how should this affect our view of our involvement in God's plan?

STUDY 17 - EZEKIEL 36:16-37:28

A SOLUTION TO SIN

Israel is in exile, but one of the key things God is saying to her in her predicament is that He will fulfil His promises, despite the apparent hopelessness of the situation. In fact, He will give her far more than He has previously promised: He will give her a new creation, and give it unconditionally. However, before He can give Israel any of what He has promised, various obstacles need to be dealt with. Through Ezekiel, God has been promising to deal with problems like bad leaders (He will replace them and shepherd her Himself), the fact she is in exile (He will rescue her) and her political enemies who want to prevent her from obtaining what God has promised (He will destroy them). In this passage God goes on to state how He will deal with some even more fundamental obstacles to the fulfilment of His promises and reveals even more about what He is actually promising. He also gives one of the most important explanations in the Bible of why He will rescue Israel. This passage follows immediately on from the previous one, so the historical setting is that the Jews have just heard of the fall of Jerusalem.

- 1 Divide the passage into its main sections and give each section a subtitle.
- 2 According to 36:16-23, what have been the consequences of Israel's sin? Why does the final consequence (vv20-23) concern God so much?
- 3 In 36:16-38, why will God rescue Israel (e.g. 36:22,23,32,36)? How is this a rebuke and how is it an encouragement?
- 4 There are differences between what God says He'll do here and what occurred at the original exodus from Egypt. In 36:24-32, what are the 3 or 4 main, overarching elements of this rescue and why are they important?

- 5 What is the difference between the promises in 36:25 and in 36:26-27, and why are both needed?

- 6 What is promised in 37:1-14 and how does it fit into God's overall plan?

- 7 In 37:15-22, what is God promising in the event symbolized by the two sticks (N.B. 'Ephraim' is the northern kingdom)? In what ways is this a difficult and important promise to fulfil?

- 8 What are the key things God is promising in 37:23-28, and why is each of these crucial (use what we've learned from the OT so far)?

- 9 Which of these promises have been fulfilled for us Christians today, and which have yet to be fulfilled? What implications does this have for the way we live our lives and how does this affect our understanding of what we are hoping for?

STUDY 18 - ISAIAH 40

THE GREAT RESCUER

Isaiah prophesied to Judah about 150 years before her exile to Babylon, but in chapters 40-55 (and some other bits) he is looking ahead to this exile and, in particular, the end of this exile (see e.g. 43:14-21, 48:14,20-21 and also 39:5-7). Thus, this is an appropriate point to look at these chapters and some of the great truths it teaches about that event. However, bear in mind that these promises were actually given *before* those in Ezekiel, so Isaiah's original hearers would not have known what God says there.

God has made great promises to Israel, committing Himself to giving her great blessings in a wonderful land. In fact, so great are His promises that it is clear that He is promising her infinitely more than merely rescue from exile in Babylon. He is promising her a rescue from the Fall, the issue He has been working at from the beginning. However, there is a vast gulf between what God is promising and the exile Israel is about to experience. This gulf raises a number of issues, and God addresses some of these in this chapter.

1 Subdivide and subtitle the passage. What are the 2 or 3 main, overarching issues being dealt with in the passage?

2 In 40:1-11, who travels on the 'highway' and where is he going? In the surrounding chapters of Isaiah, who is going where on the highway (e.g. 35:8-10, 43:14-21)? So, to what event is 40:1-11 referring?

What does the picture of the highway teach us about God's promised rescue? When is this prophecy of the highway fulfilled?

3 What are the other main things 40:1-11 tells us about God's rescue of His people, and why is each important?

- 4 What are the several things 40:12-26 teaches about God? Why does Judah need to grasp each of these as she faces exile and as she hears God's promise of rescue?

As we live in 'exile' from Eden and hear God's promises of rescue, why do *we* need to grasp each of the truths about God in 40:12-26? Which of these truths about God do *you* find hardest to accept and live by?

- 5 The picture of a sovereign, almighty God is given in 40:12-26. Why does God teach this immediately after what He says in 40:1-11?
- 6 In 40:27-31, Judah doubts that God knows what is happening to her. In what ways is she wrong and in the chapter as a whole, how is God correcting her error?
- 7 What, therefore, does 40:29-31 mean in its context? Who will benefit from God's promise here, and why is this an important qualification? How are these verses relevant to Christians today?

STUDY 19 - ISAIAH 52:13-54:17

THE SUFFERING SERVANT

In the previous five studies we've seen some of the key things God is saying through the prophets as Israel goes into exile. However, the truths He is revealing at this time are so important and so profound that He does not simply state them once. Rather He reveals them through many different prophets, each of whom focuses on a different facet of what God is promising to do. If the prophetic books are not read in the context of everything God is saying and doing in the Bible then it might appear that they are merely a disparate collection of obscure prophecies, but we are now in a position to see that God is dealing with a relatively small number of genuinely great issues and the vast array of prophecies are developing different aspects of these. In this passage Isaiah is prophesying to Judah (and, in particular, Jerusalem her capital) about the end of the exile, and making a crucial contribution to two of these great issues.

- 1 Subdivide the passage. What are the 2 or 3 main issues that dominate this passage?
- 2 The servant is a key character in Isaiah. What are the 3 or 4 main things 52:13-53:12 tells us about the servant?
- 3 In what ways does the servant suffer? What do 49:1-9a, 50:4-8 add to our understanding of his suffering?
- 4 What are the main things 52:13-53:12 tell us about *why* the servant suffers? Why is each of these important?

How does the servant deal with the problem of sin? How does this fit in with what we've seen of God's plan?

- 5 What happens to the servant *after* his suffering? Why is each of these important?
- 6 What is God promising in Isaiah 54? How do these promises relate to the promises to Abraham, Moses and David and what do they add to what we've already seen of God's promises?
- 7 How do the promises of Isaiah 54 follow on from Isaiah 53? According to Isaiah 54, why will God do what He is promising?
- 8 As we reach the end of our studies in the prophets, it's valuable to summarize what they say about God's promises and to organize all the information we've gained. So, what are the 3 or 4 main areas in which the prophets are revealing important truths about God's promises (i.e. headings we can group what they're saying under)? What are the main things they say about each area?

