

# **Exploring The Meaning Of Life**

**Through great themes in the Bible.**

**God meets with people**

**The Kingdom of God**

**Covenant**

**Holiness**

**Sacrifice and Atonement**

**Salvation and Deliverance**

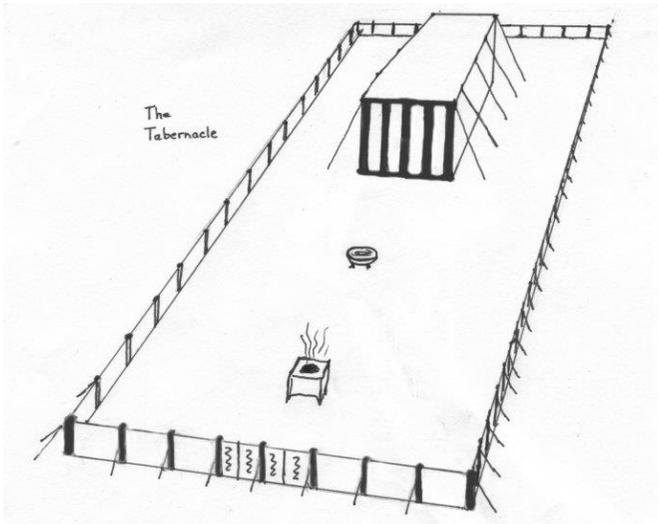
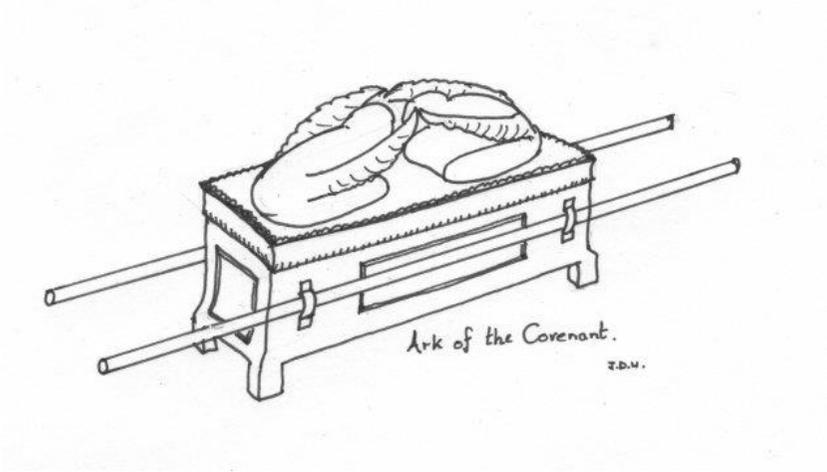
***Rev'd John D. West BTh (hons) MA (Theol)***

## **THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOKLET**

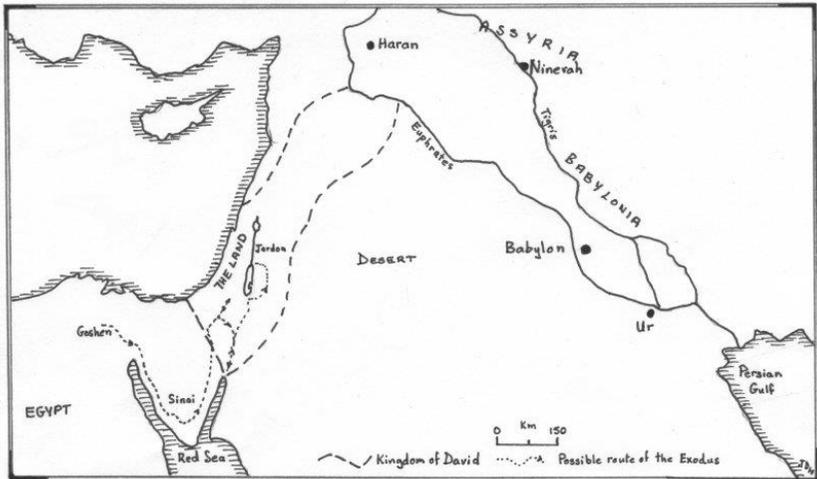
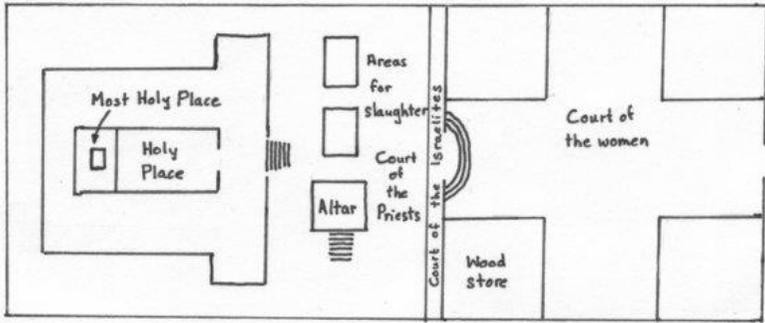
Many people go through church life gaining only a fragmentary knowledge of what the Bible is saying, and less idea of its overall thrust. This booklet is just a beginning, to help people to step up from an elementary understanding to gaining an overview of the major biblical themes, which in turn give meaning to life itself.

It does not seek to give exhaustive references for every theme, but rather a few examples whereby the reader can go on to discover others, and understand them in an appropriate context. In this way it lays a foundation for further study, and in doing so challenges the reader to consider the meaning of life.

John West.



## The Temple



## THE MAIN EVENTS IN THE BIBLE THE OLD TESTAMENT

### GENESIS

Creation, Adam & Eve and the Fall, Cain kills Abel. Evil increases.  
Noah and the Flood  
The Tower of Babel  
Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (became known as Israel).  
Joseph and the move to Egypt

*NB Israel/ Jacob, had twelve sons,  
the forefathers of the twelve tribes of Israel*

### EXODUS

The Israelites in slavery in Egypt.  
Moses, the plagues, the Passover, the Red Sea. Mt Sinai and the Law given.

### NUMBERS

The journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land under Moses.

### JOSHUA

The conquest of the Promised Land of Canaan under Joshua.

### JUDGES

The period after settlement of the Land.  
A cycle...  
of idolatry, invasion, crying to God, a leader emerges, deliverance.

### SAMUEL, KINGS and CHRONICLES

The last of the judges, but also a prophet and priest.  
King Saul  
King David  
King Solomon  
The Kingdom Divides. Jereboam to the North (Israel)  
Reheboam (David's line) to the South (Judah)  
Baalism rife. The time of the PROPHETS calling people back.  
Israel's Exile by Assyria 722BC  
Judah's Exile by Babylon 597 and 586BC  
Persia the world power in 539BC  
Jews allowed to return under Ezra & Nehemiah 458BC

## THE NEW TESTAMENT

### **THE GOSPELS** (Matthew Mark Luke and John)

The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

Jesus' teachings, life, death and resurrection.

### **ACTS** (written by Luke)

Jesus' Ascension into heaven

The Holy Spirit given on the Day of Pentecost.

The stoning of Stephen and persecution of the church which scattered.

The Samaritan "Pentecost" - Philip in Samaria.

The Conversion of Paul (Saul) on the Damascus Road.

The Gentile "Pentecost" – Peter and Cornelius.

Martyrdom of James.

Paul and Barnabas – The first missionary journey.

A conference at Jerusalem

Paul and Silas – The second missionary journey.

Paul's third missionary journey.

Paul arrested in Jerusalem, appealed to Caesar and was sent to Rome

### **Paul's letters to churches...**

Romans, Corinthians (2), Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians,

Thessalonians (2),

### **Paul's letters to individuals...**

Timothy (2), Titus, Philemon.

### **Other letters...**

Hebrews (unknown author)

James, Peter (2), John (3), Jude.

John's letter to the seven churches – Revelation.

## THE MEANING OF LIFE

It's the sixty-four thousand dollar question. The one scientists and philosophers have been trying to fathom for centuries. Even if you suggest in Christian groups that we might explore the meaning of life, the very idea is greeted with sympathetic smiles, as if to say, "Well, we all know that you're joking of course. No-one can answer that question."

But answer that question we must. If we don't know the meaning of life, then we don't know what we're doing here, and we have no idea where we are going. Life has no meaning for us. In fact we're lost!

I want to suggest that the Bible gives us a very clear indication of the meaning of life, and the more we read it, the clearer that meaning becomes. Let me share the meaning with you, and then demonstrate how the message runs right the pages of Scripture from beginning to end. Are you ready? Here it is...

According to the Bible, the meaning of life is that we were made in the image of God to have a close relationship with him. When the first people disobeyed God in Genesis chapter 3, the relationship was broken, but God didn't abandon us. The rest of Scripture is about God reaching out to people to draw them back into relationship with him. *The fundamental reason for our lives then, is to reconnect with God in what should become an ever-deepening relationship, and to let others know how they can do the same thing.* Put shortly it is *to know God and make him known.*

Let's take a look at a number of sample biblical passages to demonstrate the point that God always seeks to meet with people and through a special revelation of himself, makes himself known, and provides special places in which regular meeting can occur.

# 1.

## GOD MEETS WITH PEOPLE

### EDEN

In **Genesis 3:8-9** we read of God walking in the Garden of Eden looking for Adam. It suggests that an open relationship existed between them, which had become damaged by disobedience, resulting in the man and woman hiding in guilt. By the end of the chapter (verses 23-24), they have been driven out of the garden, so that they cannot return to the “Tree of Life.”

