

## THE WAY TO HUMAN FREEDOM

### Study 5

# ***THE STORY (1): THE GOD WHO IS—AT WORK IN FALLEN-HUMAN HISTORY***

As was said at the conclusion of Study 4, we are now about to move towards the 'good news' section of the series!

The first four studies have been *doctrinal* (giving foundational teaching), spelling out the nature and perfections of God, the nature and calling of humanity, it's tragic fall into sin and rebellion and the endless, restless struggle this has produced. These have provided a foundation for the rest of the series, but in particular, for Studies 5 & 6 which are *historical*. In them we will see the doctrinal dynamics of the first four being worked out within an amazing Story—the Historical Narrative of God's ongoing, unfailing love and faithfulness towards us.

Every human being loves a story. But the one now about to be told is not like any other we've ever heard. It is *the* Story—the awesome record of God's grand activity, fulfilling His eternal purpose of love from the beginning to the end of history!

Here, we will follow the progress of this incomparable Story as it is unfolded in the history of the Old Testament. Then Study 6 will take us into the New Testament, continuing the 'Divine Narrative' from the coming of God's Eternal Son in our human flesh, all the way to its *climax* at the conclusion of all things.

Proceeding through these two historical studies, we will be exposed to the purpose and action of God over the entire sweep of past and future world history. And in the light of this thrilling revelation, we will receive wisdom that enables us to live with clear, personal perception within our particular place and time.

With the four doctrinal studies and these two historical ones in place, the scene will then be set for the next two doctrinal studies, 7 & 8. In these, the breathtakingly wonderful—and personally liberating—*outcomes* of the Story will be spelt out. Then in Studies 9–25, the *personal* and *vocational outworking* of the first eight will be explored. There are so many treasures ahead of us!

It has already been shown in Study 1, 'The God Who Is', that the Author of our Story is by nature *Father, Creator* and *King*. In this study before us, we are to see that there is a further aspect of the divine nature that is to be added to each of these three basic elements of it.

### **His nature:**

(as Initiator of an eternal covenant of love with all creation)

- Redeemer Father**
- Redeemer Creator**
- Redeemer King**

GOD IS BY NATURE REDEEMER!!! As such He is the One who goes out after what is lost and enslaved to set it free and bring it home—by His mercy and grace restoring it to its good, right and functional place. If it were not for the fact that He is Redeemer, we would be without any hope of relief from our fallen-human dilemma—either in time or eternity.

At the heart of God's revelation of Himself to His people in the Old Testament was, the joyous reality of His redemptive—that is, liberating—*actions* on their behalf.

Isaiah 60:16b

I, the LORD, am Your Saviour, Your Redeemer, the Mighty One.

Psalms 78:35

They remembered that God was their Rock, that God Most High was their Redeemer.

Isaiah 63:16b

You, LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is Your Name.

God's Old Testament people were always able to recall ('remember') the mighty acts of their unchanging and sovereign Redeemer-Father—His amazing, redemptive operations in the midst of their history. To 'remember' is to 're-member'. That is, to go back again in our mind to what has already been established in the past, and to 'take up personal membership' in that reality once again!

This then, helps to clarify the nature of the Story before us as it unfolds in both the Old and New Testaments. It is not an account of the history of the world, as such. Neither is it a detailed history of the nation of Israel which plays a central part in it. Its focus is much more selective than that.

The Bible Story is only concerned with opening up to us the *creating, saving and redeeming purpose of God* down through the ages. All other events are set aside in order to pursue this one supreme aim. And so, what is before us is the 'Salvation History', or 'Redemption History', of the world.

From the outset it must be said that as we move through this historical section of the series, we will be exposed to the record of *incredible events* that have taken place. Some of these may seem—from a natural point of view—to be 'unbelievable'. But it would be a very strange thing, indeed, if the unsearchably great GOD WHO IS did not act in such ways in the outworking of His glorious redemptive plan!

## **HIS REDEMPTIVE ACTIVITY BCE**

### **\* *the LORD'S covenant love & faithfulness from the Creation—preparing for the Coming of the Christ***

As already said, Study 6 will show that God's redemptive activity finds its ultimate fulfillment in the work of His Son. But the appearance of this One in history was not to be 'out of nowhere'. His coming as the Christ, or Messiah (the Anointed One), was both promised by God and expected by His people.