STUDY 20 - NEHEMIAH 1, 4-5, 9-10, 13

AFTER BABYLON

God has promised wonderful things, more in fact than a full restoration of all that was lost at the Fall. He has promised (a) a great rescue from exile with sins forgiven through the sacrifice of His servant (Isaiah 40:1-11, 53:4-6,10-12); (b) new heavens and a new earth with perfect peace, justice and knowledge of God, and Jerusalem rebuilt in dazzling splendour (Isaiah 11:3-9, 54:11-12, 65:17); and (c) God Himself ruling Israel through His perfect Davidic king and Israel responding in obedience and so enjoying these blessings forever (Ezekiel 34:11-16, 36:24-31, 37:24-28). The big question is, when does all this happen? Fifty years after the destruction of Jerusalem, in 539 BC, Cyrus the Persian king conquers Babylon, and the next year he gives permission for the Jews to return to Canaan (Ezra 1:1-4). Is this the return from exile the prophets were promising? Initially there are encouraging signs. Some Jews quickly return and rebuild the altar and start rebuilding the temple (Ezra 1-3). But then things bog down. Opposition means the temple takes 20 years to build (Ezra 4:1-5, 4:24-6:15 – N.B. 4:6-23 refers to a different, later incident). After that nothing much happens until Ezra returns 60 years later, in 458 BC (Ezra 7:1-8), but all he seems to do at this time is to try to sort out the problem of intermarriage (Ezra 9-10). Nehemiah returns 13 years later still, and his book is just about the last glimpse we have of Israel in the OT, so studying it will show us how much of God's promises are fulfilled by the end of the OT. For its historical setting, see '*Historical Overview: Exile to Jesus*' in the Introduction to this Workbook. It opens in Susa, the main capital of Persia, in 445 BC, almost a century after the beginning of the return to Canaan.

It's worth quickly reading the whole book, which is relatively easy.

- 1 From Nehemiah 1,4-5, what is the situation in Jerusalem at the start of Nehemiah? Compare this with what we've seen of the promises in the prophets: which of the promises of blessing have been fulfilled? Which are the main promises that Nehemiah stresses have *not* been fulfilled?
- 2 Summarize Nehemiah's achievements in chapters 1-6. To what extent are God's promises fulfilled in greater measure through what Nehemiah does?
- 3 According to chapters 1 & 9-10, why did Judah originally go into exile and to what extent do Nehemiah and the Jews view the exile as now over? What is the main thing they do to try and change their situation?

BRIEFING 7

THE RETURN FROM EXILE

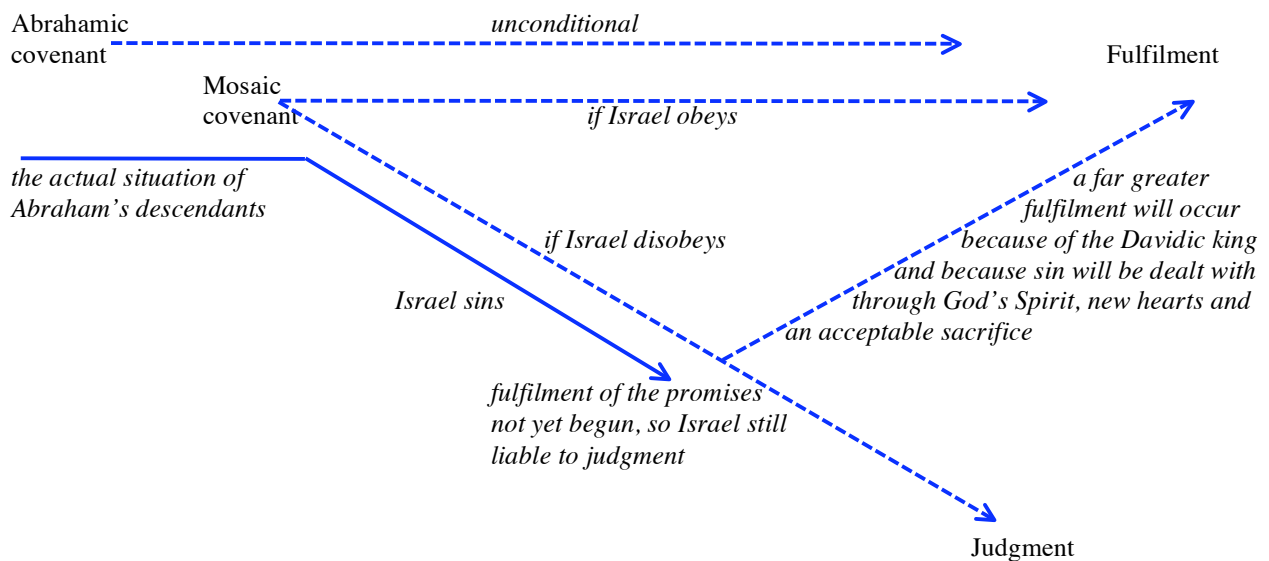
THE STATE OF GOD'S PLAN AT THE END OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

By the end of OT God has very nearly finished revealing most aspects of His plan to rescue humankind from the Fall and the final judgment that still awaits fallen humankind. For example:

- *The promises of blessing are nearly complete.* By the end of the OT God has virtually finished His promises of what He will do about the effects of the Fall and of how He will rescue Abraham's descendants to enjoy His new creation. Little is added after this, instead the NT *assumes* God's promises and tells us how God accomplishes the first step on the path to their eventual fulfilment. Thus, if we neglect the OT (as we tend to today), we'll understand little of what God is intending to give His people – and this is exactly what is happening in the church today, with dire consequences for our understanding of what God is doing.
- *Similarly, God's explanation of what is involved in dealing with sin is almost complete.* The first step in God's plan to *fulfil* His promises is to deal with sin, and this is what the NT deals with. As a result, it repeats a lot of the explanation of what is involved in this, so our neglect of the OT is not as serious in this area as it is with God's promises. However, seeing how God's plan has developed helps us grasp *why* dealing with sin matters and how it fits in with God's overall plan.
- *God has revealed most of what He is going to about Himself.* God reveals all His main characteristics through what He says and does in the OT, e.g. His power and might, His holiness and justice, His love and grace, His patience and mercy, and His faithfulness to His promises. Again, the NT *assumes* its readers know God as He has revealed Himself in the OT, so our neglect of the OT means we don't know God properly. For example, many Christians today confuse His patience with sinners with indifference to sin. No student of the OT would make that mistake.