Things went from bad to worse and, as we know, the flood destroyed a hopeless situation. But not entirely hopeless. Noah and his family, eight in all, were preserved, and God spoke to him and made him promises, so that humankind could continue multiplying and stumbling from one mistake to another. This all culminated in the Tower of Babel fiasco (Genesis 11) and the scattering of disobedient people.

### ABRAHAM and the LAND

From the pre-history of Genesis 1-11 the Bible’s attention then focuses on God’s relationship with one man, Abram – eventually to become know as Abraham. And from this one man would grow a nation who would be God’s own special people...

*Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to **the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you **all the families of the earth shall be blessed.**”***

*Genesis 12:1-3*

It was quite evident early the piece, that God had in mind a relationship not just with Abram’s descendants, but through them, with people of all nations. Until that time, however, the place of meeting would be *The Land*, the

Promised Land, the land of Canaan, the land of Israel, the Holy Land. That is where Abraham went, and that is where his descendants would return to, find a home and, more importantly, a place to be at peace with God.

The importance of the Land and the promises to Abraham, were reinforced to Isaac and Jacob, but when Jacob's son, Joseph was sold into slavery to Egypt, we read that the Lord was also with him (Genesis 39:2-3). God was not limited to meeting with his people in the Promised Land, though it is clear that Jacob's family's stay in Egypt was to be a temporary affair. Not so temporary, however, that they didn't multiply there and become a numerous distinct ethnic group in one corner of the country. Eventually united in suffering under slavery to the Pharaoh, a new generation was ready to find freedom and nationhood under the reluctant leadership of Moses. The meeting place with God, for him? A burning bush at Mt Sinai. A place where they would meet again

### MOSES, SINAI & THE TABERNACLE

And so it was that after the Exodus Moses returned to the mountain where God's presence was signified by clouds and fire (**Exodus 24:9-18**). There, Moses was the go-between. God spoke to him. He spoke to the people. The people spoke to Moses. He spoke to God. This meeting with God "face to face" obviously wasn't for just anybody, nor was it just in any place. It was through mediators appointed by God, in places appointed by God, in ways appointed by God.

The mountain was a very significant meeting place, but the people couldn't stay there. They were journeying to the Land, and God didn't just go with them, he led them, by the fire and a cloud. And as they set up camp, God camped in middle of them, inside a tent wall made of skins, inside a tent known as the Holy Place, behind a curtain in an area known as the Holy of Holies, at a box known as the Ark of the Covenant containing the tablets of the Law God had given to Moses. And you've guessed it. The design of the whole thing, this Tabernacle (a temple tent) and the Ark, were by God's appointment, right down to the colours, materials and sizes of everything (**Exodus 25:8-9, 21-22**). It was for a special purpose and God made that purpose plain...

*Exodus 29:42 ...I will meet with you, to speak to you there. <sup>43</sup>I will meet with the Israelites there, and it shall be sanctified by my glory; <sup>44</sup>I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar; Aaron also and*

*his sons I will consecrate, to serve me as priests. <sup>45</sup>I will dwell among the Israelites, and I will be their God. <sup>46</sup>And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them; I am the LORD their God. See also Exodus 40:34-38.*

## THE TEMPLE

The eventual conquest and settlement in the Promised Land meant that the Tabernacle also settled, at Shiloh, and it was not until King David set up his capital at Jerusalem, that the ark finally found a new resting place. Solomon succeeded David and built a Temple (yes, according to God's specifications) with a similar design to the tabernacle, but this time in stone and precious metals. Now God's address read:-

The Ark,  
The Holy of Holies,  
The Holy Place,  
The Temple,  
Mount Zion,  
Jerusalem,  
The Land of Israel.

All communication to be addressed through the designated priests - the mediators between God and his people – in the ways specified by God!

The opening day of the Temple was a grand affair, and God made sure, with the fire, that they knew he was there:-

*When Solomon had ended his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. The priests could not enter the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD filled the LORD'S house. When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the LORD on the temple, they bowed down on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying,*

*“For he is good,  
for his steadfast love endures forever.”*

*2 Chronicles 7:1-3*

## DIVISION, PROPHETS & EXILE

That was the pinnacle. From there on it was all downhill. After Solomon, the kingdom divided between Jereboam of the northern tribes of Israel and Reheboam in Jerusalem. Jereboam assured his place in history as the notorious king who led Israel astray by erecting not one, but two golden calves, so that the northerners wouldn't travel to Jerusalem to worship. "Here," he said, "are your gods who brought you out of Egypt." Civil war and idolatry followed. The prophets became the vehicles of God's communication. "Turn back to God's law, obey him. worship him, practise justice, get rid of the idols," they commanded - but hardly anyone was listening.

Judgement was looming for both Israel to the North and Judah to the South, but despite Israel's evil practices arising from her idolatry, God, like a jealous husband kept looking forward to the time when their relationship would be restored...

*Hosea 2:16 On that day, says the LORD, you will call me, "My husband," and no longer will you call me, "My Baal." <sup>17</sup>For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more...*

*<sup>9</sup>And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. <sup>20</sup>I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD.*

But before that could happen, Israel and Judah had to meet their darkest hours. Northern Israel was decimated by Assyria in 722BC, and Judah were carried off to Babylon in 597 and 586BC. The Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed, and there must have been many who thought that God had been destroyed with them. Those who failed to recognize the Exile as God's punishment, wondered if the Babylonian gods were indeed stronger, or perhaps that God had just abandoned them altogether.

But it was not so. In the stories of Daniel and Esther we see that God was still with his people in Exile, and the message through prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, promised a return, a rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple, a new golden age to which a remnant of Israel would return...

*Jeremiah 33: 10 Thus says the LORD: In this place of which you say, "It is a waste without human beings or animals," in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without*

*inhabitants, human or animal, there shall once more be heard <sup>11</sup>the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing, as they bring thank offerings to the house of the LORD:*

*“Give thanks to the LORD of hosts,*

*for the LORD is good,*

*for his steadfast love endures forever!”*

*For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at first, says the LORD.*

## EMMANUEL

The Babylonian masters became the Persian masters, and under King Cyrus, in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, permission was given for Jerusalem and the Temple to be rebuilt. But somehow it didn't seem the same. Even though Judaism flourished, the domination of Greece, Egypt, Syria and Rome ensured that the Jews were never entirely free. The dream of God dwelling triumphantly with his people was still to be realised. The prophets had more than hinted at it, and people now looked for a deliverer, a Messiah. God, breaking into history again.

At just the right time, God sent his deliverer, his own Son, God in human form. Matthew reports the message of the angel to Joseph (chapter 1:20-23), assuring him that the boy to be born to Mary was a fulfilment of **Isaiah 1:23** – “and they shall call his name Immanuel,” which, adds Matthew, means, “*God with us.*”

The meeting place of people with God was now not so much the Holy of Holies in the Temple at Jerusalem as the man, Jesus the Messiah. John says of him, “The Word became flesh and *lived amongst us*, and we have seen his glory as of a father's only son...” (**John 1:14**). The word, “*lived*” is the word, “*tabernacled*” in the original Greek. Jesus set up tent amongst God's people, just as the tabernacle in the wilderness and the Temple in Jerusalem had been set up amongst them before. Jesus himself would make the claim, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (**John 14:9**). But now the presence of God amongst his people was limited, in a sense, to the physical presence of Jesus, for there was a limit to how many people Jesus could relate to at once. More was needed for God to meet with all people, and to fulfil the promise to Abraham, that through him all the nations would be blessed.

Which brings us to the turning point in history. Jesus died on the cross outside the Jerusalem city wall, apparently abandoned by God, in a way which provided for the forgiveness of our sins, and the bridging of the barrier between people and God. Matthew tells us that as Jesus died, the curtain in the Temple, separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, was torn in two from top to bottom. He implies that what happened on the cross was matched symbolically in this act of God tearing down the barrier into His Holy Presence. No longer would the priesthood of mediators be necessary, for the way had been made open to all.

But after Jesus rose from the tomb, he still returned to heaven leaving his followers alone. Though only for a little while. He had promised not to leave them as orphans but to send the Holy Spirit (**John 14:18 & 25**) - and the Day of Pentecost marked that event.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT

You see, up to this time God had met with individuals. Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, the Judges and King Saul, to name a few. God spoke to these people, and we hear of the Holy Spirit coming upon some of them, equipping them for the task ahead. But the Holy Spirit had by no means been available to all people. In Numbers 11 we read that the Spirit came upon seventy elders and then on two other people in the Israelite camp, much to the consternation of one young man who reported them to Moses. Moses' wish, "Would that *all* the LORD'S people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit on them," was fulfilled at Pentecost as Peter quoted the words of the prophet Joel, "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh."

In an event which was like a reversal of the scattering of people and languages at Babel (Genesis 11), people from all nations, hearing God being praised in their languages, gathered to hear Peter say, "For the promise (of the Spirit) is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away" (Acts 2:39). This outpouring in Jerusalem would be repeated amongst the despised Samaritans, and the "unclean" Gentiles (Acts 8 and 10). The Spirit was no longer just *on* certain people of Israelite descent, he was available to live *in* all people of *every* nation.

You may remember in John 4, that when Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well, she asked him a question, "Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in

Jerusalem.” Who was right? Jesus’ reply indicated that a new time was coming,

*“Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the **true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth**, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”*

After Pentecost, Paul could then assure the Corinthian Christians that as they gathered, the Spirit would be amongst them – their Christian community was the Temple of the Holy Spirit!

*Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?*

*1 Corinthians 3:16*

He goes on to say that not only is the community a temple, but so is the individual Christian.

*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?*

*1 Corinthians 6:19*

## **THE FINAL GATHERING**

So there it is. God has finally met with us again, not only through the mediators, Moses, Mt Sinai, priests, Tabernacle and Temple, but directly. Not just God *with* us, but God *in* us. Of course we know that the relationship is not perfect yet. The process of God meeting with people goes on. So does the process of refining that relationship. Seeing it deepen and mature. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13 that in this life he saw things as in a mirror, dimly, but one day he would see God face to face and know him fully, even as God knew him.

John’s vision in Revelation 21 shows this culmination of the purpose of life where the city, “New Jerusalem” represents the people of God from all nations...

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,*

***“See, the home of God is among mortals.  
He will dwell with them;  
they will be his peoples,  
and God himself will be with them ...”***

***...<sup>22</sup>I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. <sup>23</sup>And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.***

## FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION...

- What are today's symbols of God's presence with his people?
- Which of these symbols do you find helpful?
- When have you found God's presence closest to you?
- When have you had to accept his presence by faith rather than feelings?
- Which picture of God with his people do you find most helpful?  
Individual/Temple      Gathering of Christians/Temple  
Church as a body      Some other image.....

*Pray thanking God for his love, and the ways in which he has demonstrated it.*

## FOR FURTHER STUDY...

What significance can you find in these references in relation to the theme of God reaching out to gather a people around himself?

Isaiah 40:1-11

Isaiah 66:1-2

Jeremiah 29:10-14

Luke 14:15-24

John 2:19-22

Hebrews chapters 8-9

1 Peter 2:4-10

Revelation 3:20

## 2.

# THE KINGDOM OF GOD

It is easy to imagine that the course of history has been dictated by great powers, rulers and generals. That battles and wars have given it form. Today it may still seem that governments and multinational companies hold power over the future of humankind. More prevalent, however, is the belief that we, as individuals, hold our destiny in our own hands.

Not so, says the Bible. The superpowers of the world are puny alongside the power of God's Kingdom, and we only hold our own destiny in our hands in so far as we a choice - to respond to God's overtures to us, or to reject them. Whatever we choose, past, present and future are in God's hands, and his kingdom will prevail.

We often think of God's Kingdom as another name for Heaven. Of course Heaven is a major part of God's Kingdom, but the Kingdom is not just some geographical place. Rather it is anywhere that God rules, and it especially applies when *people* submit to God. We see God's Kingdom most clearly when God's authority and power are in evidence, and when people willingly submit as God's subjects.

Graham Goldsworthy in his book *Gospel and Kingdom* helpfully describes the Kingdom of God as, "God's people, in God's place, under God's rule," but we might also add, "under God's provision" since this King cares for his subjects. Although the terms, Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Heaven are used frequently in the New Testament, it is the principle which is evident in the Old Testament.

In Chapter One we saw God meeting with people and gathering them around him. We saw that God specified the ways in which those meetings were to take place. God in control. And wherever God is seen to be in control, there you will see the evidence of his Kingdom.

Let's take a look again at some samples from Old and New Testaments.

## EDEN and THE FALL

**Genesis 1:28-29 and 2:15-17** shows clearly that the Creator, God, didn't just give Adam and Eve the world and leave them to it. The Garden of Eden was the place where his people were to meet with him, and they were to live there under God's conditions. "Be fruitful and multiply... You may have all these... but not this." In these two chapters of paradise we have the perfect picture of God's Kingdom and of his generous provision for humankind.

The Fall of **Genesis 3** is the story of the loss of paradise and Kingdom. Adam and Eve's disobedience was a conscious rebellion against God's authority. They stepped out from under God's authority, establishing their own, fuelled by the desire "to be like God, knowing good and evil." And in the process the generous provision of food had now to be gained by toil.

It is immediately obvious that God did not make us as robots. Of all his creation, humans were given the choice as to whether they would submit or rebel. But, whatever the choice, the power and authority of God would not be diminished. History, Scripture and current experience show that people can and do rebel, but that they break themselves and everything around them in doing so.

God's acts of judgement in flood and the confusion of the nations' languages are ample evidence that God's power always prevails, and that humans can eventually go too far. But still God's Kingdom continues to include human beings. As the waters destroyed humanity, so also God's subjects rode out the flood in a box, just over a rugby pitch in length. There, righteous Noah and his family, obedient to God's orders, had built an ark to God's specifications and afterwards received, as Adam and Eve before them, the order to be fruitful and multiply.

## ABRAHAM

The judgement after Babel in **Genesis 11** was followed by the focus on another obedient man, who left the city life of Haran to go to the Land that God would show him (**Genesis 12:1-2**). And so God's Kingdom was preserved on earth through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, each submitting to God's plan for them – Yes, even Jacob, after an all night wrestling match (**Genesis 32:22-32**).

Nothing could ultimately jeopardise God’s plans to bring about his Kingdom. – that is, his own people, living as and where he wanted them to. Even Jacob’s sons, intending to do away with their brother, found that God could turn evil intentions to serve his purposes. As Joseph rose from slavery to manager of the famine relief in Egypt, he was able to also provide food for his family (the Children of Israel/Jacob) and save their lives.

*But Joseph said to his brothers, “Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today.*

*Genesis 50:19-20.*

## **MOSES and ISRAEL**

And so God’s Kingdom was demonstrated in the lives of a variety of individuals who, by faith, stepped out in obedience, under God’s authority. But although Moses was, with some initial persuasion, the next notable individual example, he was the vehicle by which God would gather a *whole people* to himself under his rule...

*Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.”*

*So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. The people all answered as one: “Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do.”*

*Exodus 19:5-8*

This event took place at Mt Sinai, and what followed was the giving of the law by which God’s people were to live under *his* authority, in a place to which *he* would lead them under his provision, manna on the way and the Land, “flowing with milk and honey”. The laws, feasts and religious rituals would affect every part of their lives and constantly remind them of who they were, but more importantly – to whom they belonged.

## JOSHUA & JUDGES

Joshua, after the conquest of Canaan and its settlement, was to throw down the challenge again, for the Israelites to live wholeheartedly as the subjects of The King...

*“Now therefore revere the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”*

*Joshua 24:14-15*

“Far be it from us to serve other gods,” they replied. Ironic words indeed, given the period of the Judges which followed, when their children and children’s children served other gods, and reaped the consequences – over and over again as God removed his provision and protection. Those consequences reinforced the fact that God was firmly in control. It was still *his* people, *his* Land and *his* plan for humankind. No-one would ever destroy the Kingdom, even though the people seemed to be doing their level best to do so.

## THE REQUEST FOR A KING

Their challenge came to the last of the Judges, Samuel. “We want a king like the other nations.” Samuel took it rather personally, since God had appointed him as leader, but he also recognized that their move was at worst a rejection of God’s authority and at best, a complete lack of faith that God could raise up a leader at an appropriate time to lead them against their enemies. God’s advice came to reassure Samuel:-

*“Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you. Now then, listen to their voice; only—you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.”*

*1 Samuel 8:7-9*

The warning which followed in verses ten to eighteen was a picture of oppression that had been anticipated in Deuteronomy 17:14-20, and was very different from the ideals of God's Kingdom. Yet, as Samuel addressed the people again, near the end of his life, it was clear that the new political system would never threaten God's Kingdom:-

*“See, here is the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked; see, the LORD has set a king over you. If you will fear the LORD and serve him and heed his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God, it will be well; but if you will not heed the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you and your king. 1 Samuel 12:13-15*

Saul's reign was demonstrably exercised under God's authority mediated through Samuel. David too was subject to God, but was more successful, since he was also more faithful and obedient to God. Solomon inherited the benefits of David's victories, and enjoyed peace and prosperity. If ever there was a picture of the Kingdom of God on earth, it was in the beginnings of Solomon's reign.

**1 Kings 10** eloquently describes the splendour of the kingdom, summed up in verses 23-25.

*Thus King Solomon excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom. The whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind. Every one of them brought a present, objects of silver and gold, garments, weaponry, spices, horses, and mules, so much year by year.*

Israel had become God's Kingdom more visibly than ever before, and the nations beat a path to her door, to learn and pay their dues.

## THE EXILE

Just as the Fall followed the paradise of Eden, so in 1 Kings 11, Solomon's fall followed the glory of the kingdom of Israel. Disobedience and idolatry set the scene for the division of the kingdom and the slow decline to Exile. Judah's kings continued in the line of David, but Israel's to the north, were beset by coups, murder and intrigue. Both kingdoms met their end, and Jerusalem and the Temple, symbols of their former glory, were destroyed.

Where was God now? Could it be true that the gods of Assyria and Babylon were more powerful than the God of Israel and Judah? Had God's Kingdom finally failed? It took the prophets to provide the answers.

Their message was that God had not abandoned his people. That far from being defeated, God had actually allowed these events to take place as a means of purifying Israel/Judah and returning a remnant of the faithful to the Land...