Amos 3:7

Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing His plan to His servants the prophets.

In the Old Testament Scriptures there are numerous prophecies of the unique Person that 'the Christ' would be and what He would do when He came. He was also dramatically foreshadowed in historical events, through the lives of various characters and in the symbolism of God-given provisions of worship. When He did come, we are told that:

Luke 24:27b

He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself.

The prophetic word was always there: "He is coming!" The person and work of Jesus the Messiah is in fact, very clearly, the fulfillment of all the Old Testament Scriptures.

Throughout the entire Old Testament period God was revealing Himself to His chosen people, and preparing them to be the nation into which the promised One would be born—the One who would bring hope and liberation to ‘a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language’ (Revelation 7:9). WHAT A STORY THIS IS GOING TO BE!!!

## true Covenant relationship

In preparing to commence our Story we need to gain some understanding of the biblical concept of *covenant*. Without such insight it will be very difficult to grasp the significance of what is happening in the grand Narrative before us. Furthermore, *with* this understanding of covenant—particularly in the light of its final outcome—there is enormous joy to be known!

Having already in Study 1 very briefly mentioned God’s great *covenant of love with all creation*, this can now be spelt out in more detail. And then to add to this the fact that *within* His ‘universal creation covenant’ the Redeemer has also progressively established ‘grace covenants’.

These grace covenants provide an *openly declared framework* for His redemptive activity throughout Salvation History. Through them He *assures* and *secures* His people and *includes* them in the outworking of His purpose.

In Study 6 we will see that God is, in fact, by very nature *covenantal*.

Before going any further, however, we must first clarify our thinking in regard to what *true* covenant *is* and what it is *not*. To begin with, the great covenant of God—and those other covenants that flow from it—are not like the ones that fallen human beings often make with one another. As with every aspect of *His* Being and action, God’s covenant is *holy*.

Luke 1:72b

[He remembers] His holy covenant.

In contrast to God’s *holy* covenant, fallen humanity has developed its *own version* of covenantal activity. Made in the image of God humans are incessant covenant makers. The covenants devised, however, are essentially *contracts*.

In Old Testament times these kinds of contractual covenants were often part of everyday life—especially in situations of potential conflict. They were like a *treaty* set in place to bring security in the midst of fallen-human relationships. And, as is always the case with contractual-type situations, the continued existence of the arrangement was dependent upon *both* parties keeping to the *agreed conditions*. If either side failed in its obligation, the covenant was broken and *dissolved*.

But with the covenantal action of God things are so very much different. It would be a dreadful mistake to look at fallen-human covenantal agreements and conclude that God’s covenant is *like them*! As we progress it will continually be seen that the ways of the Creator are usually in direct contrast to those of His fallen creatures.

In communicating covenant responsibilities to His people, God did, however, often express them in ways that were similar to human covenants of the day.<sup>1</sup> But the great

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<sup>1</sup> Even though such culturally familiar ideas were sometimes used in communication to His people, the nature and basis of His holy covenant was completely *other than, separate from, and different to* those back then. During those biblical times there were two kinds of covenants: bilateral (two sided), where neither party was dominant, and unilateral (one sided). All the covenants God made with His people were, of course, unilateral. He as Creator initiated the covenants and stipulated their terms. He always wrote His own agreements!

difference between God's covenants and any other is that His are entirely based upon His own *unfailing love* and *faithfulness*. It is covenant-reality that He Himself initiates, maintains and fulfills.

It will be seen that there *were* certain *consequences* when God's people failed to fulfill their covenant *responsibilities*. But although failure to keep these did 'break' the covenant and brought unwanted outcomes, this never resulted in the covenant itself being *dissolved*.

How very different, indeed, this is to the *self-securing, contractually based* arrangements of a restlessly struggling humanity. THE WORLD IS WAITING FOR THE SECURITY AND BLESSÉDNESS THAT ONLY KNOWLEDGE OF THE COVENANT LOVE OF GOD CAN BRING!!!