Thus, God's promises and His revelation of His plan are almost complete, but so far He has done little about implementing His plan and fulfilling His promises. This is the main thing still remaining in God's plan and, until it occurs, Israel continues to remain a sinful people living in a fallen world and, under the terms of the Mosaic covenant, facing the threat of God's final judgment. Not surprisingly the big question is 'when will the exile come to an end and God's promises be fulfilled?'

Our diagram focusing on the covenants and the solution to the cause of the Fall now looks like this:



HISTORICAL FULFILMENT IN THE 600 YEARS AFTER THE EXILE STARTS

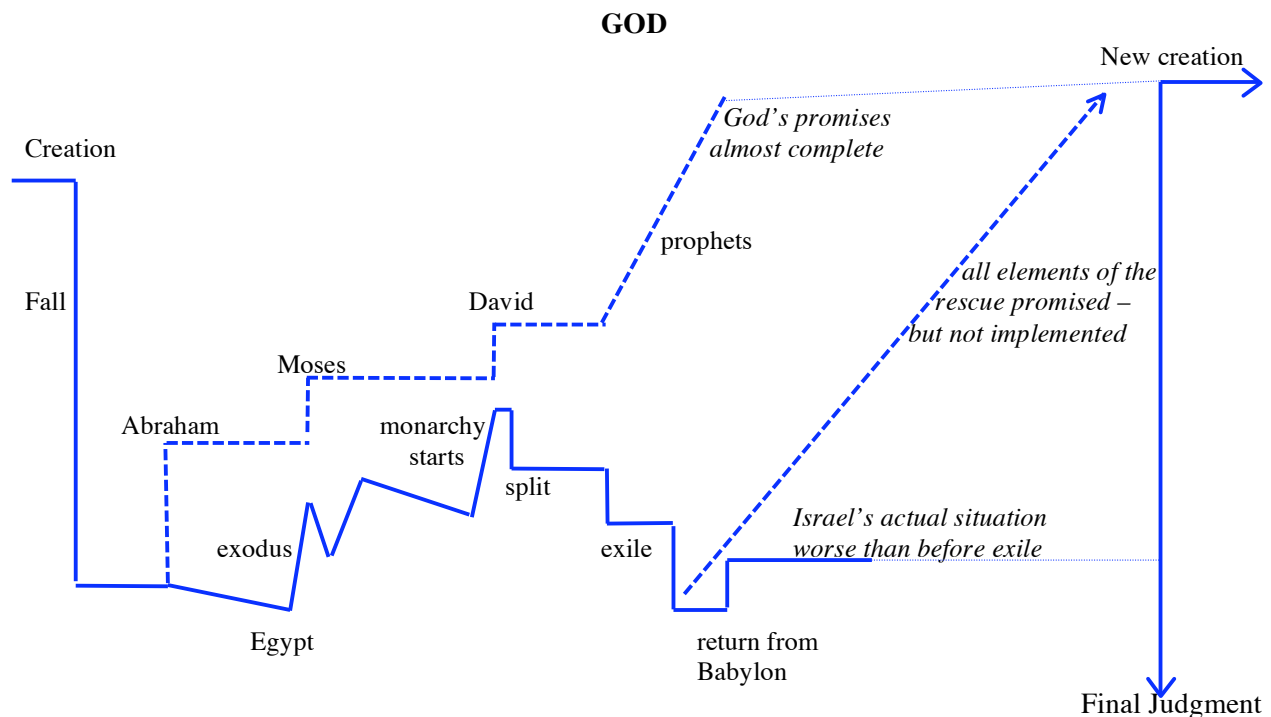
There is a widely held view that the return promised in the prophets is fulfilled – at least in part – when Cyrus allows the Jews to return to Canaan in 538 BC. However, this does not accord with the biblical evidence. There is relatively little in the OT about Israel in the years after 538 BC, but the main point of virtually all that there is is to show how *little* has been fulfilled before the end of the OT period, and how all that happens falls far short of what God promised. For example:

- Isaiah is promised a triumphant return (Isaiah 35:1-10, 40:3-11), but what actually occurs is a feeble trickle back. Relatively few return just after 538 BC (Ezra 2). A few more make the dangerous journey much later (e.g. Ezra 7:1-7, 8:15-23). Finally, many never return but choose to remain in exile.
- At the heart of God’s promises is the Davidic king (e.g. Ezekiel 34:23-24, 37:22-25), but the Jews never again have a Davidic king, and are not even an independent nation for another 400 years.
- The prophets promised a great relationship with God centred on a wonderful temple (e.g. Ezekiel 47:1-12), but the temple built by the returnees is so small that the people weep (Haggai 2:3, Ezra 3:12), and the relationship with God enjoyed by the returnees is one of sinfulness and hostility, just as it was before the exile (e.g. Malachi 1:6-9, 2:11-13,17).
- The prophets promised peace and prosperity (e.g. Ezekiel 34:25-29), but after their return the Jews face a lot of opposition (e.g. Ezra 4) and poverty (e.g. Haggai 1:6-11).
- There is certainly no eternal life or new creation.

As we’ve seen, Israel’s situation continues much like this right up to the end of the OT. Israel at the end of Nehemiah’s time is not a great nation with a Davidic king but rather a province of the Persian empire, she is still sinning and still not experiencing much by way of triumphant return, prosperity or peace.