*Isaiah 40.*

<sup>1</sup>        *Comfort, O comfort my people,  
          says your God.*

<sup>2</sup>        *Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
          and cry to her  
          that she has served her term,  
          that her penalty is paid,  
          that she has received from the LORD'S hand  
          double for all her sins...*

<sup>6</sup>        *All people are grass,  
          their constancy is like the flower of the field.*

<sup>7</sup>        *The grass withers, the flower fades,  
          when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;  
          surely the people are grass.*

<sup>8</sup>        *The grass withers, the flower fades;  
          but the word of our God will stand forever...*

<sup>10</sup>       *See, the Lord GOD comes with might,  
          and his arm rules for him;  
          his reward is with him,*

*and his recompense before him.  
11 He will feed his flock like a shepherd;  
he will gather the lambs in his arms,  
and carry them in his bosom,  
and gently lead the mother sheep.*

Covering this period of Exile perhaps the book of Daniel promotes the power of God's Kingdom more than any other. God was shown to be infinitely more powerful than the great Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, and when God showed Daniel the secret of the king's dream, Daniel responded...

*“Blessed be the name of God from age to age,  
for wisdom and power are his.  
He changes times and seasons,  
deposes kings and sets up kings;  
he gives wisdom to the wise  
and knowledge to those who have understanding.  
He reveals deep and hidden things;  
he knows what is in the darkness,  
and light dwells with him.*

*Daniel 2:20-22*

The stories of Nebuchadnezzar's insanity, the lion's den and the fiery furnace reinforce the fact that God's Kingdom was never limited to the Land of Israel. His dominion was always over all the nations of the earth, and the visions assured Daniel that, with the rise and fall of other kingdoms, God would set up an everlasting kingdom. That he is not subject to history, but is its architect...

*And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall this kingdom be left to another people. It shall crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever...*

*Daniel 2:44*

<b>JESUS</b>
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It was Jesus who fulfilled these visions. Where Israel had so often failed to obey God, Jesus' obedience was complete. He embodied all that Israel should have been. He was the embodiment of the ideal Kingdom of God. By

Goldsworthy's definition he was God's person, in God's place under God's rule, perfectly, and all the blessings of God were his!

Mark tells us that Jesus' message was, "*The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news*" (1:15). The Kingdom had, of course, come near in the person of Jesus. His teaching bore authority, and he amply demonstrated power over disease, death, spirits, nature and even sins (**Mark 2:1-12**). He replied to the Pharisees, "...if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come to you" (**Matthew 12:28**).

Jesus described the Kingdom through such parables as the Banquet (**Matthew 22:1-14**), the Treasure in the Field (**Matthew 13:44**) and the Mustard Seed (**Mark 4:26-32**). Jesus seemed to be saying that *all* people are invited to gather with God, to find acceptance around his "table". Such is the worth of belonging to God that a person would give away everything to gain such treasure. There can be nothing more valuable or important. From small beginnings God's Kingdom would not fail to grow so that all can gather to the folds of God's blessing and protection.

Jesus also taught that to enter this Kingdom one has to have the attitude of a child putting its hand trustingly into that of the Father (**Mark 10:14-15**). Entry is by faith, rather than by anything we can achieve or deserve, but Jesus suggests that there are obstacles which prevent people from taking the step, most notably in **Mark 10:23-27**, the lure of wealth. This suggests that faith is not simply believing something in our heads, but a wholehearted commitment of one's life to God, wherever that commitment may lead.

Entering the Kingdom is achieved, according to Jesus' preaching, by repentance and belief. Repentance is to change direction *from* being master of our own lives *to* allowing God to be master. Belief implies trust, so that entering the Kingdom is entering into a relationship with God, a fact underlined by a scribe's response to Jesus in Mark 12.

*<sup>32</sup>... "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that 'God is one, and besides him there is no other'; <sup>33</sup>and 'to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,' and 'to love one's neighbor as oneself,'—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." <sup>34</sup>When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."*

Jesus told the scribe that he was close to the Kingdom because he recognised that the essence of entering lay not in the keeping of rules but in the response of love for God, which naturally and inevitably led to the love of one's neighbour.

Neither Jesus nor the scribe were saying anything new. Loving God had always been the fundamental truth of the Ten Commandments, and as we have seen, the concept of the Kingdom had been there throughout the Old Testament. Jesus brought something new, not simply because he was a perfect example of obedience, but in that, with his death and resurrection, he dealt a decisive blow to sin and death, (those forces which would seek to undermine the Kingdom and its subjects). Moreover, God's Spirit entering into the forgiven believer now brings about a new birth into the family of God – his Kingdom. Where the emphasis had been in the attempt to keep the law as a means to gaining the Kingdom, now the way into the Kingdom had been provided by God through Jesus and the Spirit, along with the *means* to live in obedience to God.

Not that we mortals, even Christians, manage to do that perfectly, as you may have noticed. That is why the Kingdom is *present* when people submit their lives to God and people can be subjects of the Kingdom *now*. But it is also spoken of in a *future* sense, because *perfect* submission and obedience is still to come. That is why Jesus encouraged us to pray, "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done". The kingdom grows as more and more people hear the gospel and respond to it, but it also grows as individual Christians and church communities grow in faith and obedience – that is, they willingly come more and more under God's influence and are transformed into the likeness of Christ.

One day all evil will be eradicated. In that day the Kingdom will be complete. As we saw in chapter one, Revelation paints the city of Jerusalem, representing the people of God, in all their perfection...

*People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.*

*Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree*

*of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.*

*Revelation 21:26 to 22:5*

Paradise lost to paradise regained. The Kingdom in Eden, through the Kingdom in the nation of Israel, to the Kingdom narrowing down to the person of Jesus. From there the Kingdom expands to embrace all who will come, starting with Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and swelling to the ends of the earth, until in triumph Christ returns and the Kingdom is fulfilled.

## FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION...

- When have you been aware of being God's person in the right place?
- When have others been that for you?
- What puts people off submitting to God's kingship?
- How might the idea of God's kingship be expressed in a republic?
- When do you find it hardest to submit to God?
- What benefits have you experienced when you gave in to him?

*Pray for sensitivity to God's voice and a willingness to be obedient.*

## FOR FURTHER STUDY...

What do these references tell you about the Kingdom of God?

Compare Genesis 2 with Isaiah 65:17-25 and Revelation 22:1-5.

Judges 8:22-28

Esther - where God is not mentioned.

Daniel - note how the visions affirm the control of God over history.

Revelation 11:15-19. Is this talking about the victory of the cross and resurrection, the judgement day or both?

As in the time of Noah, the Kingdom of God has at times consisted of a *remnant* of faithful people. Think of other times when this was so, and do a concordance search of occurrences of the word *remnant*.

Think about the way in which the Tabernacle and Temple from chapter one relate to the theme of the Kingdom.

### 3.

## COVENANT

The word covenant is not used too frequently these days. We are more likely to use expressions like, promise or agreement. We may think of examples like contracts and warranties, but these hardly come close to the richness of the solemn and binding agreements that God enters into with his people. Although it is too frequently devalued these days, the Christian marriage ceremony perhaps comes closest to describing the biblical concept of God's covenants.

Covenants of the Old Testament were also part of the cultural background. There were PARITY agreements or treaties made between equals, ROYAL GRANTS usually of land made to a subject, and SUZERAINTY TREATIES drawn up by a conquering king for the vassal nation. This last treaty spelled out the benefits of serving the suzerain, and the dire consequences of not doing so. God's dealings with Israel tended to take the form of a suzerainty treaty, but he also entered into Royal Grant covenants which had no particular conditions attached.

The terms Testament, of the Old and New variety, means covenant, and both parts of the Bible mention the term at various intervals. We shall look at them to observe where appropriate,

the purpose,  
the benefits,  
the consequences of breaking the covenant,  
and any signs associated with them.

### CREATION

Covenant is not mentioned at creation but the concept is evident. God is in charge, and as a benevolent ruler he bestows all the fruits of creation on the two humans. He gives them instructions, "Be fruitful and multiply," and he places restrictions, "You must not eat of the tree..." and a dire warning, "for in the day that you eat of it you shall die." (**Genesis 1:28-30, 2:15-17**). As we have seen, the purpose of all this was that the first people should live in a right relationship with God, each other and the creation itself. That Adam and Eve broke the covenant in quick smart time is a matter of history, and that we still

live with the consequences, a daily experience. And yet life continued, until it became unsustainable because of evil.

The aftermath of the Flood brought a new beginning born out of death. God spoke to Noah in words reminiscent of those to Adam...

*“Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. For your own lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning: from every animal I will require it and from human beings, each one for the blood of another, I will require a reckoning for human life.*

*Whoever sheds the blood of a human,  
by a human shall that person’s blood be shed;  
for in his own image  
God made humankind.*

*And you, be fruitful and multiply, abound on the earth and multiply in it.”*  
*Genesis 9:1-7*

God the provider gives blessings, instructions and limitations, and this time God binds himself to life on earth with the specific promises of a covenant...

*Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth...”*

*Genesis 9:8-17*

Signs point us in the right direction. They are visual reminders of covenant relationship. In a marriage ceremony, because of the importance of the commitment, we surround ourselves with signs such as the giving and receiving of a ring, the joining of hands and so on. The symbols reinforce the covenant and are a statement of the faithfulness and intention of the one who gives them – “With this ring I wed you; with all that I am and all that I have I honour you.”

Without the words the signs and symbols would be meaningless. The words and vows together spell out the intentions. God’s sign of a rainbow is just a quirk of nature without his explanation of his commitment to the living creation. Words and signs are not just a declaration of faithfulness. They provide security and encourage a faithful response.