### **the Initiator of an eternal covenant of love with all creation**

Having spelt out the nature of *divine* covenant in contrast to *fallen-human* covenants, we may now come back to the matter of God's covenant-of-love with all creation. As said already, it is upon this that every other aspect of His covenantal action is founded. The covenant of creation is all about a *relationship of love* that God Himself has entered into with 'the work of His hands'. In this, He has *bonded* Himself completely to all that He has made. There is not one person, creature or thing that is outside the circle of His unfailing covenant love and faithfulness.

In Study 1 it was said that He has "bonded Himself in love to every element of [His creation]: from the minutest particle to the hugest mass; and from the most seemingly insignificant creature, to the humanity He has created to be His image and likeness."

This includes those of every race, culture, class and religion. Although not all people are 'saved' or 'redeemed' from their sins, the fact remains that all—regardless of their attitude towards Him—are the constant objects of a faithful Creator's bonded-love.

In this, the whole of humankind has a deep, indissoluble unity. No matter how sharply and tragically we may divide ourselves from one another, we will always have this unchanging reality in common.

The final destiny of every person within this covenant will be dependent upon their response to the 'high calling' they've received, which was outlined in Study 2. That calling is an inseparable part of the creation covenant. The failure of any to fulfill this does not *dissolve* the covenant, but it certainly does *violate* it. The whole of humanity has been embraced within the creation covenant forever. But each one's *eternal experience* within that—either ultimate redemption or condemnation—will be determined by their response to the calling it sets forth.<sup>2</sup>

God's covenant name in the Old Testament was 'Yahweh' (sometimes pronounced 'Jehovah'). This is translated in most Bibles as 'the LORD' (that is, with capital letters). It is a name that is strongly associated with Yahweh's identification of Himself as 'I AM' (Exodus 3:14), which as Study 1 showed means 'the One who *is*', or 'the One who is *always being* who He is' (or '*will* always be who He is')—that is, 'who is always in the

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<sup>2</sup> It will be seen, of course, that although eternal salvation is determined by a person's 'heart response' to the high calling required by the covenant, it is by no means the result of a *personal fulfillment* of that calling. Salvation, we will see, is always entirely on the basis of the grace of God, *freely given* to all who *receive* His redemptive provision by *faith*.

*action* of who He is as God'. It is a name that speaks powerfully of unending *faithfulness* to His great purpose of love.

In Study 1 we saw that one of the Old Testament Hebrew words that speak of God's grace is 'hesed', meaning 'unfailing love'.<sup>3</sup> Now we may fill out this meaning by adding that it always refers to God's unfailing *covenant* love.

And so, throughout the Old Testament section of our Story we will see something very significant about this One who has made us: both His name and His love are, by nature, *covenantal*.

Here, then, are some Old Testament Scriptures that speak of Yahweh's great covenant love:

Psalms 145:9

The LORD is good to all; He has compassion on all He has made.

Psalms 117:1–2

Praise the LORD, all you nations; extol Him, all you peoples. For great is His [unfailing covenant love] towards us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.

All the nations and peoples of the world throughout all of history have been—and are today—constant objects of the Creator's covenant love and faithfulness!

Psalms 36:6b–7a

LORD, You preserve both people and animals. How priceless is Your [unfailing covenant love]!

Psalms 50:11

—*His intimate relationship to every living thing*

[The LORD says] "I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are Mine."

Genesis 1:22

[In the beginning] God blessed [the creatures of the sea and the sky] and said, "Be fruitful and [multiply]."

His blessing enabled these creatures to fulfill the command given to them. That blessing continues to this very day. Every new fish in the sea or bird in the sky is a proclamation of our Maker's great covenant of creation—His intimate relational-bond with every creature.

Psalms 136:4–9

[Give thanks to Him] who alone does great wonders,

*His [covenant love] endures forever.*

who by His understanding made the heavens,

*His [covenant love] endures forever.*

who spread out the earth upon the waters,

*His [covenant love] endures forever.*

who made the great lights—

*His [covenant love] endures forever.*

the sun to govern the day,

*His [covenant love] endures forever.*

the moon and stars to govern the night,

*His [covenant love] endures forever*

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<sup>3</sup> Some translations have 'mercy', 'kindness' or 'steadfast love'.

