



St Helen's
Bishopsgate

BIBLE STUDY RESOURCES

Big Picture course

Leader's manual



Big Picture

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Why do the Big Picture course?

If you were to visit a city for the first time and ask someone to show you the most famous city building, it would be of little help if they began by showing you only the detail of a cornice or a door handle without first enabling you to see the whole building from an appropriate distance. In the same way, to understand the Bible correctly we need to see its big picture or main storyline. Without the big picture, we lack the context for any part of the Bible – we don't know where we are in the overall message. With the big picture, we know where we are and can therefore make more sense of what is happening. We wouldn't think of opening a novel in the middle and trying to understand the events taking place. To do so risks missing the point of what is happening; the same is true of the Bible.

The Big Picture will help us to step back and see how the Bible fits together into one coherent whole. As we look at the major themes of the Bible, we will cover issues such as: Does God have a plan for the world? How does Jesus fit in? What is God like? This will deepen our understanding of what the Bible has to say about God, us and the world we live in.

How to make the most of the Big Picture course

You will see that there are twelve studies. It would be a great help if you read the relevant passage(s) and look at the suggested questions yourself before the group meets. This way you will get more out of each session and will benefit others as you make your contributions during the discussion.

We hope that the sessions will be as relaxed as Christianity Explored – during each study there will be plenty of time to discuss questions and issues arising from your own study of each week's Bible passages, so do jot down questions and comments.

We are not making any assumptions about background knowledge or your current beliefs about any of the issues we have been discussing in Christianity Explored. The purpose of the "Story so far" section at the beginning of each study is not to assume that everyone believes the summary text, but just to recap on the story of the Bible as seen in the previous studies.

Don't forget Jesus' first words when he came on the scene – "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Jesus thinks it's urgent that people respond to him. As you go through the studies, think through whether the stuff you are learning is helping you to trust Jesus.



Leading the Big Picture course

Much like Christianity Explored, the Big Picture course is designed to be as accessible as possible to people who are unfamiliar with the Bible; however, there are some key differences. For a start, there's no up-front talk to consider a particular doctrine. Secondly, more focus is given to spending time looking at the Bible, and less to answering questions (although hopefully both will happen).

Much like preparing for Christianity Explored, the best way to be ready for studies is to get to know the passage(s) that you'll be leading, and then try to answer the questions yourself without looking at the suggested answers. It's also really important to be ready with 2 or 3 supplementary questions so that if group members are struggling, you've had time to come up with something helpful that still points people to the main point of the passage.

Sometimes in Christianity Explored we'll get asked a question that is covered beautifully in a later week. It's the same in the Big Picture course, so it's worth getting to know what is covered later on so that you can postpone answers if appropriate.

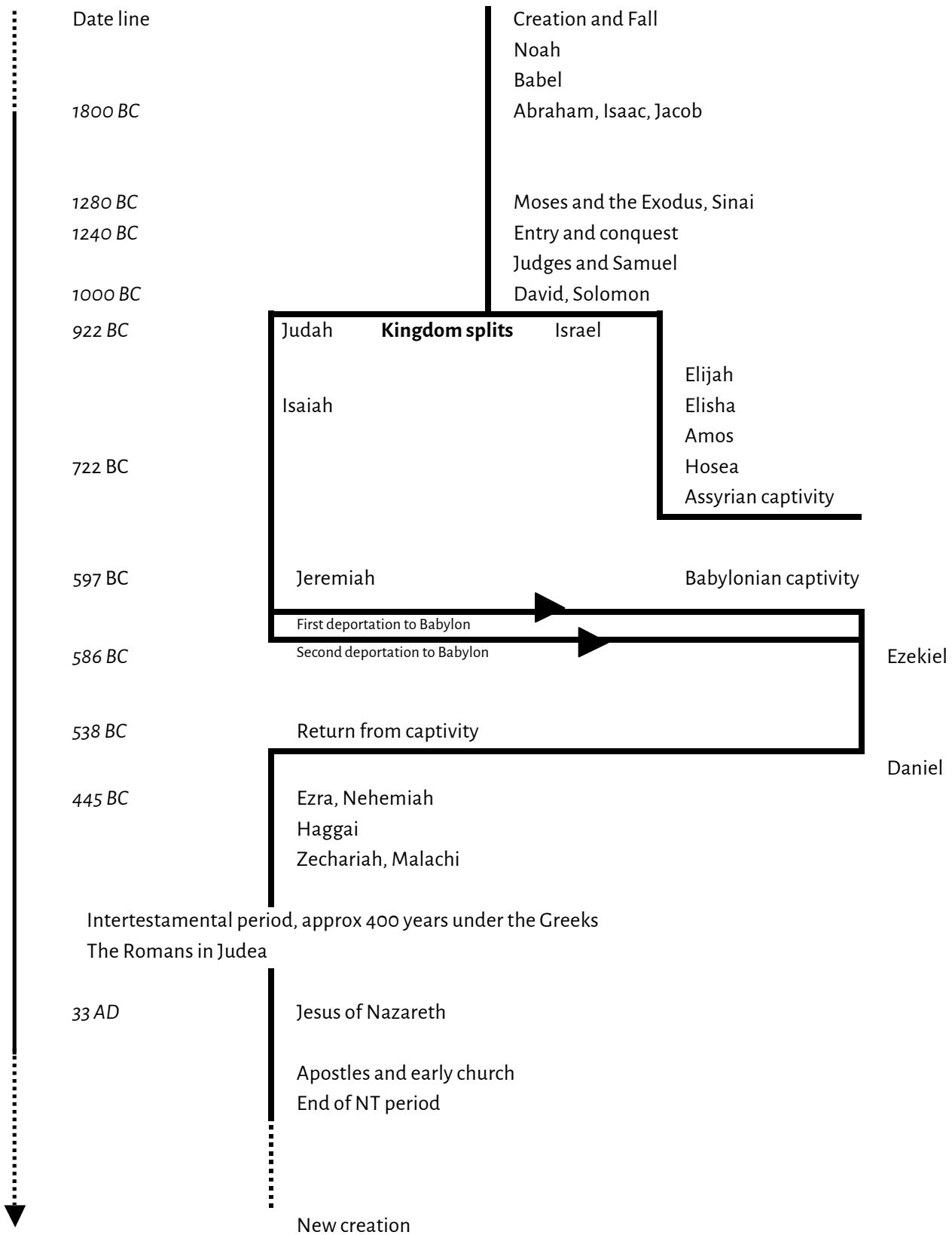
Unfortunately the number of books and speed of the course make it impossible to deal with individual questions about the reliability of e.g. 2 Kings. However, it is worth knowing a bit about how the Bible was put together, and since people will hopefully be coming to the course because they're convinced that Jesus is the Son of God, it is helpful to know that Jesus himself endorsed the Old Testament (for an example in Mark, see Mark 10:6-8 cf. Genesis 1:27, 2:24, 5:2; also Mark 12:18-27 cf. Exodus 3:6).

Differences between leaders' and members' guides

The main difference is obviously that the leaders' guides contain suggested answers. They also have "difficult bits" at the end of every study, so that hopefully you'll have had an opportunity to think about many of the difficult questions that you'll get asked.

However, the most important difference is that the beginning of every study in the Leaders' guide has a "Main points" section. This explains the main truths that the study is trying to communicate. Knowing these is really important for making sure that your study, and your supplementary questions, are geared towards communicating the next element of the Big Picture that the course is illuminating.

Timeline of the Bible



The God who has a plan

Ephesians 1:1-14

Main points: To see that

- God has a plan for this world and for his people and he has chosen to reveal it in his word, the Bible.
- God's plan is purposed in and through Jesus Christ. This is emphasised in the repetitive use of the phrase 'in him' or 'through him' in the passage.

The apostle Paul was a missionary sent by Jesus to spread the gospel among people from both Jewish and non-Jewish backgrounds. The book of Ephesians is a letter which he wrote to a bunch of people in the area around Ephesus (part of modern-day Turkey). They had already become Christians, and Paul is writing to encourage them to keep going in their new faith. he does this by reminding them that God is hugely powerful and has fantastic plans and purposes for his people.

HEALTH WARNING!

Paul's writing style is very different from Mark's 'story-teller' method. he writes more like a lawyer (don't let that put you off!), cramming a lot of ideas into a few sentences to make his argument - you might need to read the chunk of text through a couple of times to make any sense of it. Don't worry if it feels like hard work to read – make a note of words and phrases which are new to you (Paul uses some terms that you won't have heard Mark using) and we'll discuss them in the session.

**For starters**

1. How do you view God? Do you view him as having a plan/purpose for the world? If so, what would you say his plan is?

**Investigate**

2. Read Ephesians 1:1-14. List all the things that God has done for the Ephesians.
 - Chosen us (v4), predestined us to be adopted as his sons (v5), redeemed us (i.e. paid the price) (v7), forgiveness of sins (v7), given us wisdom and understanding (v8), made known the mystery of his will (v9), marked us with the Holy Spirit (v13).
 - So that we may know the full extent of what God has done for us!
3. What is God's plan (1:3-14)? Why is God seeking to achieve this plan? (1:6,12,14)
 - To bring all things in heaven and on earth under Christ (v 9-10).
 - Achieved for the praise of his glorious grace, it is all for his glory.