The 400 or so years between the end of the OT and the beginning of the NT sees no further fulfilment. This does not mean nothing is happening. On the contrary, this is an eventful time historically. Israel remains under Persian rule until 332 BC when Alexander the Great conquers the entire region. But Alexander’s Greek empire splits after his death in 323 BC and since Israel lies near the boundary of two of the factions she is fought over for the next 150 years. In 167 BC the Jews rebel and eventually gain their freedom in 141 BC. However, by 63 BC Israel is under Roman rule. None of this is in the Bible because it is not relevant to God’s plan. He has finished His promises and not begun their fulfilment. This all changes in 4 BC when the NT opens, as we’ll see in our next study.

Our diagram of God’s plan now looks like this:



STUDY 21 - LUKE 3:1-4:13

FULFILMENT BEGINS!

The OT contains two major ‘beginnings’ – the beginning of God’s creation and the beginning of God’s people, Israel – but both are ruined by sin. Thus, God’s good creation is ruined when Adam and Eve rebel against Him, and God’s rescued people Israel fail to obtain what He promised because they sin. God, however, is working to put right what has gone wrong. So far this has involved Him promising first to deal with the effects of sin and then to deal with sin itself. Thus, He has promised (a) that He will create a new heaven and a new earth and (b) that He will rescue a people from this fallen creation and will forgive them and make them sinless so they can enjoy this new creation forever. However, as yet these promises have not been fulfilled. The initial fulfilment of these promises in Israel was all lost at the exile, showing that this was not what God was actually promising. Similarly, Israel returned from her exile in Babylon following Cyrus’ decree, but no significant promise was fulfilled at this time, showing that this was not what God was really promising either. Now, some 400 years after the end of the OT, all this changes. God makes a third new ‘beginning’, the beginning of the fulfilment of what He has promised, and the NT compares and contrasts this new beginning with the previous two in various ways.

- 1 Subdivide the passage and give each section a subtitle.
- 2 All four gospels describe John the Baptist’s ministry in terms of Isaiah 40:3-5 (e.g. Luke 3:4-6). What are the main things this indicates about what Jesus has come to do?
- 3 What is John doing in 3:7-14? How does this contribute to his job of preparing the way for Jesus and what lessons does this have for us as we look to Jesus?
- 4 In 3:8, what do the Jews mean when they say that Abraham is their father and what is John’s response to this? What implications does this have for what God is about to do?

- 5 What does John say about Jesus in 3:15-17 and how does this help prepare the way for Jesus? In the light of the OT, what is the significance of Jesus baptizing 'with the Holy Spirit' (3:16)?

- 6 What is Jesus called in 3:21-4:13, and who else is called the same thing in these verses? In the light of this, what is the significance of the temptation narrative in 4:1-13?

- 7 In the light of Exodus 4:22 and the Scriptures Jesus quotes in reply to the devil, is it valid to compare Jesus facing temptations in the desert with Israel facing temptations in the desert at the exodus? If it is, what is the significance of Jesus resisting temptation unlike Israel?

- 8 How does the contrast between Jesus' response to the devil's temptation and both Adam's and Israel's responses help us better understand Jesus and what He has come to do?

- 9 In summary, what are the 3 or 4 headings that best encapsulate everything this passage teaches us about Jesus and what he has come to do.

- 10 In the three temptations in 4:1-13, what is the basic, underlying sin the devil is trying to get Jesus to commit? What is Jesus' basic response? What lessons can we learn from this about the nature of sin and obedience?

STUDY 22 - GALATIANS 3:1-29

JUSTIFIED BY FAITH

God has begun to fulfil the promises He made in the OT, but a key question is ‘who will be saved?’ or, alternatively, ‘what must a person do in order to inherit God’s blessings?’. Most Jews assumed the answer was that those who obeyed the Mosaic Law would be saved and inherit God’s blessings. However, the question of what a person must do in order to be saved causes a lot of confusion in the early church. Two major reasons it causes such problems are (a) Jewish ‘Christians’ who are still confused about whether they need to keep the Law to be saved, and (b) the conversion of Gentiles, which raises the question of how much of the OT law they need to keep and whether they must become Jews (e.g. Acts 15:1-5). The question of whether or not Christians must keep the Mosaic law is, in fact, one of the great issues in the NT and it continues to confuse many Christians, so it’s crucial for us to see what the NT says about this.

The letter to the Galatians shows us the issues at stake and what the apostles are saying about them. The Galatians have heard the gospel and responded, but now some are beginning to say that they must live according to the OT law. In response, Paul writes the most vehement letter in the NT to point out how wrong they are and how serious the consequences. Chapter 3 is the heart of his reply.

- 1 Begin the study by looking at what’s at stake. How serious is the error Paul is opposing (see 1:6-9, 2:4-5,21, 3:1-5, 4:9, 5:1-4)? What does Paul mean by what he says in these verses?
- 2 It’s vital to see exactly how the Galatians have gone wrong so we don’t do the same. What are the Galatians doing that is wrong (see 1:6, 3:1-5, 4:10,17-21, 5:1-4)? Why do they want to do these things (N.B. they’re *already* Christians)? In what ways do you do similar things?
- 3 From 3:1-9, how are God’s blessings obtained, and what does this mean? What are the two main ways Paul proves his point?

- 4 From what we've seen in the OT, what is the significance of Paul's use of Abraham to prove his case? What does 3:7 mean, and how does it fit in with everything we saw in the OT?

- 5 In 3:10-18, what are the several things Paul says about the OT law, and what does he mean by each of these (you'll need to use what we've seen in the OT as well as Paul's argument here)? What does Paul say the role of the law really is in 3:19-25?

- 6 What are Paul's 2 or 3 main points in 3:26-29, and what do each of these mean? How do they help to show the Galatians that they are wrong to seek to keep the law?

- 7 From Galatians 3, what are the 2 or 3 main roles Jesus fulfils in our inheriting God's promises, and how do these help us better understand what he has done?

- 8 In the light of this passage, what is involved in our continuing our Christian lives the same way we began (e.g. 3:3)? What does this mean for you in practice, and how does this affect your view of what is involved in living as a Christian?