Jeremiah 33:25

This is what the LORD says: “[I have] established My covenant with day and night and the fixed laws of heaven and earth.”

At the creation God set in order the regular sequence of day and night. This was to be part of the ongoing nature of things. And it was like this because it was part of Yahweh’s covenant with creation that could never be broken.

Jeremiah 31:35a

[He is the One] who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night.

Psalms 146:6

—*a faithful Creator*

He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—He remains faithful forever.

The whole of the heavenly and earthly creation that has been brought into existence is being sustained, and will be brought to its goal, on the basis of His boundless covenant love!

Genesis 1:29

—*the covenant provision of delicious, nutritious, life-sustaining food for all living creatures*

God said [to the first couple], “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.”

Acts 14:17

—*divine faithfulness for all to see!*

He has not left Himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; He provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with [gladness].

So there we have it—the Creator’s grand creation covenant: that *magnificently purposeful, bonded-relationship of love* that He has entered into with everything He has made. The rest of our Story will be an awesomely, incredible outworking of this.<sup>4</sup>

**the covenant of love and Eden, the Holy One’s  
garden sanctuary—the ‘place’ where He delighted  
to dwell with His beloved humanity**

The dwelling of God with His image on earth is a theme that is continually linked with covenant throughout the Scriptures. This was clearly a part of His love-purpose from the very beginning—and will be gloriously so at the great Climax of our Story!

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<sup>4</sup> The word ‘covenant’ does not actually appear in the very early chapters of Genesis. The reason for this will be seen later. It is enough to say just now that everything in these chapters is clearly of a covenantal nature. Even from chapter 2 God’s covenant name, the LORD, is used when speaking of His works of creation.

## Genesis 2:7–8

The LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life<sup>5</sup>, and the man became a living being. Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there He put the man He had formed.

Adam was created *outside* of the Garden of Eden: the ‘Garden of Delights’. But his Maker immediately placed him within this garden sanctuary: an especially *set apart* environment / that ‘place’ where He, the LORD God, would be ‘specially present’ to him.

Having been put in the garden the man, Adam, was himself *set apart* to a holy purpose: enjoyment of the divine presence as he did the work he was given to do. He was to know the blessedness of *relational intimacy* and *vocational partnership* with God: those life-giving elements of our ‘high human calling’.

We are told that God ‘walked’ in the garden and had fellowship with His image.<sup>6</sup> Such intimate communion was—and will always be—at the heart of His great covenant of love. It is out of this joyous, relational intimacy with our Creator that full vocational partnership flows.

Adam was brought into that relationship of fellowship and friendship with God from the moment he received the breath of life and was placed in the garden. Everything he heard his Maker say—and everything he saw, heard, touched, tasted and smelt around him—would have caused his heart to well up with gratitude, worship and praise! Such a perpetual song within him, in fact, represented that which, in principle, rose up from the whole of creation to the One who formed it. It was part of Adam’s grand calling to lead God’s excellent world in its worship!

For him it was so natural—as a son of God—to walk with His Creator in an adoring spirit of reverent awe, childlike trust, grateful affection and wholehearted obedience. From the very first he knew what it was to live in covenant union with the LORD—as the dear object of his Maker’s bonded-love.

Adam was, then, God’s treasured **person**, in the **place** God had provided, in God’s **presence**, with (as will be seen) the **proclamation** God had given, with the **provision** God had made, to fulfill the **purpose** for which God had created him, and all this, for God’s **pleasure**—and, of course, for Adam’s own ongoing blessedness!

As we continue through our Story—and through the series in general—this rich covenantal picture will be progressively reproduced in different stages of the redemptive process.

We will also see much more of the ‘sanctifying’ action of God that took place in the establishment of that first sanctuary. That is, His way of ‘making holy’, ‘consecrating’

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<sup>5</sup> Right from the beginning we see a (Study 2) picture of humankind being called into intimacy with its Maker: this act of the Creator, ‘face to face’ with the first man as He breathed the breath of life into him.