4. What is God the Father's part in the plan and what is Jesus' role? What does this teach us about God the Father and Jesus?
 - The Father is in control of the plan, and will bring it about (v3) (Notice the repetition). The whole of the Father's plan is purposed in and through Jesus (v 3-5, 7, 9) (Again, notice the repetition of 'in/through Christ').
 - Jesus has a central part in the Father's plan. he is the one through whom the plan is fulfilled.



Thinking it through

5. When we look at the world, why is it hard to believe God has a plan and that he will accomplish it?
 - Look at the world around us! It seems random, unfocussed and without God or anyone in control or heading towards a particular goal.
 - As Christians, living in this world, it is often difficult to see how they are blessed with every spiritual blessing now when they appear to experience life the same as non-Christians around them.
6. How does what we learn in Ephesians 1:3-14 help us understand God's priorities for the world?
 - God's main concern is to see everything united under Christ
7. Why do you think we have studied Ephesians 1 at the beginning of the Big Picture course?
 - The whole of the Bible is about God's plan for mankind. As we work through some key passages in the Bible, we will see God's plan unfold and be able to remember from Eph 1 both why there is a plan and why it is important that we understand it.



Home study: Genesis 1

1. What repeated words and phrases do you notice in Genesis 1?
2. What do we learn about God? What do we learn about the world?

Difficult bits:

- **How can we understand predestination?** Predestination is a truth in the Bible that as Christians we may still struggle with, but it is clear that Paul thinks of it as a good thing for God to predestine his people (Eph 1:3-6). Rather than seeing this as withholding something that everyone deserves, Paul seems to recognise that this is choosing to show some people great kindness that no one deserves.
- **Who are the 'we' and 'you' in 1:11-13?** The 'we' of v11-12 probably refer to Paul and his immediate circle of fellow-believers. The 'you' of v13 probably, therefore, refers to the Ephesian Christians. This is confused by the rest of the passage as 'we' and 'our' refer to Christians in general.

The God who made the world

Genesis 1, 3

Main points: To see that

- God created the world and it was only good. he created man to rule over the world under him.
- At the fall, man rejected God's word, his rule, and his goodness.
- The consequences of man's rebellion against God is death and judgement. There is a reversal of all the good things God gave his creation in the beginning.

The story so far

The Bible's account of God and his plan for eternity begins with God's creation of the world. However, the paradise that God originally created is ruined as early as Genesis 3 when mankind rebel against God, often known as the Fall. This is not the end of the story but really the beginning – the Bible is about what God does in response to the events of Genesis 3.



For starters

1. If you were to go onto the street and do a survey, what words do you think people would use to describe God? Write a list.
 - For example, distant, loving, angry, personel, creator, almighty.



Investigate

2. Quickly read Genesis 1:1-2:3, noting down any words or phrases that are repeated. What are the main things we learn about God and the world?
 - Repeated phrases: 'and God said' (v3,6,9,11,14,20,24,26,29)
'God saw that it was good' (v3,10,12,18,21,25,31)
 - We see that God is so powerful that he made the world himself, by his word, and it was good.
3. What do we learn about mankind and our place in God's world? What is the order of authority that God establishes in the world (1:27-28)?
 - Man is made in God's image (1:27), to rule over creation. The order is:
God rules over man rules over creation
 - It may help to write each on 3 separate pieces of paper and ask for them to be ordered
4. Read Genesis 2:15-17 and 3:1-24. What are Adam and Eve caused to doubt about God? How are they trying to change the order of authority?
 - Adam and Eve doubt God's word, his goodness and his rule. They want to be like God.

In light of Genesis 1, why is their rebellion so serious?

- It is God's word that created everything, and he rules over all things. By rejecting his word and rule, man is totally rejecting God himself and what he has done, as they want to rule themselves.
5. What are the consequences of their rebellion (3:7-24)?
- Shame (v7)
 - Relationship between man and God is ruined. Man is afraid and God is angry (v8-10).
 - Relationship between people ruined (v11-13, v16)
 - Creation cursed (v14-17)
 - Death (v19, 22)
 - Expelled from the garden (v23)
 - NB: Realising the wide effect of the Fall, that it stretches throughout creation, is crucial to understanding why the only solution is Revelation 21: re-creation!
6. What evidence is there of hope for humanity in Genesis 3?
- The woman's seed will crush the serpent (v15)
 - God clothes Adam and Eve (v21)
 - God doesn't destroy everything, man still 'lives' physically



Thinking it through

7. How does Genesis 1-3 describe God? What words would you use to describe him? How has your own thinking changed?
- For example, provider, almighty, creator, powerful
8. 'I can't believe in God when the world is in so much of a mess.' What would Genesis 1-3 say in answer to this comment?
- We are living in a 'fallen' world, where sin is present and creation is cursed by God because of man's rejection of him.
9. Read Colossians 1:16. What is Jesus' role in creation?
- he created all things, for himself.



Home study: Genesis 3, Revelation 21:1-8

1. What are the differences between the world at the end of Genesis 3, and the world in Revelation 21?
Use the table below to compare and contrast.

	Genesis 3	Revelation 21-22
Relationship between God and man		
Land		
Life / death		
Curse/sin		
Blessings		

Difficult bits:

- **Is this a historical account?** The NT considers Adam was a real man (e.g. Luke 3:38; see also 1 Cor 15:21-22). It is a broad question, but it is important to drive home the reality that God did create the world in this way. Less important details, such as day length, are debatable.
- **In what sense does man die?** Man actually does die (Gen 2:17) not only physically but also spiritually (as man is separated from God).
- **Why does God make the world if he knows it will all go wrong?** This is a much debated question, which we do not fully know the answer to. Clearly, however, God loves mankind and so, in order for himself to be glorified, he rescues us for relationship with himself.
- **Where did Cain get his wife from (4:17)?** There are a number of possibilities, but we can only speculate; Genesis doesn't give us the answer explicitly, so its author clearly doesn't seem to think that it's important.

The God who will re-make the world

Revelation 21:1-22:6

Main points: To see that

- God's plan will end with the creation of a new heaven and a new earth, and the old will pass away.
- This new creation will be even better than the first creation, there will be no more death, and sin will never enter it.

The story so far

The Bible's account of God and his plan for eternity begins with God's creation of the world in Genesis 1-2. God's sheer greatness and power is breath taking as he creates everything from nothing and simply by speaking. God's created world is very good and, although God is in charge of his world, his rule over his creation is delegated to mankind.

However, God's paradise is ruined in Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve are seduced by the serpent into doubting God's word and God's goodness. The heart of their rebellion is that they long to be like God (Genesis 3:5) which is both scandalous (as God is the creator and ruler of the world) and foolish (as mankind is not like God). Mankind's rebellion leads to a terrible judgement from God – all of creation is cursed, mankind's relationship with God is ruined and relationships between people are ruined. The only glimmers of hope are God's promise that the serpent will one day be crushed (3:15) and God's continued provision of good things to Adam and Eve (3:21).

The rest of the Bible can be viewed as God putting right what went wrong at the Fall. In fact, God is going to do more than simply restore the paradise of Eden. God will create a wonderful new heaven and new earth far superior to Eden. Revelation 21 – 22 is the best glimpse of God's new creation.



For starters

1. What are your main aims and goals in life?
2. What is your view of heaven? How does it affect the way you live?



Investigate

3. Read Revelation 21:1-22:6. What will happen to the 'first' creation? What do you think this means?
 - The first creation will pass away (21:1). It will be destroyed.
 - A totally new creation will take its place.
4. From what we saw in Genesis 3 (see Study 2), why does this have to happen?
 - There is sin in this present creation and so it is spoilt.
 - A radically new creation, without sin (21:27) or curse (21:4), needs to be made to replace the old one. This new creation needs to be like Eden, or even better.

5. Complete the table below to compare and contrast the situation in Genesis 3 with that in Revelation 21.

	Genesis 3	Revelation 21
Relationship between God and man	Relationship with God ruined Gen 3:6-13	Relationship restored, man can see God's face and he worships God Rev 21:3
Land	Thrown out of the garden, into a fallen world Gen 3:23-24	A new creation is formed (cf. v20-22 – that is a city compared to a garden i.e. more secure). Man dwelling there. Rev 21:1-2
Life/death	No access into Eden, so no access to the tree of life Gen 3:22	No more death Rev 21:4
Curse/sin	Man and creation is cursed – man is destined to die. Sin is present Gen 3:1-5 & 14-19	No sin and no curse Rev 21:8
Blessings	Signs of hope: woman will crush serpents' heal (v15), God clothes man and woman (v21) Gen 3:14-21	No more death, mourning, crying or pain Rev 21:4

6. What is the significance of the similarities between the 'first' creation and the new creation? What is the significance of the differences?
- Similarities: God is present, there is relationship between God and man, they are dwelling in a land, there is a tree of life. The new creation is, in many ways, very similar to the 'first' creation
 - Differences: In the new creation there will be no more sin 'ever'. The new creation is a secure city, as opposed to a garden.
 - The new creation appears to be even better than the 'first' creation.