BRIEFING 8

WHO IS ISRAEL?

God has begun to fulfil His promises, but a key question the NT addresses is: who will benefit? The Fall affects everyone, but not everyone will benefit from God's reversal of it. God's promises are to 'Abraham's descendants' and 'Israel', but who are Abraham's descendants and who is Israel? A cursory reading of the OT might suggest that 'Abraham's descendants' and 'Israel' are the nation of Israel, but a closer look shows this is not the case. The NT goes further, and makes it clear that God's promises to Abraham's descendants are for *Christians* and the *church*, not the nation of Israel.

Most people in NT times didn't see that the OT showed that God's promises are not for the nation of Israel, so when Jesus and the apostles taught this it caused some consternation. In fact, the issue of what makes a person a member of 'Israel' was one of the hottest potatoes of the time and, as a result, it is a key theme in the NT. It is so crucial an issue that the Bible uses several, complementary, arguments to show that God's promises are for Christians, not the nation of Israel, and that God always intended this. Most of us don't have the vested interest in this issue that the first century Jews had, but the issue of who will inherit God's OT promises still confuses many Christians and is something we must be clear about.

JESUS IS THE TRUE ISRAEL – THOSE WHO ARE 'IN HIM' WILL BE SAVED

The first argument why 'Abraham's descendants' are not the nation of Israel focuses on *Jesus*. The nub of this argument is that Israel *does* inherit all God's promises, but the 'Israel' that inherits these promises comprises *one person only*, namely Jesus himself (e.g. Galatians 3:16). Because he alone is obedient, he alone is the true Israel (e.g. Luke 3:21-4:13) who will inherit all that God has promised.

This is the final step in the OT principle of the *remnant*, i.e. the idea that at every stage in history God's purposes and promises are for a smaller and smaller proportion of the whole. Sometimes this is because God only chooses part of the whole to inherit His promises, sometimes this is because his judgment on sinners means only a remnant is left. For example, initially, in Adam and Eve, God's purposes are for all humankind; then, God selects only Abraham and his descendants; then, He chooses only some of Abraham's descendants, first those descended through Abraham's son Isaac and then Abraham's grandson Jacob; then, only some of those rescued from Egypt enter the land; next, only some of Israel survives the judgment of the exile. Finally, the remnant is down to one person – Jesus. Everyone else is sinful and faces judgment. But, now, this narrowing goes no further because Jesus is sinless and so inherits God's promises. He, Jesus, *is* the Israel the promises were always intended for.

However, the fact Jesus is Israel is not the end of the story but in many ways its beginning. Now it is possible for people to inherit God's promises by being *in Christ*, and everyone who accepts Christ is in him (e.g. Galatians 3:27-29). Because he inherits God's promises, anyone who is in him also inherits God's promises, whether or not they belong to the nation of Israel (e.g. Galatians 3:26-29, Ephesians 2:13, 3:6). Thus, *God's promises to Abraham's descendants and to Israel are inherited by Christians*.

THOSE WHO HAVE FAITH ARE ABRAHAM'S DESCENDANTS – i.e. ISRAEL

The Bible's second reason why God's promises and plans are for Christians, not the nation of Israel revolves around how a person *belongs* to 'Israel'. A superficial reading of the OT might suggest that a person belongs to 'Israel' by being born into the nation or by becoming a member of the nation by being circumcised, but the Bible's great truth is that the essential characteristic of a descendant of Abraham's is *faith*. This is stated clearly in the NT (e.g. Galatians 3:7, Romans 4:9-12), but it is also revealed in the OT. Thus, all through the OT, God's true people are those who have faith, as Hebrews 11 points out. Further, books like Isaiah state explicitly that faith is essential (e.g. Isaiah 7:9b). In other words, God's promises to Abraham's descendants are not to his *physical* descendants but to his *spiritual* descendants. Having Abraham's *faith* is the mark of being part of the real 'Israel'.

However, there is an important new development in the NT, namely: faith is not only an essential mark of God's true people, it is the *only* mark of who belongs to 'Israel' (e.g. Galatians 5:6). Thus, a Gentile who has faith will be saved *without having to become a Jew as well*, and a Jew who has faith has no advantages over the Gentile with faith.

The nation of Israel no longer has any special role to play, and the true Israel is 'defined' as those with faith and no national characteristic – e.g. circumcision or descent – has anything to do with it. As a result of this redefinition of Israel, the new 'Israel', i.e. the church, looks very different to the nation of Israel. Not surprisingly, this caused great offence to the Jews at the time. It also caused problems in the church as Jewish Christians wrestled to come to terms with this (e.g. Acts 15:1-21). Galatians 3 shows us some of the sorts of problems early Christians struggled with in this area.

GOD CHOOSES PEOPLE FROM ALL NATIONS TO INHERIT HIS PROMISES

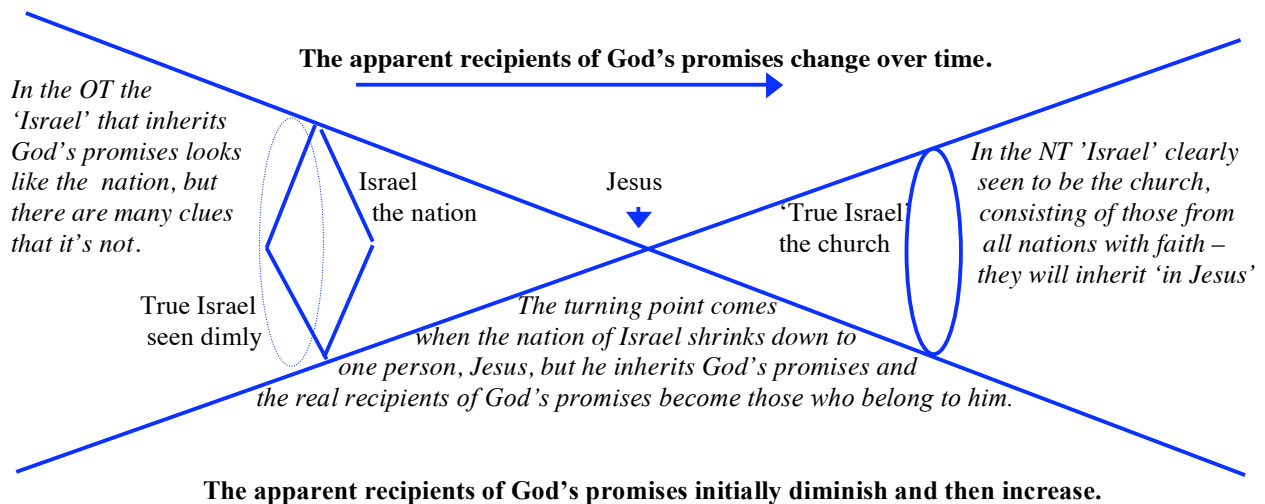
Finally, God's plan to reverse the Fall benefits people from all nations but only some Jews because God is the One who *chooses* who He will rescue and *He* always intended to choose people from *all* nations but only some of Abraham's physical descendants. Thus, right at the start, God promises Abraham to bless 'all peoples on earth' through him (Genesis 12:3). Conversely, God chooses first Isaac and then Jacob, i.e. only *some* of Abraham's physical descendants (cf. Romans 9:6-13,22-29).