## ABRAHAM

There are few Bible verses more significant than **Genesis 12:1-3**, with chapters 15 and 17, because they are promises not only to Abraham, but to his physical descendants, the Children of Israel, and to all those in the world who would eventually respond to God through Jesus Christ, and become the People of God – spiritually.

The promises of God in chapter 12 are:-

You will be a great nation.

I will bless you.

I will make your name great.

You will be a blessing.

In you all the families of the earth will be blessed.

The condition was that Abraham go to the Land that would show him – the Land of Canaan – which in verse 7 God promised to give to Abraham’s offspring.

Even Abraham, the man of enormous faith, wondered how he could have children in his old age. Although he believed God’s *word* to him (**Genesis 15:6**) concerning offspring but then expressed doubts about them inheriting the Land. After all he would live to see a son, but not the conquest of Canaan.

God therefore gave him a guarantee. He made a Land grant and according to the Hebrew expression, he *cut a covenant* with him. In the custom of the day two parties would seal an agreement by cutting animals in half, leaving a pathway between. The two parties would then walk between the divided animals as if to affirm, “May I become like these animals if I break this covenant!” At God’s instruction Abraham prepared the animals and on sundown God restated the promise of the Land, sealing it by passing between the animals in the form of a smoking fire pot and flaming torch – smoke and fire, the signs of the presence of God.

A further, and even more tangible sign of this covenant was to follow. As God restated the promises in **Genesis 17**, he also provided a reminder for the following generations that they were part of God’s purposes and plan, the inheritors of the promises and blessings. The sign was circumcision, and since it was associated with the organ of procreation, it would be an apt reminder that they and the children they made belonged to the Lord. The reminder of their destiny was carved in their flesh.

The covenant promises to Abraham were repeated to Isaac and then Jacob (**Genesis 35:9-12**). It is notable that Jacob, despite his scheming and unsavoury character, recognised the value of the promises (birthright), while on the other hand his elder brother, Esau sold them to him for a bowl of soup, “*Thus Esau despised his birthright*” (**Genesis 25:27-34**).

## MOSES & THE LAW at SINAI

For the Hebrew descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob Sinai marked the transition from being a loosely knit people in slavery in Egypt, to being a free nation under God, journeying to inherit the covenant promises. It is important then that this “marriage” between God and his people, should again be sealed with a covenant, this time taking the form of a *suzerainty treaty* as we have read before in **Exodus 19:1-6**.

There, the Suzerain (God) reminded Israel of what he had done for her, freeing her from slavery to Egypt. The condition was that she should obey his voice. The benefits were that she would be his own special people. Fire and smoke accompanied God’s presence with Moses, who recounted the Covenant conditions (the Commandments), set in stone, to the people. Much of the rest

of Exodus, Leviticus and parts of Numbers set out the fine print of the agreement. By the end of Moses life a new generation was ready to take possession of the Land and Moses reminded them that the Covenant was not just for their ancestors, but for them!

Deuteronomy – literally the *second law* retells the story, the blessings of obedience and the curses associated with disobedience (**Deuteronomy 28**).

*This very day the LORD your God is commanding you to observe these statutes and ordinances; so observe them diligently with all your heart and with all your soul. Today you have obtained the LORD'S agreement: to be your God; and for you to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, his commandments, and his ordinances, and to obey him. Today the LORD has obtained your agreement: to be his treasured people, as he promised you, and to keep his commandments; for him to set you high above all nations that he has made, in praise and in fame and in honor; and for you to be a people holy to the LORD your God, as he promised.*

*Deuteronomy 26:16-19*

## COVENANT WITH DAVID

After the Land was conquered and settled, the period of the Judges gave Israel ample experience of the seriousness of the Covenant conditions. Idolatry brought defeat and obedience saw deliverance through to the time of the kings.

In the golden age of Israel's history, under David and Solomon, many of the promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were fulfilled. They were a great people, occupying the Land securely, blessed by God, and providing blessings to the surrounding nations. God also made a covenant with David, brought by the prophet Nathan, "*Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.*" *2 Samuel 7:16*

But when the nation divided, the memory of the Covenant was lost, despite the kings of Judah continuing in David's line. About three hundred years after Solomon we read of Josiah, King of Judah, renewing the Covenant, when the Book of the Covenant (Deuteronomy?) was rediscovered during the Temple reparation work (**2 Chronicles 34:1 to 35:19**). But the move was too little too late, and Jeremiah, prophet to Judah, presented the hope of a New Covenant, even as the southern kingdom slid towards Exile to Babylon.

*The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.*

*Jeremiah 31:31-34*

Just as the Holy Spirit would dwell within God’s people, so his Covenant would be within them to help them respond to him, not merely out of legal obligation but from the very heart.

## **THE NEW COVENANT**

In 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 Paul tells us the words of Jesus on the night before he died. Taking bread and wine he presented them as the signs of the New Covenant or Testament.

*... the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “**This cup is the new covenant in my blood.** Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, **you proclaim the Lord’s death** until he comes.*

Just as God’s Covenant of life with Noah was signed with the rainbow, so this new Covenant of life was signed with bread and wine. As Noah and his family had been preserved through the floodwaters of death, so the New Covenant was brought into being through the death of Jesus Christ, and all who receive him into their lives inherit eternal life. Paul explains the death of Christ in Romans 5:10, *...we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son...*

The thrust of the Covenant mediated through Moses was that people could be reconciled to God through obedience to the law, but as Paul points out in Romans 2:12 onwards, the law only served to emphasise our inability to keep it. The New Covenant tells us that God has now provided the means of reconciliation not through *our* obedience, but through *Christ's*. Because he died, we may be forgiven and born into God's family through the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:6). No wonder that the writer of Hebrews could say...

*But Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted through better promises.*

*Hebrews 8:6*

## FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION...

- What sorts of covenants do we enter into in church and secular life?
  - What is their purpose?
  - How binding are they?
  - What happens if we break them
- Are you aware of having entered into a covenant relationship with God?
  - What has he promised you?
  - What are your obligations?
- When have you made promises to God?
  - Did you keep them?

*Pray, giving thanks for God's dealings with us.  
Ask forgiveness for broken commitments.*

## FOR FURTHER STUDY...

Read Hebrews 8:6 through chapter 9. Notice the aspects associated with the Old and New Covenants.

Think about the significance of the following references

Exodus 2:23

Exodus 26:33-34 Why was it called the ark of the Covenant? (40:20-21)

Numbers 1:50

Judges 2:1-3

Nehemiah 1:5-11

Psalms 25:10-14

Consider that the marriage covenant is to reflect the covenant of Christ with his people. Ephesians 5:31-32.

Luke 1:72-73

Galatians 3:16-18

Revelation 11:9

## 4.

# HOLINESS

So the purpose of life is to know God. God meets with us, and draws us into his Kingdom. The *means* by which he does it is the Covenant in Christ's blood by which we are reconciled to God. We must now ask ourselves, "Why?" Why did Jesus have to die for our sins for us to be reconciled?

In this lifetime there will always be something of a mystery as to the mechanics of it all, but the Bible does give us some insight, which we will look at in these final chapters.

The first part of the answer to our question, "Why?" has to do with *holiness*. In particular it has to do with God's holiness, and our lack of it. A matter of incompatibility you might say, and you'd be right. Imagine for a moment a marriage between an active prostitute and a prophet, a true man of God. I'm sure you could think of a hundred reasons why such a union would not work. I'm sure you could also see ways in which it *might* work if one of them, namely the prostitute, was willing and able to change.

There is a similarity here with God and us, and if you read Hosea you will see that this very example is used to demonstrate God's love for unfaithful Israel, his people. We may not wish to class ourselves with prostitutes, but the truth is that the Bible labels us all as sinners, unworthy of God. Even the least of our sins causes us to be incompatible with God who is 100% perfect. Some of the greatest saints are and were only too aware of their own unworthiness. Most of them probably wouldn't have rated themselves above 50% of God's perfection. Yet God, as we have seen, still reaches out to us, in his love, to draw us to himself, to remove the unholiness, and make us fit to be his bride.

We have become so used to our imperfections that we refer to them as being, "only human," as if that is how humanity is expected to be. We think that God will understand this and overlook our faults. Understand, he does, but to know why he cannot overlook our faults we must remind ourselves of how holy God is.

## THE HOLINESS OF GOD

*But the LORD of hosts is exalted by justice,  
and the Holy God shows himself holy by righteousness.*

*Isaiah 5:16*

When we talk about God's holiness, we are usually talking about his righteousness. He never does anything wrong, nor does he ever make a mistake! If he were any less than that, we could not trust him. But it also bars him from making imperfect liaisons with imperfect people!

## HOLY THINGS, HOLY PLACES

There is another aspect to this holiness of God. His perfection has a way of making things, and places and even people, *special, holy sanctified, set aside*.

Let's take a look at some examples of this...

In **Exodus 3:5-6**, Moses saw a burning bush which wasn't consumed, when he approached it God spoke from the bush and said, "Take the sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are walking is holy ground." What made it holy? The very presence of God. Was it perfect ground? Probably not, but it was *set aside* as a meeting place of God with this man.

Holiness has to do with purity, but it also has to do with being specially used for God. There is also a sense in which things and people so used, are cleansed and purified. The process of cleansing and purifying we call *sanctification*.

In **Exodus 19:23-24**, Moses returned to Sinai, this time with the people of Israel. There, the mountain was designated by God as holy, as was the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle (**Exodus 26:33-34**), the altar and anyone who touched it (**Exodus 29:37**), the anointing oil (**Exodus 30:31-32**), tithes (**Leviticus 27:30-33**), and even the camp they lived in (**Deuteronomy 23:14**).