Thinking it through

1. What big questions are left unanswered after studying Genesis 1-3 and Revelation 21?
 - How will God rescue his people from a fallen world to the new creation?
 - When will God complete this rescue?
2. How has this passage challenged your view of what heaven (i.e. God's new creation) is like?
 - Not just fluffy clouds; genuine, physical, focused on God



Home study: Genesis 12: 1-20

1. What are the main things which are promised to Abram in this passage?

2. Look again at your table from Study 2. Which (if any) of the effects of Genesis 3 are dealt with in this passage?

	Genesis 3	Genesis 12
Relationship between God and man		
Land		
Life/death		
Curse/sin		
Blessings		

Difficult bits:

- How literally can we take this picture of heaven?** As described in the passage, the new creation will be physical and will be amazing, but it is evident from the context of Revelation and other Scriptural apocalyptic literature that many of the images are symbolic (see below).
- What is all the symbolism?** “seven” – completeness (?spiritual); “twelve” – completeness (?structural); “thousand” – big; “144” = 12 x 12 = absolutely complete and inclusive; “12,000” = 12 x 1000 complete and big. “High walls” – freedom from wars; “cube city” = like the Holy of Holies in the OT temple, demonstrating God’s presence is everywhere as fully as it was then in the temple; “twelve tribes / apostles” – completeness of OT / NT believers; “transparent / clear” – purity; “light / bright” vs “night” – purity / perfection vs wickedness; “river” and “tree of life” – allusions to Genesis 2, as a restored garden of Eden.
- What happens to the old creation? Is it completely destroyed or renewed?** This is a much debated issue, but taking the text from Rev 21:1 literally, it appears that the old creation will be completely destroyed (see also Rev 20:11). However, scripture is not completely clear, and some verses suggest that the first earth may not be totally destroyed (see 2 Peter 3:10). The big point is clear, that there is a totally new creation, but how this is brought about has not been fully revealed to us yet.
- Will anyone who lies go to hell (21:8)?** The passage describes the people who will be excluded from the kingdom of heaven and lists a few sins. However, the context is clear that the point is about the exclusion of all sin (e.g. 21:27). It is also clear that humans will be there (21:3) even though all humans have sinned. Therefore it must not be saying those who have ever sinned, but those who go on sinning rather than turning in a life of repentance to serve Jesus.

The God who makes promises

Genesis 12

Main points: To see that

- God promises (unconditionally) a partial reversal of the consequences of the fall (i.e. a relationship with him, a land, some blessings, a great nation), showing his grace and love to mankind.
- Abraham responds in obedience and trust, but his faith is not perfect, reflecting the nature of our faith today.

The story so far

The Bible's account of God's plan for the whole of history is not simply to put right what went wrong at the Fall and to rescue his people from this fallen world. God will create a wonderful new heaven and new earth far superior to Eden.

The new creation is pictured in Revelation 21 as a stunning and secure city without any rebellion (21:27) or the consequences of such rebellion (21:4). The people of God have access to the Tree of Life which was out of their reach after the Fall and we are specifically told that 'no longer will there be any curse' (22:3). Even more wonderful, however, is the picture of restored relationship between God and his people (21:3) who will be gathered from all nations (21:24-26).

God begins to promise how he will achieve his plan in Genesis 12. This set of promises is one of the key turning points in the Bible.



For starters

1. What are the various means by which the world can be made into a better place, according to what people generally think?
 - Being a good person and being nice to other people, such as feeding the poor, housing the homeless etc.
 - Caring for the environment now, such as save the rainforests etc.
2. What big questions are left unanswered after looking at Genesis 1-3 and Revelation 21?
 - How and when will God create this new heaven and earth?



Investigate

3. Read Genesis 12:1-7. What are the main things that God promises Abram (later called Abraham) in these verses?
 - A great nation (v2)
 - A great name (v2)
 - Blessings (v3)
 - A land (v7)

4. Complete the table below to relate the promises of Genesis 12 with the events of Genesis 3.

	Genesis 3	Genesis 12
Relationship between God and man	Relationship between God and man ruined	<i>Relationship with God closer, but not restored to the way it was</i>
Land	Thrown out of Eden	<i>Promise of land/Canaan</i>
Life/death	No access to tree of life (death introduced, no future)	<i>Death still present, but everlasting descendants</i>
Curse/sin	Presence of sin and curses	<i>Sin still present</i>
Blessings	No significant blessings	<i>Blessings to Abraham, and through him to the other nations</i>

What does this teach us about what God is beginning to do?

- God is beginning to reverse the effects of the fall. This appears to be the start of God's plan to rescue his people.

5. What has Abraham done to deserve these promises?

- Nothing. God makes these promises before Abram even moves house; God's promise of blessing is not an 'if' statement ("If you go, I will bless you") but a command to go to another land in order to receive the blessing he is promising.

6. How does Abraham respond to the promises (see 12:1-9)? How is he different from Adam and Eve in Genesis 3?

- Abraham obeys God's commands
- Whereas Adam and Eve rejected God's word and rule, Abraham listens to and obeys God's words.

Describe Abraham's faith in God (see 12:10-20)? What does it tell us about God that he chooses to bless people like that?

- Abraham is not sinless. Sin is still present in the world, but God still wants to rescue his people. Despite Abraham's sin, he has faith in God and believes and obeys him. God is shown to be gracious.



Thinking it through

7. To what extent are the promises to Abraham fulfilled in the new creation described in Revelation 21?

- Completely fulfilled. The new creation consists of a land, with many people dwelling there, there is a close relationship between man and God and there will be many blessings.

8. How does Abraham show what faith looks like?

- Abraham gets up, moves everything and trusts God's promises. Faith is not just believing in God, but also obeying God's word, living for him, and knowing he is in control.
9. What would / does it mean in practise to put your faith in Jesus?
 - An opportunity to discuss the practical out workings of faith, and to address the difference between obedience in order to achieve salvation, and obedience because salvation has already been achieved.



Home study: Exodus 1-12

Exodus follows the events surrounding Abraham's descendents, the Israelites.

1. Skim read Exodus 1-11. Where are the Israelites? What problem do they find themselves in?
2. How does God intervene?
3. What 2 things is Israel rescued from in Exodus 12?

Difficult bits:

- **Was the Abrahamic covenant genuinely unconditional?** In Genesis 17:9-14, it appears that the male offspring must be circumcised to receive the promises. However, the covenant is made unconditionally before the command for circumcision, so it is most likely this is used as a sign of God's people, not the way to inherit the promises.
- **If the covenant is everlasting, why is heaven not in Canaan?** The outworking of Genesis 3 show that the whole world, even the earth, has been corrupted by sin (e.g. Genesis 3:17-18). In order for heaven to be perfect, God needs to work a transformation that exceeds what was offered in Canaan.
- **What's wrong with Hagar's child (Genesis 16)?** Ishmael is still a descendant of Abram, but the decision to have children through Sarai's servant is an expression of doubt in God's promise to give Abram many descendents. God makes it clear that the blessing comes through his power and not man's efforts to fulfil his promises for him.

The God who rescues Israel

Exodus 12

Main points:

- God executes judgement on Egypt and rescues Israel for relationship with him, showing his rescue achieves for them what he has promised. The emphasis is on rescue for relationship, more than rescue to live in the land.
- God reveals what he is like, both to the Egyptians (in the first 9 plagues) and to Israel (distinguished as those who are his). Israel are to remember the rescue as a clear revelation of God's character; to forget the rescue is to forget what God is like.

The story so far

At the start of the Bible, God creates the world and sets apart mankind to enjoy relationship with him and to look after his creation. However, mankind rebel against their creator and, as a result, suffer God's right anger and punishment (Genesis 3). They face toil, enmity, death and separation from God. Rebellion remains an ever-present problem from Genesis 3 onwards – even flooding the whole world and starting afresh with the most righteous man, Noah (Genesis 6), deals with neither rebellion nor death. Something altogether different is required before the Fall can be reversed and the new creation (Revelation 21-22) can come about.

We looked at one of the key turning points in the Bible in Study 4, Genesis 12. God promises that he himself will act to reverse the effects of the Fall. God promises Abram (later called Abraham): many descendants, a land in which to dwell, blessing for himself and other nations, and a relationship with God.

However, the early chapters of the book of Exodus begin with such thoughts a million miles away. Abraham's descendants have become a nation: Israel. However, they still do not have a land of their own, and are in slavery in Egypt.