God's intention to rescue Gentiles is confirmed in the OT when God makes provisions for them to become members of His people (e.g. Exodus 12:48-49), an offer taken up by people like Ruth the Moabitess who becomes king David's great-grandmother (Ruth 1:4, 4:13-17). It is confirmed even more explicitly when God says at the exile that His promises of a reversal of the Fall are for the Gentiles also (e.g. Isaiah 49:6).

Similarly, we see the truth that God has not chosen all Israelites confirmed when He rejects many of them for their sin, e.g. at the exodus when a whole generation dies in the desert. The surprising development in the NT is how very different from the nation of Israel the true Israel looks. Someone who knew the OT well might have expected *some* Gentiles to be added into Israel and some Jews not to inherit God's promises. But, he or she would have expected the 'shape' of 'Israel' to remain roughly the same.

However, God's promise to bless all nations is fulfilled by Him choosing vast numbers of Gentiles and causing them to accept Jesus and be saved (e.g. Acts 11:1-21) and not choosing the bulk of the Jews but causing them to reject Jesus and so lose His promises (e.g. Romans 9:1-29).

There are, thus, three distinct but linked arguments in the Bible, all making the same point: *God's promises to Abraham's descendants and to Israel are meant for Christians*. The answer to the question 'who is the 'Israel' who will inherit God's promises?' thus develops over time, and can be represented in a diagram as follows:



- 5 From 3:7-4:11, with which part of the exodus is the Christian life paralleled? (N.B. this is the *only* part of Israel's history with which the NT compares the Christian life!) What lessons does this parallel have for us today? How does this affect your view of the Christian life?

- 6 From 3:7-4:11, what is the key thing Christians must do to enter God's 'rest'? What 3 or 4 specific instructions does the author give his readers to help them do this, and what do these mean?

- 7 What is the author's main point in 4:12-13? How does this fit in with what he's been saying in 3:7-4:11? From 3:7-4:13, how does God's word judge the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts?

- 8 What caused Israel in the desert to disbelieve God's word and rebel (e.g. Exodus 17:1-7, Numbers 11:1-10, 14:1-12)? What causes you to disbelieve God's word and rebel? What does this reveal about the thoughts and attitudes of your heart?

- 9 3:1-4:13 stresses *our* responsibility. In 4:14-16, what help do we have and how is this a help? Why is the balance between our responsibility and God's help important and what does it mean in practice?

STUDY 25 - HEBREWS 8:1-10:18

THE PERFECT SACRIFICE

Judaism has great attractions – e.g. an impressive temple, priesthood, sacrificial system and great OT promises – and the original readers of this letter appear to be in the process of being seduced by these. However, Jesus is infinitely superior to Judaism because he is the one to whom the OT points and in whom the OT promises are fulfilled. The author’s primary means of persuading his original readers not to abandon Jesus is to show them just how superior Jesus is. So far he has shown that Jesus is a greater revelation than that contained in the OT (e.g. 1:1-2:4, 3:1-6) and he is now in the process of showing that Jesus is a greater priest than the OT priests. Having established that Jesus is a sinless and everlasting priest (7:23-28), he moves on in our passage to deal with what Jesus accomplished as priest, and this is the heart of his argument. As we’ve seen, the OT contains God’s great promises, but no fulfilment, and the promises *cannot* be fulfilled through Judaism because it contains no answers to Israel’s sin. But now Jesus has come to bring about the fulfilment of all God’s promises, and his success in accomplishing this, more than anything else, is the reason why it is folly to return to Judaism.

This passage is the Bible’s clearest explanation of what Jesus achieved – i.e. how he fulfils what the OT pointed towards and how he enables God’s promises to be fulfilled – so understanding it is crucial.

- 1 Subdivide and subtitle the passage (but don’t get bogged down in details in this complex passage).
- 2 What does 8:1-6 tell us about Jesus’ high priestly ministry? How is Jesus the same as the Levitical priests (i.e. the priests of the Mosaic covenant) and how is he different?
- 3 In 8:6-13, what are the main ways in which the new covenant is better than the old and what do each of these mean? When are the prophecies of 8:10-12 fulfilled (see 9:28, 10:13-14, 3:7-4:11)?
- 4 What is the ‘first covenant’ and what has now happened to it, and the other OT covenants? Did God make a mistake giving the ‘first’ covenant?

- 5 In summary, what are the 2 most important things the author has said about the new covenant? Why is he making these points here?
- 6 What are the 2 or 3 main things 8:1-5 & 9:1-12 tell us about the OT tabernacle (i.e. temple) and its significance? How is the place where Jesus ministers different?
- 7 According to 9:1-13, what are the OT sacrifices all about and what do they achieve? What does 10:1-18 add to this? What are the limitations of the OT sacrifices and what is the evidence of these limitations?
- 8 According to 9:1-10:18, what are the 3 or 4 main things Jesus' sacrifice of himself achieves? Why is each of these essential?
- 9 In summary, what are the two *most* crucial things 9:1-10:18 teaches us about Jesus' ministry? How should this affect the way you view (a) the cross, and (b) the way you live your life?