Holiness is the theme of the book of Leviticus. It is full of laws to be observed, summarised in the instruction to Aaron...

*<sup>10</sup>You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean; <sup>11</sup>and you are to teach the people*

*of Israel all the statutes that the LORD has spoken to them through Moses.*

*Leviticus 10:8-11*

We recognise that today most of these things no longer apply to us (a good rule of thumb is that unless a law is reinforced in the New Testament it probably no longer applies). But we also recognise that these laws had the purpose of constantly reminding Israel that they were special and set aside for a purpose. Everything they did, every aspect of life including the things they ate, would say, “We are holy for God.” The ritual law was a visual aid to remind them of their destiny, *to enable people to meet with God.*

But wait a moment! Didn't we say that knowing God, and God meeting with people was the most fundamental purpose in life? If that's so then anything which helps to achieve that end must be of the utmost importance. Well holiness is! We, who overlook our shortcomings, sometimes forget the utmost seriousness of holiness, of purity, of things, places and people set aside for God.

## **THE SERIOUSNESS OF HOLINESS**

Let us then remind ourselves by reading these verses about fledgling Israel, poised between obscurity and greatness, on the road to inheriting the greatest promises ever made to humankind

*Now Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, each took his censer, put fire in it, and laid incense on it; and they offered unholy fire before the LORD, such as he had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the LORD meant when he said,*

*‘Through those who are near me  
I will show myself holy,  
and before all the people  
I will be glorified.’”*

*And Aaron was silent.*

*Leviticus 10:1-3*

I would have been too!

The absolute holiness of God is enough to instil fear in anyone!

Do you find such passages hard to read? Is God cruel and domineering? Perhaps it's easier to say that the writer got it wrong. That in the Old Testament they didn't know God well enough. But that won't do, for a reading of the New Testament will reveal just as much of God's wrath. Take Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 for example. No, it seems to me that in their precarious position, at that time, in that setting, with so much a stake, riding on the obedience of Israel, that drastic measures were sometimes necessary. Otherwise all would be lost, not just two lives. The hopes and blessings for the human race rested on the promises to Israel!

We should not be surprised therefore to learn of the measures taken against Korah in Numbers 16 or of Joshua's warnings to the people in Joshua 24:19-20, nor even the fate of Uzzah in touching the Ark of the Covenant (2 Samuel 6:6-7).

Rather than the actions of a pedantic perfectionist, we would do better to see the broad vision of a loving God who so desires the human race to be reconciled to him, that he will allow nothing to jeopardise that plan.

*For I am the LORD your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming creature that moves on the earth. For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt, to be your God; you shall be holy, for I am holy.*

*Leviticus 11:44-45*

## **A HOLY PEOPLE**

Although things, places and actions were declared holy, the ultimate aim was to bring about *a people* who were holy, and who could therefore relate to a holy God. We see that intention at Sinai...

*Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites."*

*Exodus 19:5-6*

As we have seen, the definition of God's special people (his Kingdom) expanded through Christ, Pentecost and Paul's missionary journeys, to include both Jews *and Gentiles* who would respond to Christ by faith.

God had promised Abraham that he would be a blessing to all nations, but it had been the Creator's intention long before that. Paul confirms it when he wrote to the Christians at Ephesus,

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.*

*Ephesians 1:3-4*

And the way we are made holy? We have seen that where God lived or met with people, that place or object became holy. We have also seen that God's dwelling place became the very hearts of those who would receive him. We receive God when we receive the Holy Spirit. We are set aside and sealed by the Holy Spirit...

*In him [Christ] you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.*

*Ephesians 1:13-14*

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.*

*1 Corinthians 3:16-17*

In Corinthians Paul is talking about the Christian community rather than individuals. You may notice the seriousness with which he regards their holy status, and the dire consequences of damaging that which belongs to God!

## HOLY LIVING

It's one thing to be declared holy because of God's Holy Spirit living within us, it's another to live a holy life as a result.

In eleven chapters Paul told the Roman Christians that salvation is by faith, that God demonstrated his love in that Jesus died for us, and that Christians are sealed (as a sign of being God's children) by the Holy Spirit. By chapter 12, in the light of all that God has done, he wrote...

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

*Romans 12:1-2*

It becomes plain that holy living depends on presenting ourselves to God, in his service. It is equally obvious that there is a process of transformation which takes place whereby we learn what pleases God. Living holy lives is therefore an act of will, a surrendering to God and his purposes, and growth whose end is to be more like Jesus. The New Testament is full of appeals to holy living, because by it we demonstrate that we are God's children – we behave more and more rightly – more like God does. But there are also warnings galore about becoming complacent. We are to continue in the faith so that we may finally be presented to God. And, as you know, there is only one way that can happen - in holiness...

*And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him—provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the*

*faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard,*

*Colossians 12:21-23*

So there you have it. Christians are in a *state* of holiness through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. For that reason we can be known as *saints* – holy people, but we are also called to demonstrate that holiness in our *behaviour*. The process of growth in holiness is known as *sanctification*. As Christians continue in the faith, the state of holiness and the practice of holiness should gradually converge until that day when we meet God face to face and state and practice become one as we are presented to him without blemish.

## FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION...

- Do we still consider things and places as holy?
  - Why/Why not. What makes them holy?
- Do we still consider people as holy?
  - What qualifies them as holy?
- Do you think of all other Christians as holy?
  - How might it affect the way you relate to them to think that way?
- What comes in the way of holy living?
- What can assist us to live holy lives?
- Do you think of “holy” as boring? Share reasons for your answer.
  - Should it be so?

*Pray for holiness in your's and others' lives.*

## FOR FURTHER STUDY...

In what way was the Sabbath holy, and why?

Should it still be so? Exodus 16:23, 20:8

What might the purpose of the Nazirites have been? Numbers 6:5

Consider, in the question of what was clean and unclean, that there is a difference between *ritual* holiness and *moral* holiness. Note Leviticus 10:8-11 amongst other commands in that book.

Read and think about the significance of the following...

Leviticus 20:26

Ephesians 2:19-22

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

Hebrews 12:9-10

1 Peter 1:13-16

1 Peter 2:9-10

## 5. **SACRIFICE, OFFERING & ATONEMENT**

Jesus died so that we who were unholy can be reconciled to a holy God. But our disobedience, our failure to acknowledge God, our tendency to try to run our own lives, and effectively make gods of ourselves, our sin in other words – cannot be simply overlooked. How just would God be if our crimes were simply swept under the carpet? He would be like a judge who simply set every criminal loose on society, without any punishment. We hate it when that sort of thing seems to happen and criminals are let off too lightly. It's funny though. We are full of righteous indignation when the courts seem too lenient, but we tend to feel differently when someone we know and love is on trial and about to be sentenced. Suppose it was your child, your parent, your spouse? Would you want the full weight of the law, or would you want mercy to prevail?

That is something of God's dilemma. The sin must be punished, but he loves the people he has created so much, that he doesn't want any to die – and let's make no mistake, death is the penalty for sin, of any sort, of any size. Remember, God is 100% perfect and any sin separates us from him – and that separation is death – spiritual death – for ever.

So how may the penalty be paid? It requires death, and here is where the mystery occurs. Something woven into the fabric of creation, but beyond our ability or knowledge to understand completely.

If a perfect human being were to die as the punishment for sin then justice would be satisfied. Perfect Adam through disobedience, brought sin into the world, so perfect Jesus through obedience to death on the cross, brought forgiveness and reconciliation.

The forerunners of Christ's sacrifice were those sacrifices of the Old Testament. They were usually made on an altar made of stones or earth, though in the Tabernacle they were of wood overlaid with metals such as bronze or gold.

Some sacrifices were **burnt offerings**, of say a ram or a bull or bird (depending on your circumstances), which had to be pure. This was a voluntary act of worship as atonement for unintentional sin, and as an expression of submission to God.

**Grain offerings** were also voluntary and involved the sacrifice of grain, oil, flour and so on, as a recognition of God's provision.

**Fellowship offerings** involved any animal without defect, but might also include breads of various sorts. With the communal meal it was a voluntary act of worship, fellowship and thanksgiving.

**Sin offerings** were mandatory for cleansing from defilement and forgiveness of specific unintentional sins. The animal used depended on your standing. A young bull for a priest and congregation; a male goat for a leader; a female goat or lamb for a common person; a dove or pigeon for a poor person and a tenth of an ephah of fine flour (2.2 litres) for a very poor person.

**Guilt offerings** were also mandatory, for unintentional sin which required restitution, and involved a ram or lamb.

Many details were to be involved and although they symbolic, the cost of a perfect sacrifice was significant and the faith which accompanied them could be very real.

Such sacrifices were made in the way which God prescribed, for only when it was pleasing to him did it have the effect of restoring or maintaining the relationship between himself and people as a true act of worship. This act of reconciliation is understood in the word **atonement** (at – one – ment). The Hebrew word used was *kipper* which means *to cover, to wipe away* or especially *to ransom by substitution*. Hilaskomai is the Greek New Testament word and it carries the idea of the removal of sin (expiation) and/or propitiation, which is the turning away of God's wrath (his just punishment).