For starters

1. Read Exodus 2:23-24; 3:15-17. What does God plan to do and why?
 - God plans to rescue them from Egypt into Canaan (3:17)
 - God remembers his covenant with Abraham and his descendants (2:24)
2. Skim read Exodus 3-11. List the main things that happened in the run up to Exodus 12.
 - God reveals who he is and what he will do (3:15-17; 6:1-8)
 - God calls Moses through whom God will rescue Israel (3:1-10)
 - God brings plagues which are aimed to judge Egypt, rescue Israel and reveal himself (6:28-7:7 cf 7:14-11:10)

Investigate



3. Read Exodus 12. From what 2 things is Israel rescued in chapter 12? Why are both necessary?
 - Israel are rescued from slavery and from God's judgement
 - Rescue from slavery is needed before God can give Israel what he has promised (12:31-39)
 - God had to judge his enemies but Israel needed to be spared this judgement (12:3-13, 21-23)
4. How does God accomplish each of the rescues referred to in question 1? How does the Passover lamb avert God's judgement?
 - By the death of a substitute (Passover Lamb); a death occurred in every house – either of the firstborn or the lamb
 - God's people were marked out by the blood of the lamb
 - In this way, God distinguishes between those who are his people and those who are his enemies; his people are rescued and his enemies are judged
5. What is Israel rescued for? (6:8, 7:16, 8:1, 9:1, 12:25). Why is each aspect significant?
 - Israel are rescued to live in the land - God is fulfilling his promise to Abraham
 - More significantly, Israel are rescued in order to worship God – he is the focus of the rescue not Israel. They are rescued for relationship with him.

What else do we learn about the way God rescues his people? (e.g. 9:4-7)

- God deals differently with those who are his people and those who are not
6. What is God teaching about himself through his rescue of the Israelites (see 9:14-16)?
 - God is powerfully able to rescue and the people do not rescue themselves (9:14-16)
 - God reveals what he is like as he rescues (9:14-16)
 7. How are God's people to remember these events? (12:14-20, 24-27)? Given your answer to question 6, why is this important?
 - The Feast of Unleavened Bread (12:14-20) to remind them of the haste with which they were rescued from slavery in Egypt; the Passover Meal (12:24-27) as a way of explaining the rescue from judgement to their children; and the consecration of the firstborn (13:1-16) to explain the rescue of the firstborn.
 - Israel need to remember the Exodus otherwise there is a real danger that they will forget what God is like.



Thinking it through

8. The Passover is used in the Bible as a pattern of God's ultimate rescue of humanity. From studies 1-4, what parallels are there between God's rescue of his people here and what we learned in Christianity Explored about how God rescues people through the work of Jesus? (Think about why God rescues them, from what they're rescued, and the manner in which the rescue takes place).
 - God needs to rescue his people in order to give them what he has promised
 - God needs to rescue from judgement and from his fallen world
 - God rescues his people as his enemies are judged

9. What questions are still left unanswered?
 - Who are God's people?
 - Who are God's enemies?
 - How will God's people be saved from the Fall?

10. Read the second sentence of 1 Corinthians 5:7. How does the Bible view Jesus' role in God's rescue of mankind?
 - Jesus acted as the Passover Lamb to avert God's judgement



Home study: Exodus 19:1-6

1. What are the nation of Israel promised in these verses? What do you think this means?

2. How are Israel to obtain this blessing? Is this different to how Abraham did?

Difficult bits

- **What's with Exodus 4:24-26?** Abraham had already been given the covenant and circumcision, yet Moses' son clearly hadn't been circumcised (4:25). This disobedience of Moses's comes to a head, and his wife identifies and solves the problem in order to save Moses' life. The account actually speaks of God's mercy in using the disobedient, and of his justice, being willing to find another way to achieve his purposes if justice takes Moses out of the picture.
- **What about this bit....?** Avoid reading too much into the detail and interpreting the plagues in an allegorical way. Most of the details are not referred to in the rest of the Bible, except where the writers are keen to show that the Passover Lamb is a type of Christ.
- **Why does God harden Pharaoh's heart?** While this may appear unfair, notice that Pharaoh is also described as hardening his own heart (8:15,32). While God is in control, Pharaoh is willing to have his heart hardened. God's underlying purpose is to have mercy by rescuing his people (cf. Romans 9:17). A helpful cross reference may be Genesis 50:20, showing God's active involvement in achieving good when man wishes evil.
- **Why do they have to do all this lamb-killing and blood-spreading?** This is the point of the study! The Israelites were also deserving of judgement from God for their rebellion against him, but God has graciously chosen a way for them to escape that judgement through a substitute.
- **What's with all the festivals in the Old Testament?** Festivals like Passover were pointing forward to things which have now been fulfilled (in Jesus' death). We are still encouraged to remember everything that God has done for us, but since Jesus came, we are no longer required to keep festivals in the same way.
- **How can you trust what it says in Exodus?** What you make of the OT depends in part on what you make of Jesus. Jesus publicly validated the OT, so trusting in Jesus as God requires you believe what he says about the OT. A helpful example is Mark 12:16-27, where in answer to the Sadducees, Jesus quotes Exodus 3:6 as though it is word-for-word history (v26). Since God is the God of the living, God's declaration to be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob requires that all three are going to come back to life, so the resurrection must be true. If Jesus didn't believe Exodus's account of God's words was accurate, his argument in v27 would not work.
- **Is it possible for Israel to have produced 600,000 men (12v37) in 430 years (12v40)?** If each of Israel's couples had an average of 6 children each for 13 generations (i.e. averaging the next generation at the age of 30) then this would total 1.6 million. Given their ancestor Jacob had 12 sons (plus e.g. Dinah), the ability to have 6 is well within the realms of possibility. Note that already 66 persons had been totalled, excluding his son's wives, when Jacob arrived in Egypt (Gen 46:26). 1 Chronicles suggests Moses was a 3rd generation Levite, and the NT genealogies (Matt 1, Luke 3) only describe 10-11 generations between Judah and King David; but clearly there must have been more to span 430 years, so it seems to be accepted that these genealogies are deliberately selective.

The God who makes a deal with Israel

Exodus 19, Deuteronomy 28, Jeremiah 11

Main points:

- God initiates a covenant with Moses whose primary focus is himself, a covenant based on God's rescue and revelation of himself, and rewarding obedience with relationship with him (e.g. Ex 19:4-6).
- The Mosaic covenant provides God's people with a means to inherit Abraham's promises. Its conditionality and Israel's inevitable failure remind us that the cause of the Fall (disobedience) needs to be dealt with before the Fall can be reversed.

The story so far

Although God has promised in Genesis 12 to reverse the effects of the Fall, the situation in Exodus 1-11 looked bleak. God's people Israel were hardly a nation and, although they were numerous, they were slaves in Egypt to Pharaoh. However, God heard their crying and remembered his covenant with Abraham (Exodus 2:23). God called Moses and revealed to him the God that he is and the rescue he was about to bring about. The rescue of Israel from Egypt (known as the Exodus) is very significant as it provides a pattern which teaches us much about how God ultimately rescues humanity.

Exodus 12 teaches that God rescues his people **from** slavery **and** judgement by punishing his enemies. God does so **through** the death of a substitute Passover Lamb whose blood marks them out as God's people. And God rescues his people **for** relationship with himself. So significant are these things that Israel is told again and again to remember lest they forget their rescue and...their God!



For starters

1. How do people like to think they can get to heaven?



Investigate

2. Read Exodus 19:1-8. How does God offer to bless Israel? What do the terms in 19:5-6 mean?
 - They will be God's treasured possession having an intimate relationship with God
 - They will be a kingdom of priests having access into God's presence
 - They will be a holy nation, set apart for God and different to the nations around them
3. What must Israel do to obtain this blessing? How does this differ from the promises made to Abraham (Genesis 12)? How do the Israelites respond?
 - They must obey God fully and keep the covenant (19:5) – the covenant is conditional
 - The promises made to Abraham were unconditional
 - The people responded by agreeing to obey God (19:8)

God unpacks this agreement with the Israelites several times. Read Deuteronomy 28:1-14 and 28:58-68.

4. What are the main ways in which God's people will be rewarded if they obey God? (Deut 28:1-14) How do these rewards compare with the promises made to Abraham?
 - Israel will be rewarded with prosperity (28:3-6,8,11); peace with God and with other people (28:7-10); and success (28:13-14)
 - The promises to Abraham are expanded so the people could better understand them
5. What are the main ways in which God's people will be punished if they disobey God? (Deut 28:58-68)
 - Israel will be punished with sickness (28:59-61); ruin and destruction; uprooted and scattered (28:63-64); restlessness and terror (28:65-67); and a return to Egypt - which probably means slavery (28:68)
6. Read Jeremiah 11:1-11. What is the prophet's charge against Israel? Why is this so serious?
 - Israel failed to listen to God's repeated call to obedience but instead were stubborn (11:7-8) and followed other gods and, as a result, have broken the covenant (11:10)
 - Israel have experienced the curses of the Mosaic covenant (11:3,8) but now face inevitable disaster and a silent God (11:11)
7. Look back at your answer to question 3. What does Jeremiah 11 tell us about Israel's ability to succeed? Why is that?
 - The blessings promised will not be obtained by humanity's obedience - we are rebellious and cannot obey



Thinking it through

8. What were the consequences of this failure to obey for Israel? (See 2 Kings 25)
 - The Babylonians invaded in 587 B.C., killing the king and his sons, setting fire to the Temple, breaking down the walls of Jerusalem, and carrying the people off into exile (25:11-12)
9. How does it challenge our thinking today about God and about how we can get to heaven?
 - We should not trust in our own ability but, instead, recognise our rebellious nature
 - God will judge and punish rebellion and disobedience
10. Remember the question from week 4 of Christianity Explored – if you were to die tonight and God said “why should I let you into heaven” what would you say. How would you answer it now?