BRIEFING 9

THE FINISHED WORK

It is often said that Jesus has *begun* to fulfil all that God has promised. However, things are not this simple. Passages like Hebrews 9:26 & 10:12 state that Jesus' death has resulted in many of the key elements of God's plan now actually being *completed*, while passages like 2 Peter 3:3-13 indicate that other things are *little changed* – something confirmed by the lack of e.g. peace and prosperity in the early church. It is vital to be clear about what Jesus has now finished and what we're still waiting for, because confusion on this issue has caused many heresies in the church's history. If we don't see what is completed we'll undervalue what Jesus has accomplished at the cost of his life – and we'll end up trying to do what he has done (and failing). Alternatively, if we expect now things that will not occur until he returns we'll be disappointed and disillusioned, and many people have had their faith destroyed this way.

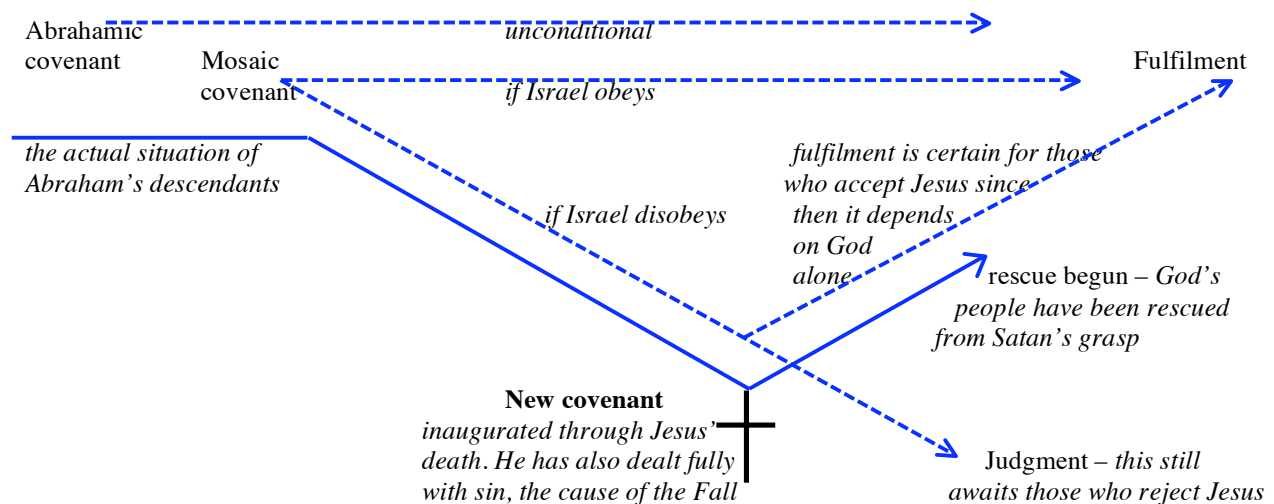
WHAT JESUS HAS FINISHED

What Jesus has done at his first coming is to fully deal with the *cause* of the Fall, i.e. sin. Dealing with the cause of the Fall dominates the Bible from Exodus 19, where God reveals that His work of doing something about the *effects* of the Fall depends on the cause being dealt with. In the Mosaic covenant, Israel is given the task of dealing with the cause of the Fall, and the OT is an extensive study of how she fails totally. (N.B. the Mosaic covenant itself is not a failure. Through it God achieves exactly what He intends, namely to reveal Israel's need for something better, and more about Himself and His plan to deal with the Fall.) God then reveals that He will deal with the cause Himself through His divine, Davidic king. Now Jesus has come and has done precisely this. His finished work can be looked at in three ways:

- *He has inaugurated God's new covenant.* We're now in a completely new regime, one where dealing with the cause of the Fall is totally dependant on God not us (e.g. Hebrews 9:15).
- *He has fully dealt with sin.* He died as a perfect sacrifice so all our sins are forgiven (e.g. Hebrews 9:14-15), and he has given us God's promised Spirit (e.g. John 16:7-11) so we will one day be sinless.
- *He has rescued us from Satan and his dominion.* Satan is a crucial part of the cause of the Fall, since he originally ensnared Adam and Eve and has held humankind captive ever since. Now we've been rescued from his kingdom and he has no control over us (e.g. Colossians 1:13).

The fact Jesus has fully dealt with the cause of the Fall shows just how important the cross is. It is the turning point of the whole of God's plan, the thing that solves not simply the biggest problem in the world, but the problem that has totally shaped the world and that lies behind every other problem. We need to value and rejoice in it far more than we do.

Our diagram of how the covenants relate and how the cause of the Fall is dealt with is now complete:



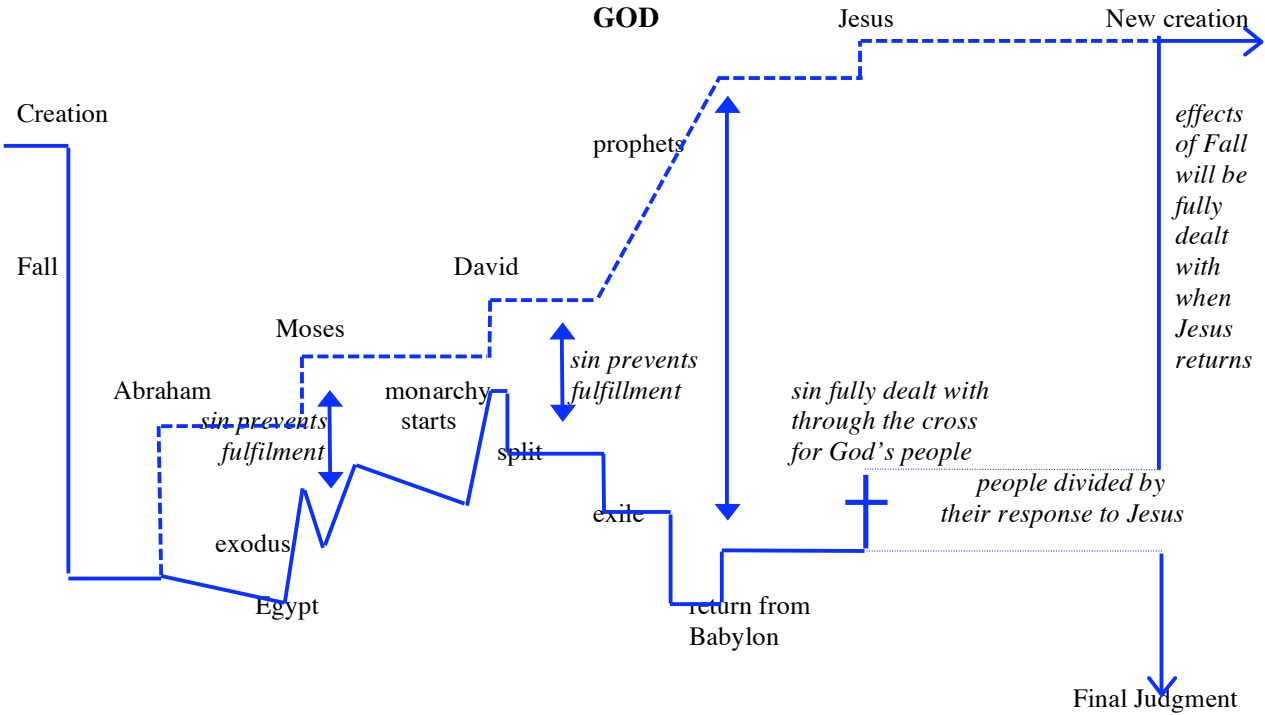
WHAT IS NOT YET COMPLETE

The thing Jesus doesn't do at his first coming is to deal with the *effects* of the Fall. In fact, he barely begins to tackle these – the only indications of him dealing with these effects are his miracles which indicate that he *can* and the gift of the Holy Spirit as a foretaste of the new creation, and even then He is a foretaste of only one or two of the blessings (e.g. of our relationship with God – Romans 8:15-17).

The NT's picture of the position of the Christian in this world is that we are like Israel in the desert (e.g. Hebrews 3-4). We're completely out of 'Egypt', but we do not yet have any of the promised land. We can view the situation as follows. When God rescued His people from Egypt, He gave them the Mosaic covenant both to show that the cause of the Fall needs to be dealt with before the effects can be, and to show that human beings can't deal with the cause of the Fall themselves. Now that both these points have been amply demonstrated (even if not always learnt), God 'begins again' from the point where His plan came to a standstill the first time (i.e. the middle of the desert). He inaugurates a new covenant to fulfil and replace the Mosaic covenant and picks up His plan to deal with the effects of the Fall from Mt. Sinai. However, there is one further twist in God's plan. In the 1300 years since God inaugurated the Mosaic covenant, He has revealed that the rescue He is actually working on is the rescue from the Fall, i.e. He is rescuing us from Satan's kingdom not Pharaoh's and He is rescuing us for a new creation not Canaan. There are two major implications of the fact that we're still 'in the desert':

- *We do not yet experience God's new creation, rather we are still waiting for this* (Hebrews 9:28, 1 Peter 1:3-6). God is committed to creating a new heaven and a new earth where all the effects of the Fall are dealt with and placing His people in it, and He has done everything necessary for this to happen by dealing with the problem of sin, but the Bible's great promises of blessing are not ours yet. If we think they are we will be disillusioned and will give up on Jesus. Alternatively, we'll water the promises down to match what we're experiencing, and this is just as bad, since it is to turn aside from the hope which is so central to genuine, biblical faith (e.g. Colossians 1:5, Hebrews 11).
- *We are currently in the desert and so life will often be uncomfortable.* Israel found the desert even less comfortable than Egypt in many ways, and Christians will too. Like Israel, we do not yet have the promised blessings but nor can we have the things this world offers (cf. Numbers 11:5). Our next study will show us more of what life in the 'desert' is like and how we are to live while we're in it.

Our diagram of God's plan thus shows us still as far as ever from inheriting His promises, but with His people rescued from sin through the cross and so with nothing left to do except to persevere in waiting.



- 4 How does the author's discussion of faith in chapter 11 follow on from what he said in 10:19-39? Why does he refer to so many OT characters and how would this have helped his original readers?
- 5 What is 'faith' according to 11:1 and what does this mean? Use Abraham as a 'case study': what are the 3 or 4 main things faith involved for him (i.e. 11:8-12, 17-19)? What do each of the things he did teach us about faith?

What does 11:13-16 add to this explanation of what faith involves?

- 6 In 11:32-40, why do some people who have faith enjoy good things in this world (11:32-35a) while others who have faith do not (11:35b-38)? So, how should a Christian respond to things going (a) badly, (b) well?
- 7 What is the author exhorting his readers to do in 12:1-4 and what does he mean by this? What do these verses add to what we have seen so far in this study?
- 8 How does this passage's explanation of what Biblical faith is challenge you in (a) your view of what the Christian life is all about, and (b) your aspirations and desires?

4 Comparing this passage with Genesis 3, to what extent are each of the things that went wrong at the Fall put right in the new creation? What is the significance of this?

5 How is the new creation similar to the first one as described in Genesis 1-3 and how is it different?

6 What were the main things promised to Abraham? In what ways are these promises fulfilled in the new creation described in 21:1-22:5?

What were the main additional things promised to Moses, David and through the prophets? In what way are these promises fulfilled in the new creation?

7 Are there any surprises in the way any of the promises are fulfilled and how do we explain these (from what we've seen over the year)? How does seeing the way all these promises are fulfilled in the new creation affect your understanding of what God is doing in the whole of the Bible?

8 How has this passage challenged your view of what heaven (i.e. the new creation) is like? How should this affect the way you live?