#### **OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES**

Cane's and Abel's sacrifices in **Genesis 4:1-7** appear to have been thank offerings, akin to a harvest thanksgiving, while Noah was expressing thanks for the preservation of life in **Genesis 8:20-21** and probably sacrificing for the sins that had gone before. As Abraham journeyed he set up an altar in the places where he settled (**Genesis 12:7-8**). *It becomes obvious that the altar*

became a specific meeting place between God and his people as the sacrifice enabled the communication. Few instances of this were more significant than the sacrifices at Sinai...

*Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, "All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do." And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. He rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and set up twelve pillars, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel. He sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed oxen as offerings of well-being [fellowship] to the LORD. Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he dashed against the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, "See **the blood of the covenant** that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."*

*Exodus 24:3-8*

Here, the blood, the sign of both life, and life sacrificed is used as a seal of the solemn agreement or covenant between God and his people. Half of the blood Godward (on the altar) and half on the people, to demonstrate agreement and unity between the two. Further study of references to the blood reveal that it ritually purifies that which it touches.

As the Israelites traveled to the Land and settled it, the place of sacrifice was the tabernacle, and later the Temple. That Israel strayed into idolatry was demonstrated by the proliferation of places of sacrifice on the hilltops, and the falling into disrepair of the Temple, (for example see Josiah's reforms in **2 Chronicles 34**).

## FORESHADOWING CHRIST'S SACRIFICE

In a few instances in the Old Testament we see strong parallels with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. One is the story of Abraham taking his only son, Isaac onto Mt Moriah to sacrifice him according to God's command. **Genesis 22:1-14** speaks of Abraham's faith when he answered Isaac, "God will

provide a lamb.” Abraham was prevented from killing his son, and a ram was found caught in a thicket. Abraham sacrificed the ram in place of his son.

The parallel is twofold. The ram reminds us of Jesus’ death in our place so that we can live, but Abraham reminds us of God who was willing to sacrifice his only Son, as Isaac the willing sacrifice reminds us of Jesus himself. In the second parallel we also see that God received Jesus back from the dead, just as Abraham received Isaac back from the brink of death.

An even stronger parallel is seen in the story of the final Egyptian plague, the Passover in **Exodus 12:21-27**

*<sup>21</sup>Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go, select lambs for your families, and slaughter **the passover lamb**.  
<sup>22</sup>Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood in the basin. None of you shall go outside the door of your house until morning.  
<sup>23</sup>For the LORD will pass through to strike down the Egyptians; when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over that door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you down. <sup>24</sup>You shall observe this rite as a perpetual ordinance for you and your children. <sup>25</sup>When you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this observance. <sup>26</sup>And when your children ask you, ‘What do you mean by this observance?’ <sup>27</sup>you shall say, ‘It is the passover sacrifice to the LORD, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, when he struck down the Egyptians but spared our houses.’”*

The blood of the lamb was the sign by which the Hebrew people could be safe. The lamb died instead of the firstborn in each family, the power of the Egyptian Pharaoh was broken and through this deliverance they would be affirmed at Sinai as the special people of God. It is significant then, that John the Baptist should have pointed Jesus of Nazareth with the words, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” (**John 1:29**).

Similarly the ritual in **Leviticus 16:6-10** whereby one goat died for the sin of the people, while the scapegoat (azazel) was released into the wilderness presumably carrying away, symbolically, the sins of the people.

With this background **Isaiah 53** speaks so powerfully in linking the Old Testament practices to what we know of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as he went to the Cross...

- ...he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,  
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.*
- <sup>3</sup> *He was despised and rejected by others;  
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;  
and as one from whom others hide their faces  
he was despised, and we held him of no account.*
- <sup>4</sup> ***Surely he has borne our infirmities  
and carried our diseases;**  
yet we accounted him stricken,  
struck down by God, and afflicted.*
- <sup>5</sup> ***But he was wounded for our transgressions,  
crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,  
and by his bruises we are healed.***
- <sup>6</sup> *All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have all turned to our own way,  
and the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.*
- <sup>7</sup> *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,  
yet he did not open his mouth;  
**like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,**  
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.*
- <sup>8</sup> *By a perversion of justice he was taken away.  
Who could have imagined his future?  
For he was cut off from the land of the living,  
**stricken for the transgression of my people.***
- <sup>9</sup> *They made his grave with the wicked  
and his tomb with the rich,  
although he had done no violence,  
and there was no deceit in his mouth.*
- <sup>10</sup> ***Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him with pain.  
When you make his life an offering for sin,**  
he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days;  
through him the will of the LORD shall prosper.*
- <sup>11</sup> *Out of his anguish he shall see light;*

*he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge.*

***The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous,  
and he shall bear their iniquities.***

<sup>12</sup>*Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great,  
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;  
because he poured out himself to death,  
and was numbered with the transgressors;  
yet he bore the sin of many,  
and made intercession for the transgressors.*

## JESUS CHRIST IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

What was indicated in the Old Testament becomes explicit in the New. It is thought that Jesus' Last Supper was in fact the Passover with his disciples. When he took the bread and wine and linked it with his body and blood given for us, he was making the connection of himself with the lamb of the original Passover, dying in our place so that we may live.

John writes very clearly in his first letter...

*In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.*

*1 John 4:10*

which was similar to Christ's own words...

*For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."*

*Mark 10:45*

Paul also writes of Christ's atoning sacrifice in Romans 3:23-25, and the writer of Hebrews emphasised the finality of that sacrifice with...

*Unlike the other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered himself.*

*Hebrews 7:27*

It becomes evident reading **Hebrews 9 to 10** that the sacrifice of animals could never of itself have been effective in dealing with the problem of sin. It

seems that only Christ's sacrifice gave meaning to the Old Testament practice through the exercise of faith. In other words Christ's death was effective retrospectively, and if he had not died, the animal sacrifice would have been to no avail.

It is difficult to know exactly how or why the death of Jesus should avail for all sin. The actual mechanics of it all may well be beyond our understanding. There is however a logic in a human being dying on behalf of human sin, just as it makes sense that an animal sacrifice could never be an adequate substitute. In the story of David and Goliath we see an example of representative warfare. Two champions, one from each army, went out to fight each other so that the rest of the army need not engage in battle and be killed. When Jesus died on the cross, he did so as representative of the human race, so that we need not fight and die in battle. Jesus died in our place, but won the victory over sin and death. Had he been imperfect, then he could only have died for his own sins, but as the perfect human, his sacrifice availed for us, for all time.

### **THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE**

The appropriate response to the knowledge that Christ died for our sins is to repent, put our lives into his hands, and receive the forgiveness that God offers. Paul's letter to the Ephesians makes it abundantly clear that such forgiveness cannot be earned by living a good life, or by trying to keep the Commandments...

*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God- not the result of works, so that no one may boast.*

*Ephesians 2:8-9*

Once we have accepted that forgiveness however, God looks for a further response in his people. Paul exhorts the Roman Christians, on the strength of all that God has done for them through Jesus Christ...

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*

*Romans 12:1*

In Jesus' words we are to take up the cross and follow him. There is nothing that we are to hold back. It is a cost to be counted, but it pales into insignificance compared to what God has given us, and what he promises to give us both now and in the future. But we shall read about that in the next chapter.

## FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION...

- Do you think we can make atonement for our sins today?
- What sort of sacrifices can we make to God?
- Have you ever made a sacrifice of something for God?
  - What was the result?
- Are there things that you need to confess to God?

*Spend some time in quiet confession. Then read 1 John 1:9*

## FOR FURTHER STUDY...

Consider that it was not just the ritual, but the right attitude which was important, even in Old Testament times.

Psalm 50:12-14, 23.

Psalm 51:15-19.

Hosea 6:6. 1

Samuel 15:21-23.

What do you think was wrong with Cain's sacrifice?

Genesis 4:1-7.

Why might natural stone have been required for the altar?

Exodus 20:22-26.

Read of the details concerning sacrifice...

Exodus 29.

Leviticus chapters 1-10.

Consider that altars could be a sign of division or unity...

Joshua 22:10-34

Settling inside and outside the Land

1 Kings 12:25-33

The start of the divided kingdom of Israel

Our sacrifices

1 Peter 2:5

Hebrews 13:15-16

## 6. Salvation & Deliverance

Jesus died as the sacrifice for our sins to bring us to God. We use the term, “Jesus saves.” A short sentence with a wealth of meaning!

*Save* can mean *collect*, as one collects stamps or trophies. There is a sense in which that is true here. After all God is collecting a people to himself, his treasured possessions, a holy people. But more importantly Jesus saves us from one condition in order to enjoy another. We are saved *from*, and we are saved *to*.

This is not a new experience for either God or humankind. As we go back through the Old Testament Scriptures we see God constantly delivering people from various crises, so that they may serve him. We will look at some examples to determine what people were saved from, what they were saved for, and the way that salvation comes about.

### NOAH

By now you should be aware of the great act of deliverance associated with Noah. He was saved from the penalty meted out on an irredeemably wicked world...

*Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth. And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth.*

*Genesis 6:11-13*

Although it was physical death and destruction, by implication spiritual death had already occurred, for it seemed that the population had no desire to know God.

Noah and his family were saved from death, in order that they might be fruitful and multiply (**Genesis 9:7**). They had been saved *for* life and for an ongoing relationship with God.