Home study: 2 Samuel 7:1-17

1. What does God promise for Israel (v9-11)? How does this compare to Abraham's promises?
2. What does God promise about David's descendent (v12-16)? Who does it sound like?

Difficult bits

- **Is the Mosaic covenant conditional?** This is a question legitimately debated among Christians, and it's hard to give a succinct answer to this question. However, the passages in this study do describe a conditional covenant, so yes.
- **How can I believe in a God who would make people eat their own children (Deut 28:53-57)?** The description is deliberately horrifying to convey the magnitude of the poverty Israel will find herself in. The curse does not advocate such horror, but speaks of the depravity of those who have rejected God, and the significance of rebelling against him. The prophecy comes true in 2 Kings 6:24-31.
- **How can God 'take delight in bringing ruin upon [them] and destroying [them]' (Deut 28:63)?** God is loving and gracious, and he is also a God of absolute justice. We struggle to understand the offence of our rebellion against him, but catch a glimpse when we see the severity of the punishment. God does not delight in the death of a sinner (e.g. Ezekiel 18:23,32) and yet in the same prophecy it is clear that God does delight in justice (e.g. Ezekiel 5:5-13). As seen from the context of the verse in Deut 28:63, God is not exhibiting a malevolent delight in punishment, but a righteous delight in justice - so he delights in justly rewarding good, even as he also delights in justly punishing evil.

The God who will send a great king

2 Samuel 7:1-17

Main points:

- God promises to establish one of David's descendants after him as a great king whose kingdom will be everlasting. This king will be God himself (Isaiah 9:6) and will rule rightly and justly (9:7)
- God also reiterates his promise to establish the nation of Israel in the land, broadening his promise to include a promise of safety and peace from their enemies (e.g. 7:11).

The story so far

God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 looks doubtful. Having saved his descendents, Israel, from slavery in Egypt, he has committed to fulfilling his promise to Abraham through a covenant. However, unlike the promise to Abraham, this is conditional on Israel keeping his commandments. Obedience will lead to great blessing, just as God promised to Abraham; but disobedience will lead to curse and judgement for the whole nation. And Israel was a disobedient people.

Having settled in a new land, Canaan, Israel failed to keep the terms of their covenant with God, and - true to his word - God brought judgement upon them in the form of attack from surrounding nations. When Israel repented, God rescued them, but they fell into disobedience again. The cycle repeated itself until eventually Israel called out for a king, to be 'like all the nations' (1 Sam 8:5). God granted this request with King Saul and then King David. David was much better than his predecessor, but still failed to rule perfectly. Yet God chose to bless him, as we are about to see.



For starters

1. If a friend asked you, 'What's the Old Testament all about?', what would you say?
2. Think back to before you started The Big Picture. In what ways is your answer different now to what it would have been back then?



Investigate

3. Read 2 Samuel 7:1-17. What does David want to do for God? What does God say?
 - David wants to build for God a house for him to live in (v2)
 - God has not needed a house in the past (v7) - implication: so I don't need one now!
 - God instead promises David a house (v11) - i.e. to establish David's dynasty
4. What does God promise for David (v9, v11-16)?
 - To make his name great (9)
 - To make him a house (v11)

- To raise up one of his descendents as a great king whose kingdom will be everlasting (v12), and who will always have an intimate relationship with God (v15)
5. What does God promise for Israel (v10-11)?
- To establish a place for them (v10)
 - Peace, no more disturbance from outside (v10), no more violence (v10), rest from enemies (v11)

How does this compare to the promises made to Abraham?

- The promise of land – the same as before
- The promise of peace on every side – a greater, fuller promise than before

	Genesis 12	2 Samuel 7
Relationship between God and man	Relationship with God closer, but not restored to the way it was	To a chosen king: close relationship (v9), and will be like a Father (v14)
Land	Promise of land/Canaan	Promise of a place of their own, disturbed no more; rest from enemies (v10-11)
Life/death	Death still present, but everlasting descendents	Death still presented, but everlasting kingdom under Davidic king (v16)
Curse/sin	Sin still present	Sin still present
Blessings	Blessings to Abraham, and through him to the other nations	Blessings to the nation, and peace with other nations (v10-11)

6. Look at Isaiah 9:6-7. What more does this tell us about David's descendent?
- The king will be God himself (v6)
 - he will rule with justice and with righteousness (v7)
 - God will achieve it all (v7)



Thinking it through

7. 2 Samuel 7:17 says that Nathan the prophet relayed all this information to David. Imagine you are Nathan. How would you summarise the promises that God made to David?
8. Who do you think the descendent of David may be talking about? How well do the descriptions in 2 Samuel 7 and Isaiah 9 fit?
9. If this is talking about Jesus, how does this study help us know how to respond to him?

Difficult bits

- **Why was Noah's ship in a tent (v2)?** We've not mentioned the ark of the covenant yet, so members may assume the ark is talking about Noah. It may be helpful, then, to clarify that the ark was a wooden chest covered in gold and topped with golden cherubim. It contained precious items of the Mosaic covenant (the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, an urn containing manna, and Aaron's staff), and God spoke to Moses from between the cherubim. It was a symbol of God's presence with them, and David was concerned that it had no proper home.
- **Why does God assume the king will commit iniquity (v14)? Wasn't Jesus sinless?** Yes, Jesus was sinless (e.g. 1 John 3:5). The promise of 2 Samuel 7 is regarding a descendent of David. In part, this is fulfilled by David's immediate descendents (Solomon etc.), who built the Temple (cf v13a), and who were disciplined when they did commit iniquity. However, the supreme fulfilment of this prophecy is in Jesus, who established an everlasting kingdom (v13), who was sinless, but who suffered punishment for our iniquity (cf. Is 53:5).

The story so far...

The Bible says that God has a plan to bring everything under Jesus' rule for God's glory and praise (Ephesians 1). However, after 7 studies this looks a long way off. God's perfect world is ruined by mankind's rebellion and humanity has been punished by God by being judged and ejected from his presence (Genesis 1-3). Still, God promises not simply to reverse the effects of the Fall but to bless Abraham's descendants with a land of their own and a relationship with the living God (Genesis 12). God shows that Israel's captivity in Egypt will not prevent his plan from being fulfilled as he powerfully rescues her from slavery and from his mighty judgement on the Egyptians (Exodus 12).

In study 6, we looked at the deal that God made with Moses at Mount Sinai which established the terms of Israel's relationship with God for the rest of the Old Testament. It is as foundational as the promises to Abraham in Genesis 12, though in a different way. A grasp of it is essential if we are to understand both the Old Testament and what Jesus came to do.

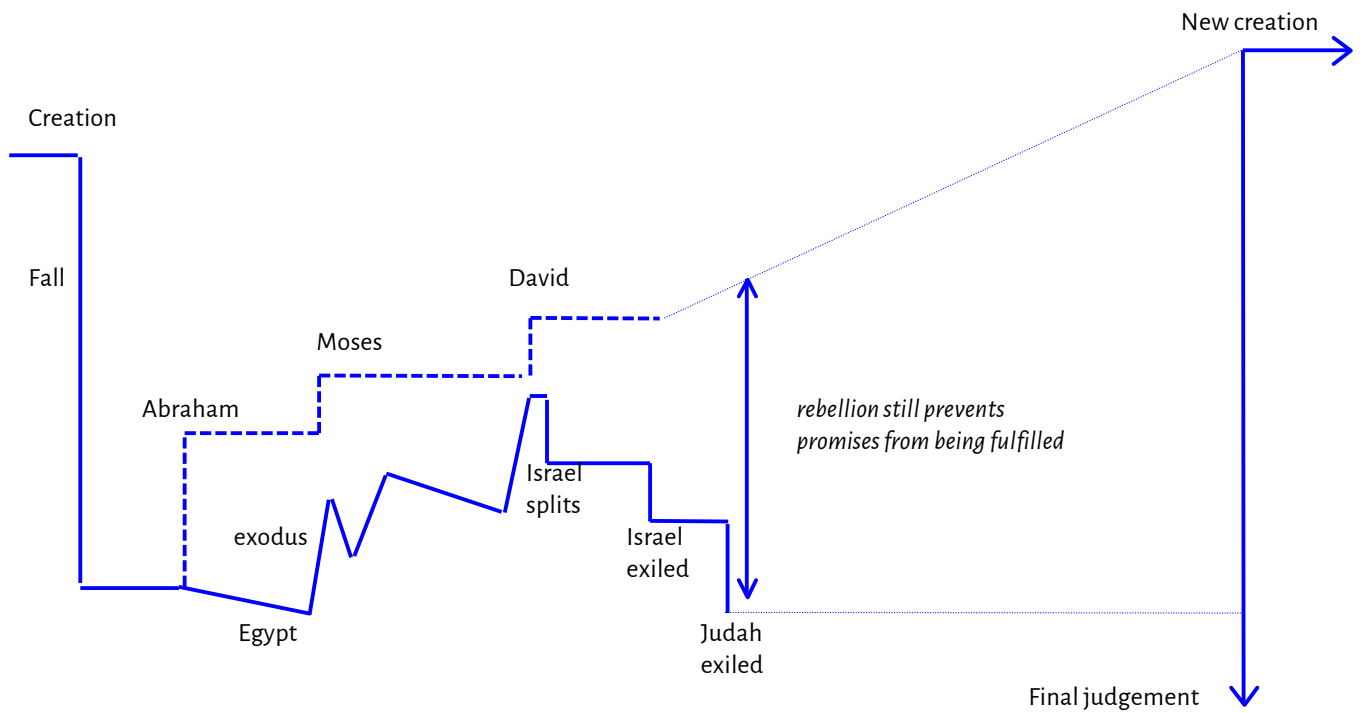
The promises in the Mosaic covenant deal with the same issues as the promises to Abraham, i.e. relationship with God, a land, blessing and a great nation. However, they are explained in greater detail and actually offer much more than Genesis 12 indicated. However, the most important feature of the Mosaic covenant is that it is conditional. Israel will only obtain the promises if she obeys God's commandments. If she disobeys God then she will face God's anger and be punished. We last saw her, in Jeremiah 11, clearly disobeying and in breach of the covenant and awaiting imminent judgement from God.

A good and strong leader will help to prevent Israel rebelling too much. However, the people cry out for a king, not to help them be more obedient, but so that they can be like the other nations. First Saul, then David become king. David is Israel's greatest king in the Old Testament. He subdues Israel's enemies within Canaan and fully conquers the land. In David's reign and that of his son, Solomon, Israel gets closer than at any time to obtaining what God has promised. However, this relatively happy time does not last and does not result in God's promises being properly fulfilled because Israel still keeps rebelling against God. Even David and Solomon sin. Importantly, God makes a covenant with David, promising that his descendant will help Israel to do what is right and will actually succeed in accomplishing what is necessary for God's promises to be fulfilled (see 2 Samuel 7).

The story of the next 400 years (2 Samuel 8 – 2 Kings 25) is of how the promised king does not appear. As a result of her rebellion, Israel ends up in a position worse than she was before the exodus. Three principle disasters occur (see the Time Line of the Bible on page 2):

- In 922 BC, the kingdom of Israel splits into two – the northern kingdom (called Israel - but also referred to as Ephraim and Samaria) and the southern kingdom (called Judah). Judah contains the Davidic monarchy, the city of Jerusalem and the Temple;
- In 722 BC, Assyria, the emerging superpower in the area, conquers the northern kingdom and the survivors disappear (2 Kings 17). Assyria invades Judah but does not succeed in destroying her (2 Kings 18-19); and
- Then in 586 BC, Babylon conquers Judah and takes her into captivity (2 Kings 25).

God's plan now looks like this



Home study: Ezekiel 34

1. Who do you think the sheep are in this passage? Who are the shepherds?
2. What have the shepherds done wrong?
3. What does God promise will happen? Who is going to do it?

The God who will send a good shepherd

Ezekiel 34

Main points:

- God will replace Judah's bad leaders, who have led her astray, with himself. he will rescue, feed and care for his people, and provide for them the land, nation and blessing he promised Abraham and David
- As God's people are enslaved, in exile and helpless, God says that he will provide the rescue just as he rescued them in the exodus: saved from a foreign land by his hand, and delivered to a land of blessing.
- God, the sovereign Lord, will do everything (34:10-29). he can do it and he will do it. he will be the good shepherd.

The story so far

God has made great promises to Abraham and his descendants but, at this point in their history, the people of Israel are miles away from enjoying them. However, Israel's failure to obey, subsequent exile and failure to inherit God's blessings is not going to stop him from accomplishing his plan. Even as Israel is being judged, God sends his prophets to her to explain why this disaster has come about and what will happen afterwards.

Through the prophets, God tells the people that he will provide a king from David's line who will, in fact, be God himself (Isaiah 9:6). This king will rule righteously and bring about an utterly amazing time of peace reminiscent of the time before the Fall (Genesis 3). Not only that, but God's king will rule forever (2 Samuel 7). However, when Israel is taken into captivity, it is not clear how this will happen.



For starters

1. What do you look for in a leader? Write a CV for your chosen leader.



Investigate

2. Read Ezekiel 34:1-10. What is God's complaint against the 'shepherds'?
 - They cruelly treated God's flock as if it belonged to them (34:1-3 cf. Deut 17:14-20)
 - They didn't care for the flock but, instead, allowed it to be scattered (34:4-6)

What does God warn them he will do as a result of their actions?

- The flock will be taken from them because of their failure
- The shepherds will be accountable to God for their behaviour; they will be removed (34:10)

3. Read Ezekiel 34:10-24. Who will be the new shepherd? List the ways in which he will shepherd the flock.
 - God will shepherd the flock himself (notice the number of times "I" is used)

- God will rescue them, searching for them and looking after them (34:11-12), bringing them from the nations to the land (34:13), where he will provide and care for them (34:14-16)
 - As God does this, so he will judge his enemies (34:17-22) but save his flock and place them under the David-like king who will be their shepherd (34:23)
4. How will this rescue be like the original exodus from Egypt? (See study 5).
 - The people are in a foreign land
 - God is taking the initiative to rescue a helpless people in order to give them the promises he made to Abraham
 - As God rescues his people, he judges his enemies and reveals himself (34:27-30 cf. Exodus 6:7; 9:14; 10:2)
 5. Read Ezekiel 34:23-30. What are the main things promised? How do they compare to what God promised Abraham in Genesis 12?
 - Davidic shepherd to rule (34:23)
 - Peace from human and animal enemies (34:25-29) i.e. blessing (34:26)
 - Great nation (34:28)
 - Land (34:29 cf. 34:13,14) and relationship with God (34:30)
 - These are very similar to the promises to Abraham except for the Davidic ruler, and are the very opposite of their exile experience
 6. Summarise what you have learned from Ezekiel 34. Why can we have confidence that the promises of this chapter will be fulfilled?
 - God promises to rescue his people from exile and shepherd them himself into a time of unimaginable peace and blessing
 - God has said that he will do it!



Thinking it through

7. What questions are left unanswered after this study?
 - Who is the good shepherd?
 - How will he rescue the scattered sheep?
8. Read John 10:11-18. To what extent does this answer the remaining questions?
 - Jesus is the good shepherd
 - he will lay down his life for the sheep



Home Study: Ezekiel 36:16-38

1. Why has God decided to rescue Israel?
2. How is he going to change them? Why is this important?

Difficult bits:

- **Who are the shepherds in the passage?** The shepherds were the leaders of Israel. This is made clear in the passage by the way in which this group of people are held responsible for the actions of the nation, and because the role which God takes when he replaces them is a leadership role.
- **How do we know that Ezekiel was talking about Jesus?** The shepherd who is to follow is God himself, but he also describes putting his Davidic king over Israel. Jesus doesn't just make that claim for himself – he is recognised as a descendent of David (e.g. Mark 10:47, Luke 3, and explicitly Luke 1:32)
- **Who are the sheep / rams / male goats, lean/fat sheep?** God speaks of judgement he will execute over Israel, and seems particularly interested in those who have fed themselves at the expense of others (e.g. v18). The contrast is presumably between different groups of people within Israel between whom God will judge, primarily deciding who he counts as the faithful and who he counts as the unfaithful from the people themselves (as opposed to leaders).

The God who will deal with rebellion

Ezekiel 36:16-38

Main points:

- God acts primarily for the sake of his holy name, revealed in the rescue of his people. This gives confidence to Christians because it is not dependent on us, and through it he is glorified
- God's work involves dealing with the real problem – sin – by cleansing his people and by giving them a new heart and the Holy Spirit so they can follow him.

The story so far

God has made great promises to Abraham and his descendants including the creation of a great nation ruled by a great king who would rule as no king had done before. However, in Ezekiel's time the people are in captivity in Babylon. All seems lost. Yet God is still saying that he will fulfil his promises despite the apparent hopelessness of the situation.

In chapter 34 of Ezekiel, God promised to deal with Israel's bad leaders by replacing them and coming to shepherd his people himself. God also promised to rescue Israel from captivity and to destroy her enemies who want to prevent her from obtaining what God has promised.

In Ezekiel 36, God goes on to state how he will deal with the biggest problem – our rebellion against him.



For starters

1. Make a list of the main promises God has made so far.
2. What have you learned from the studies so far about how these promises will/will not be fulfilled?



Investigate

3. Read Ezekiel 36:16-23. What have Israel done wrong?
 - v17-18 Defiled land by shedding blood and worshipping idols.
4. What have been the consequences of Israel's rebellion? What, according to God, is wrong with such rebellion?
 - v18 God has poured out his wrath on Israel.
 - v19 They have been scattered.
 - v19 God has judged them.
 - v20-21 God's name has been profaned.

Why does the final consequence (36:20-23) concern God so much?