## THE EXODUS

The paradigm of salvation in the Old Testament is the Exodus. It actually contains numerous examples of deliverance for the Hebrew people. Each of the plagues affected the Egyptians but not the Israelites, and the final plague – the Passover – is fixed in Hebrew Passover tradition to this day, for it was the final act of God which broke the Pharaoh's resolve and brought about freedom for an enslaved ethnic minority. The Red Sea really marked the physical boundary between slavery and freedom, and its crossing was a crossing from death to life, from ethnic minority to an established nation on its way to its homeland. As we have seen, the events at Sinai formalised Israel's new status as God's people. They had been saved to take on an enormous responsibility (**Exodus 19:3-6**), in inheriting the promises to Abraham in Genesis 12 onwards.

The journey through the wilderness gave rise to deliverances from enemies, from hunger, from thirst and from God's anger! A notable example is one of the times when Israel grumbled...

*<sup>4</sup>From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. <sup>5</sup>The people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food." <sup>6</sup>Then the LORD sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. <sup>7</sup>The people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. <sup>8</sup>And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live." <sup>9</sup>So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.*

*Numbers 21:4-9*

Here, as at many points in their, Israel was delivered from the results of their own waywardness – saved from the judgement of God, by God. For with the judgement a way of escape was provided.

God's deliverance during the journey to the Land is well summarised at the end of Deuteronomy...

*<sup>10</sup>Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face. <sup>11</sup>He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, <sup>12</sup>and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.*

*Deuteronomy 34:10-12*

## DELIVERANCE IN THE LAND

Both the conquest and the years of settlement in the Land were marked by failure to obey God, his withdrawing of his protection, the people turning back to him, and his saving them from their enemies.

After the victory at Jericho, the Israelites were roundly defeated at Ai, but dealing with the disobedience which caused it led to victory (**Joshua 7:1-5 and 8:1**). God's provision for them can be read in Joshua's final speech in **Joshua 24:8-13**. Later the Midianite oppression was turned to victory under Gideon when the people cried out to God (**Judges 6:1 and 8:28**), a cycle of events oft repeated in this period.

## THE EXILE

Next to the Exodus the Exile stands as the next most significant act of salvation in the Old Testament. When God put it into the heart of Cyrus, King of Persia, to allow the Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem and begin rebuilding, he brought to an end seventy years of wilderness-like experience. Jeremiah expressed the pain of their loss...

*Judah has gone into exile with suffering  
and hard servitude;  
she lives now among the nations,  
and finds no resting place;  
her pursuers have all overtaken her*

*in the midst of her distress.*

*The roads to Zion mourn,  
for no one comes to the festivals;  
all her gates are desolate,  
her priests groan;  
her young girls grieve,  
and her lot is bitter.*

*Her foes have become the masters,  
her enemies prosper,  
because the LORD has made her suffer  
for the multitude of her transgressions;  
her children have gone away,  
captives before the foe.*

*Lamentations 1:3-5*

God's salvation, spoken of in Isaiah in terms of a new creation and a new Exodus, brought Israel from captivity, homelessness and purposelessness to freedom, new hope and new purpose.

Salvation for the Israelites had always been away from straying into oblivion, and death, and *faith and obedience were the means by which that salvation came about*. As Noah, Moses, Joshua, Gideon and many others obeyed God's directions, so God acted to deliver his people for himself. The purpose was, as it had always been, that they should be a blessing to the world, by revealing God through their life and practice, so that the other nations could also gather to him and know him as *their* God.

But the reality didn't live up to the immediate expectations. Jerusalem and the Temple were rebuilt, but between the Old and New Testaments, a period of about 400 years, the Land was dominated by Alexander the Great, Egypt and Syria, and finally Rome. Growing out of the time of the Exile the Jews were looking for a new deliverer, God's representative king, a Messiah, a Saviour.

## **THE SAVIOUR**

Enter an angel to Joseph...

*"...Mary will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."*

*Matthew 1:21*

And another to the shepherds...

*I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.*  
*Luke 2:10-11*

*Jesus* in Greek and *Joshua* in Hebrew both meant Saviour and he became known as the Christ, the anointed one, *Messiah* in Hebrew, through the things which he did.

His life was one of deliverance. The word for *heal* is the same as the word for *save* in the New Testament Greek. Jesus went about saving people from sickness, possession, danger and death. And through *his* death he brought about salvation from the penalty and slavery of sin, from separation from God.

Here was an act of deliverance to transcend all that had gone before, which is why Jesus could take the Passover Remembrance of the Exodus and turn it into a remembrance of himself and what he would do in dying on the Cross. In Jesus' also drew a parallel with the serpent incident...

*"Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life".*

*John 3:14-16*

## **THE WAY OF SALVATION**

As we can see, the way to salvation for us is still the way of faith. This is not just believing strongly enough. It is a matter of entrusting one's life into the hands of Jesus Christ, of asking his forgiveness for sins, and receiving the Holy Spirit. That Jesus is the way of salvation is abundantly clear both from the Old Testament (Isaiah 53 which we read before) and in the New...

*Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

*John 14:6*

*This Jesus is*

*'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders;  
it has become the cornerstone.'*

*There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under  
heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."*

*Acts 4:11-12*

## **SAVED FROM**

When the Israelites entered through the doorway surrounded by the blood of the Passover lamb, they entered a place of security from the judgement of God. Jesus called himself the door to the sheepfold (**John 10:9-10**). Through the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God, we too may enter a place of safety from judgement

Those who entrust their lives to Jesus the Christ are saved from the penalty of sin, which is separation from God. They are saved from the wrath and judgement of God. They are saved from the destructive enslaving nature of sin because God's Spirit enters them, and they are saved from a pointless, purposeless life.

## **SAVED TO**

What are they saved *to*? Freedom! Freedom from guilt, from sin's consequences. Jesus said...

*"Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.*

*John 8:34-36*

*"I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup>The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."*

*John 10:9-10*

Abundant life! It is abundant because it the life of God's Spirit in those who believe. It is abundant because it is eternal. It is knowing God now and it's destination is the presence of God face to face, with the resurrection of Jesus

Christ as the guarantee of our resurrection. It is abundant because it is a purpose-filled life, and not just any purpose, but *the* purpose for which we were created – *to know God, and to make him known to others*. And when you look at that purpose you can see the parallel between God’s people today, and Israel of the Old Testament.

Lists could be made of the blessings to which we are saved through faith in Jesus Christ. There are the advantages of prayer, the elation of Spirit-filled worship, the gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit in love, joy, peace, and so on (**1 Corinthians 12 and Galatians 5:22-23**).

<b>SAVED, NOW OR WHEN?</b>
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It may sound arrogant when some Christians talk about being sure they are going to heaven, especially when some of the Bible verses talk of salvation in the future. Consider the tenses in these verses.

Jesus to his disciples...

*“...and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end **will be saved**.”*

*Matthew 10:22*

*And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end **will be saved**.*

*Matthew 24:12-13*

*For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who **are being saved** it is the power of God.*

*1 Corinthians 1:18*

*<sup>4</sup>But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you **have been saved**—<sup>6</sup>and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup>For by grace you **have been saved** through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God...*

*Ephesians 2:4-8*

As we remember what we are saved from, and what we are saved to, it becomes obvious that the benefits of salvation begin as soon as a people put their faith in Jesus Christ. Eternal life is not just future life, it is an enriched life in the present. But the ultimate salvation is the escape from the penalty of sin on the Day of Judgement, and that lies in the future. However, we have the guarantee of the Holy Spirit now, that on that Day we shall indeed be saved. The condition, of course, is that we remain in the Faith, that we do not turn our back on God and deny Jesus Christ. And that is why the New Testament is full of exhortations to persevere to the end.

Christians are saved, because they have been reconciled to God and become subjects of his Kingdom through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. God promises eternal life through this New Covenant, signed by the Bread and Wine and sealed by the Holy Spirit, so that we can be confident that on the last Day we will be presented to God, faultless.

*<sup>20</sup>But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup>Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.*

*<sup>22</sup>Be merciful to those who doubt; <sup>23</sup>snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.*

*<sup>24</sup>To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—<sup>25</sup>to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.*

*Jude 1:20-25*

## FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

Can we be confident of going to heaven?

In the light of the exhortations to persevere, do you think we can lose our salvation?

Are you aware of God having saved you from anything?

What has he given you?

What do you see now as the purpose for your life?

*Having thought about life's purpose, now may be a good time to actually ask Jesus Christ to be Lord and Saviour of your life. You could pray asking for forgiveness, and for the Holy Spirit, thanking God for what he has done on your behalf.*

*If you have already done that, it could be a time to recommit your life to God's purposes for this world.*

*Finish with one of Paul's prayers for the Ephesians, chapter 1:17-19.*

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

1 Samuel 17:33-37 and beyond. Note the deliverance of David and the faith involved. As you read further, find other examples of God delivering him.

2 Chronicles 32:20-23 Discover the context of these verses. What is Hezekiah saved from, and what are the results?

Read the first six chapters of Daniel to see several acts of deliverance by God. Think about the results of these deliverances. What affect might these stories have had on Jewish people undergoing exile or foreign invasion?

Mark 10:46-52 Reflect on the relationship between healing and faith. Jesus says, "Your faith has saved you." Where was Bartimaeus' faith placed?

Jesus, at his transfiguration, met with Moses and Elijah. Luke 9:31 says they were talking about Jesus' *departure*. The Greek word is the same as for *Exodus*. What is the significance of the Exodus with relation to Jesus' departure?

Consider Romans 10:9-15 in the light of the purpose of life.

Read the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3. Note the call for perseverance, in order to inherit eternal life.