- God's holy name has been profaned among the nations.
5. Read Ezekiel 36:22-38. Why will God rescue Israel? In what way does this rebuke them and in what way is it an encouragement? How are God's priorities here different from ours?
- v22 God will rescue them for the sake of his name.
 - v23 To show his holiness.
 - v26, 38 To show that he is the Sovereign Lord.
 - Rebuke: v22 God is not doing it for Israel's sake, but for his own.
 - Encouragement: v32 God is promising an end to the exile, great blessings, etc, and it is not conditional on their conduct.
 - God's concerns and priorities are for his name - that he is seen to be God and seen to be holy. Often our concerns are self-focused and about what God will do for me.
6. List the 3 or 4 main elements of God's rescue (34:24-36). Compared to the original exodus (study 5), what will God do differently? Why is this important?
- v24 God will gather his people from where they are scattered.
 - v25-27 God will cleanse them and help them to obey.
 - v28-30 God will bring them back to the land and bless them.
 - v36 All nations will see who God is as a result.
 - v26-27 God's people will be able to obey, so it won't fail.
 - v32 It is for God's sake.
7. What is the difference between the promise in 36:25 and the promise in 36:26-27? Why are both needed?
- v25 Cleansing from past sin
 - v26-27 New heart and Spirit so they can serve God in the future.



Thinking it through

8. What would the people of Israel be like when the promises of Ezekiel 36 were fulfilled and why was this important?
- The people will be cleansed from sin and will be able to serve God. We have seen so far in the Big Picture that the problem with God fulfilling his promises is the people's ongoing sin. But, once God has completely dealt with the problem of sin they will attain all he has promised.
9. How would it feel to be forgiven of 'all your uncleanness' (v25)? How would it feel to walk in God's statutes and be obedient to God all the time (v27)?



Home Study: Isaiah 52:13-53:12

1. What does this passage tell us about the servant and what he will do?
2. According to the passage, why is this going to happen?

Difficult bits:

- **Have these things happen/when do these things happen?** Some of these things have clearly already happened – as Christians, we have already been cleansed from our sin by Christ’s work on the cross and have the Spirit living in us. Our struggle with sin will continue until heaven, when we receive all the blessings God has promised.
- **Were the ‘land’ promises fulfilled?** The Israelites did return from exile, legitimately prompting the question as to whether the ‘land’ promises were fulfilled. However, this wasn’t the amazing, prosperous & joyful return promised

The God who will send a suffering servant

Isaiah 53

Main points:

- God will send his servant who will deal with the problem of humanity's rebellion.
- his servant will deal with the problem of sin by taking our punishment.

The story so far

In Ezekiel 36, God promised that he would deal with the problem that has dogged humanity since Genesis 3 and the Fall – namely our rebellion against him. God promised to cleanse his people from their past rebellion and give them a new heart so that they can obey him in the future (36:25-27) – something that has seemed impossible until this point. Furthermore, God gives one of the clearest explanations in the Bible of why he will rescue – not for their sake but for the sake of his name, his reputation, among the nations (36:22-23, 32,36).

However, we are not yet clear on how God will do this. We know he will send a great king to rule and that this king will be God himself coming to rule. Furthermore, we know that God himself will come as a good shepherd to rescue his people and that he will forgive our past rebellion. But, as yet, we do not know how God will deal with people's past rebellion so that they can be forgiven without his own character being compromised. How can God justly forgive rebels? In Isaiah 53, God explains that he will do so by sending a suffering servant.



For starters

1. Imagine you were to carry out a street survey asking people, 'What is the world's biggest problem?'. What answers do you think you would get?
 - Break down of family and community.
 - Social injustice.
 - Poverty.
2. In what different ways do people try and deal with such problems?
 - Social reform.
 - Politics.
 - Economics.



Investigate

3. Read Isaiah 52:13-53:12. What are the 3 or 4 main things the passage tells us about the servant?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Servant will be rejected by men / oppressed. • God has punished him for our sins. • he will be exalted. 	<p>52:13-15 God's servant will be exalted</p> <p>53:1-3 God's servant will be rejected by men</p> <p>53:4-6 God's servant will be punished for our sins</p> <p>53:7-9 God's servant will be oppressed to the point of death</p> <p>53:10-12 God's servant will be vindicated</p>
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4. Read Isaiah 42:1-7; 49:1-9a; 50:4-8. What are the main things that these passages add to our understanding of the servant?

42:1-7	God will give his Spirit to his servant. The servant will bring justice and freedom for the oppressed.
49:1-9a	God's servant will bring back God's people, Israel. he will also bring salvation to the Gentiles too. The servant will be exalted by God.
50:4-8	The servant has not rebelled against God. God's servant suffers now, but God will vindicate him.

- Through this servant, God will bring about his great rescue and will extend it to Gentiles too. The servant will be anointed by God and will be obedient to him. he will suffer oppression, but will succeed in bringing salvation and justice. Ultimately, God will vindicate him.
5. According to Isaiah 53, in what ways does the servant suffer? What further suffering do we see in Isaiah 49:1-9a and 50:4-8?

53v3 Despised and rejected by men.
53v4 Smitten by God. Pierced, Wounded.
53v7 Oppressed.
53v8 Suffered injustice.
49:1-9a Despised and abhorred by Israel.
50:4-8 Beaten, mocked, spat at.
 6. According to 52:13 – 53:12, why does the servant suffer?

52v15 The servant will sprinkle many nations.
53v4-6 Suffered because of our sins and infirmities.
53v10 Suffers as a guilt offering – because it is God's will.
53v12 The servant's suffering bore the sins of many.
 7. What happens to the servant after his suffering?

52v13 Will be raised and exalted.
53v11 Will again see life.
53v12 Will be given a portion among the great.



Thinking it through

8. How is the problem of humanity's rebellion dealt with according to Isaiah 53?
 - God's servant will be the ultimate sin offering – God will punish him for the rebellion of mankind.
 - Follow-up question: What does this passage teach about how God's judgement against sin can be taken away?
9. How does this fit with the 'DVD swap' from week 3 of Christianity Explored?
 - God would provide a solution to their inability to follow him. he would deal with their rebellion completely.
10. How does this passage help us to know how to respond to Jesus?

- Praise him for his amazing grace and the glory to which he has been exalted. Give great thanks for his grace in dying for our sins



Home Study: Luke 3-4

1. What is John the Baptist's job (3:4)? How does he do this?

2. List the ways that Jesus is described in these chapters. What aspect of Jesus' character does Luke focus on in 4:1-13?

Difficult bits:

- **What is the image of a 'bruised reed / faintly burning wick' (Isaiah 42:3) about?** The prophecy is speaking of the Lord's servant who 'will bring forth justice' (v1). In contrast to the leaders who have gone before, the Lord's servant will not exploit the vulnerable, nor 'kick a dead dog while he's down', but rather will establish 'justice in the earth' (v4).

The God who fulfils his promises

Luke 3-4

Main points:

- John the Baptist announces the end of the exile and the arrival of God's rescuer: Jesus, the Christ, the true Son of God
- Jesus has come to save, because unlike Adam and Israel he is able to resist temptation. he has also come to judge.

The story so far

Both God's good creation and God's chosen people, Israel, were ruined by the rebellion of mankind. God's response is to put right what has gone wrong. So far, this has involved God promising first to deal with the effects of rebellion (by more than reversing the effects of the Fall) and then to deal with rebellion itself. God will create a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21-22) and he will rescue his people from this fallen world to enjoy it by forgiving them and enabling them to obey him. However, these promises had not been fulfilled by the end of the Old Testament. The initial fulfilment of these promises in Israel was all lost when they were taken into captivity - the restoration of Jerusalem and its Temple after the return from captivity was a pale imitation of the former city and Temple. Now, after some 400 years of silence after the end of the Old Testament, all this changes as God begins to fulfil what he has promised. God does so through his Son, Jesus, who is contrasted both with Adam and Israel.



For starters

1. List the main promises God made in the Old Testament.
 - New creation
 - A king who will reign forever
 - God will cleanse his people from sin and enable them to follow him.
2. List what you have learned from the studies so far about how these promises are to be fulfilled.
 - God has promised to send his servant who will deal with sin completely. God will then fulfil all he has promised.



Investigate

3. Read Luke 3:1-20. Why is it significant that John the Baptist's ministry is described in terms of Isaiah 40:3-5 (see Luke 3:4-6)? What does this teach us about what God is about to do, and what Jesus has come to do?

As people won't have studied Isaiah 40:3-5 it is likely it will be unfamiliar to them, hence, it may be helpful for leaders to give a brief overview of it. Isaiah 40 is a turning point in Isaiah's message, where he declares

that after God has judged his people there is hope. God is declaring that there will be an end to the exile, and that it will be announced by God's messenger.

- John the Baptist has come to fulfil Isaiah's prophecy – he has come to prepare the way for God's great rescue. Jesus has come to bring God's salvation (v6).
4. What is John doing in Luke 3:7-14? What is he teaching them about themselves? How will this prepare the way for Jesus?
 - John is warning people of their sinfulness. In doing this he is preparing the way for Jesus, by showing people that they need rescuing.
 - John is calling people to repent from their sin. As people attempt to obey the commands they will see their own sinfulness.
 5. What do the Jews mean when they call Abraham their father (Luke 3:8)? Why is John's response significant?
 - The Jews are descendants of Abraham and therefore expect to be a part of the fulfilment of the promises God made to Abraham. John is telling them not to rely on their heritage as God can create alternative descendants for Abraham if necessary.
 6. What is John doing in Luke 3:15-18? How will this prepare the way for Jesus? Why is it significant, given what we have seen in the studies so far, that Jesus will 'baptise with the Holy Spirit' (Luke 3:16, cf. Ezekiel 36)?
 - John is pointing away from himself to the one far greater who is coming. he is warning them that Jesus will come to judge.
 - In Ezekiel 36 we saw God promise to cleanse his people and give them the Holy Spirit. Here John tells us that Jesus will fulfil this.
 7. Read Luke 3:21 – 4:13. What is Jesus called in 3:21 – 4:13, and who else is called the same thing in these verses? What then is the significance of Jesus' behaviour in 4:1-13?
 - 3v23 Son of Joseph
 - 3v22 God's Son – compare with Adam in 3v28.

Adam, when he was tempted gave in. Here, however, we see Jesus resisting temptation. Jesus is the true Son of God who is able to obey him fully.

NB – Jesus' baptism also confirms that he is the Son of God:

- As he is baptised the Holy Spirit descends on him – fulfilling what the OT has said, that God's promised king would have God's Spirit.
 - God acknowledges Jesus as his Son.
8. What is the main difference between Jesus' behaviour in Luke 4:1-13 and Israel's behaviour throughout the Old Testament? Why is the main difference between Jesus and both Adam and Israel so significant?
 - Throughout the Old Testament, the big problem has been Israel's rebellion against God – they've failed to trust God and have continually put God to the test. Unlike Israel and Adam, Jesus does not give in when he is tempted.

- Jesus responds to the temptations by quoting from Deuteronomy. The passages quoted refer to Israel's failure when tempted in the desert, and reinforce the contrast between Israel's disobedience and Jesus' complete obedience.



Thinking it through

9. What does this passage teach about who Jesus is and what Jesus came to do?
 - Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.
 - he fully obeyed God.
 - he comes to fulfil God's Word and to judge.
 - he's come to bring in God's great rescue plan.
10. How different is your answer now to what you thought before you studied The Big Picture? Do the differences matter? Why / why not?



Home Study: Hebrews 10:1-25

1. What is wrong with the Old Testament sacrifices? What is the solution?
2. How are Christians encouraged to respond? Why?

Difficult bits:

- **Is Adam also 'the son of God' (3:38)?** The phrase 'son' or 'sons' of God is used throughout the Bible, referring to heavenly beings (e.g. Job 1:6) and to God's people (e.g. Romans 8:14,19), and there are other passages that speak of Israel as God's firstborn son (Ex 4:22, Jeremiah 31:9) or when God speaks of kings as his son (e.g. 2 Sam 7:14, 1 Chr 22:10). The phrase is predominantly used as a metaphor speaking of the subject's relationship with God. In Luke 3:38 it especially refers to Adam as one without a human father. However, beyond this verse, **'the son of God'** is reserved exclusively for Jesus, from whom Adam was evidently distinct in terms of sinfulness (Genesis 3:6; cf 1 John 3:5) and origin (Genesis 2:7; cf John 17:5). John helpfully clarifies Jesus is God's 'only Son' (e.g. John 3:16-18, 1 John 4:9).
- **Why are you mentioning Adam's disobedience?** People might struggle to see the link between Jesus' obedience and Adam / Israel's disobedience. Recognising the link, however, is important to understanding why Jesus – and only Jesus – is able to save. Jesus and Adam are described in the Bible as heads of respective kingdoms, Adam being a 'type of the one who was to come', Jesus (cf. Romans 5:12-21, 1 Corinthians 15:22). They are deliberately compared like heads or representatives of their families, to show that only under Jesus can one be seen as perfect.
- **Doesn't John the Baptist say that repentance is enough?** John's call is for repentance, but we have seen e.g. in Ezekiel 36 that social reform isn't enough. Here we see that Jesus is the only one fully able to obey God, and therefore he is the only one who can deal with sin and bring forgiveness.
- **Why do Luke and Matthew have different genealogies?** The best explanation of this is that Luke records Joseph's 'real' genealogy and Matthew records the 'throne succession' and omits a few generations.

The God whose Son is all we need!

Hebrews 10:1-25

Main points:

- Jesus' death has dealt with sin once and for all. It has also fulfilled the Old Testament Law, doing what the OT Law could never do.

The story so far

Luke 3-4 demonstrated that Jesus is the long-awaited rescuer. he is the true Son of God and he is able to resist temptation and to fully obey God. he has come to fulfil God's promises that were revealed throughout the Old Testament: to rescue his people, and forgive their rebellion and bring them to his new heaven and new earth.

However, the New Testament also demonstrates that, rather than stick with Jesus, God's people are often tempted to give up trusting in Jesus and his death as the fulfilment of all these promises. They are tempted to believe Jesus isn't quite enough – that while his death was helpful, more is required to bring about the fullness of all that God promised. Often this takes the form of believing that they need to continue trying to obey the demands of the deal with Moses in addition to following Christ.

The recipients of the letter to the Hebrews were tempted, probably because of persecution and pressure that was brought to bear, to return (or, possibly, to turn) to Judaism. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews, like all other New Testament writers, urges them to persevere in Jesus and the gospel.

The writer argues that through Jesus comes God's revelation of himself and his plan of salvation, and that Jesus has been chosen by God as the great "high priest", or intermediary, between God and his people. Jesus is revealed in Hebrews 7 as the eternal high priest and, in Hebrews 8-9, as the minister of the new covenant and ministry – far superior to the Old Testament system of animal sacrifices that he replaced. Jesus, unlike the Old Testament priests, entered heaven, set us free from sin, and inaugurated the new covenant (9:11-20). However, there was an even more significant difference.



For starters

1. Sum up the big picture of the Bible from the studies so far.
 - We have seen that God's plan is to deal with his rebellious people and to create a new heaven and new earth. In the Old Testament we saw the promise of a servant through whom he'd accomplish it all. We have seen that this is all fulfilled in Jesus.



Investigate

2. Read Hebrews 10:1-25. Looking at v1-4, what was the old covenant law not able to do and why? What was the point of the law according to Hebrews 10:1-4? (i.e. What was it meant to teach us?)
 - The Law was not able to make us perfect (v1).
 - Sacrifices were unable to take away sin (v1-2).
 - The old covenant was meant to be a picture of what is to come – it is described as a shadow of the reality (v1).
3. What has replaced the sacrifices and offerings according to v5-10?
 - God required the Law to be fulfilled but the people were unable to keep it. The OT sacrifices were unable to deal with the people's sin and were not pleasing to God. These things merely demonstrated the need for something else.

- Jesus' sacrifice has dealt with sins once for all and he is now sat at God's right hand.
4. How does the writer show that Jesus' work is done (v11-14)? How does the Holy Spirit also show that Jesus' sacrifice is complete (v15-18)?
 - The writer emphasises the 'single' sacrifice of Jesus (v12, v14), that he 'sat down' (v12) afterwards and that he has 'perfected for all time those who are being sanctified' (v14).
 - The Holy Spirit shows that there is complete forgiveness (v17), proving the offering for sin is complete (v18).
 5. Sum up the main point of Hebrews 10:1-18. How do these verses (10:1-18) fit into what you have learned so far in The Big Picture?
 - Main point: Jesus has dealt with the problem of man's rebellion once and for all.
 6. Re-read 10:19-25. How does it follow on from 10:1-18?
 - 'Therefore' (v19) – we can now have access to God – we can come into the Most Holy Place.
 - Because we have been cleansed we can come into God's presence.
 7. What are the two great benefits of Jesus' death? List what Christians are called to do in response. What do these mean? Are Christians given any other reasons for doing these things?
 - Benefits: cleansing and access to God.
 - Response: draw near to God (v22); hold to our hope – i.e. keep going (v23); meet together and encourage one another (v25).
 - Reason: the day is approaching – i.e. Jesus' return (v25).



Thinking it through

8. How would describe what Jesus came to do?
 - Jesus came to deal with the problem of man's rebellion.
 - he came to fulfil the OT Law and prophecies.
 - The result of his sacrificial death is that we can now have access to God.
9. How would you summarise what the 'big picture' is?
10. Do you believe that Jesus really is all we need? What does it mean to live as someone who believes that?

Difficult bits:

- **What does 'sanctified' mean (v10,14)?** Made clean, made holy, 'set apart' for God
- **What does it mean to 'draw near to God' (v22)?** We have access to God through Jesus, so we can keep drawing near. It does not specify how – but it will encompass prayer
- **Did the OT sacrifices deal with sin?** The writer to the Hebrews says the sacrifices were not sufficient to 'take away sins' (v 4, v11 cf v1). Rather, they served as a reminder that they were sinful (v3), and ultimately pointed to the final fulfilment in Christ whose death was sufficient to pay for sin (v12-14).