<sup>6</sup> The One who walked with Adam may well have been ‘the Angel of the LORD’ (who was different to other angels who made appearances throughout the bible). At times He uniquely appeared in this way as the LORD Himself, in a human form. When He appeared to Manoah in Judges 13 and was asked what His name was, he answered, “Why do you ask My Name, it is [beyond understanding—it is wonderful]” (13:18). This awesome personage then, may have been a physical appearance of ‘the Eternal Son’ before His actual ‘En-fleshment’ among us as ‘the Divine Mediator of all things’ (as Study 6 will show).

or ‘setting apart’ the people, situations and things He had chosen for a special purpose.<sup>7</sup>

## the covenant of love and the kingdom of God

When the Father initiated His eternal covenant of love with all creation, He also initiated His magnificent, eternal kingdom of love on the earth.

The two great themes of *covenant* and *kingdom* will go hand in hand as we pursue our Story through both the Old and New Testaments. God’s covenantal action is always within the context of His sovereign reign and rule over all things, for the fulfillment of His love-purpose: the revelation of His glory, and, consequently, the blessedness of humankind.

## three covenant gifts imparted at Creation

It has rightly been observed by teachers of the Old Testament, that in binding Himself in love to us, our Maker has provided three marvelously significant covenant gifts: Vocation, Marriage and Sabbath rest. These gifts to those who are God’s image are an integral part of the creation covenant—and true human freedom and fullness are known as each is wholeheartedly embraced according to God’s will and way.<sup>8</sup>

### 1) the covenant gift of *Vocation*

It was said in Study 1 that the high point of God’s holy happiness expressed at the Creation, was the formation of humankind in His image and likeness (the entire creation was then called ‘very good’). We were the climax and crown of all He had made!

One of the reasons for this was mentioned in Study 2. There we saw that our being formed as His image and likeness included a calling to be THE REPRESENTATIVES OF HIS KINGSHIP WITHIN THE CREATION. His intention was that we should have authority / dominion over the whole of His world, to *rule over* and *care for it* on His behalf. We were to be *full covenant partners* with Him in the manifestation of His wonderful kingdom of love upon the earth! This is what the gift of human vocation is all about.

Genesis 1:26

—*made in the likeness of the King!*

God said, “Let Us make human beings in Our image, in Our likeness,<sup>9</sup> so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

We were to live on the earth as rulers and caregivers of all living and breathing things.

Proverbs 12:10a

—*exercising true authority over our fellow creatures*

The righteous care for the needs of their animals.

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<sup>7</sup> The Old Testament Hebrew verb *quidash* and the New Testament Greek verb *hagiazō* both mean ‘to sanctify’, ‘make holy’, ‘consecrate’ or ‘set apart’.

<sup>8</sup> These were alluded to in Studies 3 & 4 as: ‘vocational activity, marriage and family life, and rest and recreation’.

<sup>9</sup> “Let *Us* make human beings in *Our* image, in *Our* likeness ... ” This reference to Himself in a plural form, may give the hint of an incredibly significant reality that will be introduced in Study 6. That is, that in the beginning, God’s Eternal Son—together with the Holy Spirit—was with Him, and involved in all His works. In that study and others, there is stunningly beautiful revelation awaiting us—particularly regarding the nature of God’s covenant.



What an amazing gift the animal creation is to us! And how right and good it is for us to care for it as the work of our Creator's hands.

Genesis 2:19–20a

—*Adam exercising authority over the creation by naming his fellow creatures*

The LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

What a happy time 'king Adam' must have had relating to and naming the creatures that God brought before him. They were all his to enjoy!<sup>10</sup>

Psalms 8:5–6

[LORD], You crowned [human beings] with glory and honour. You made them rulers over the works of Your hands; You put everything under their feet.

This would include exercising a functional dominion not only over every living and breathing creature, but also over every other element of the creation.

Genesis 1:28a

God blessed them and said to them ... ["Fill] the earth and subdue it."

In the beginning—before God spoke 'fullness' into the creation—we're told that the earth was 'formless and empty' (Gen. 1:2). Formlessness here speaks of 'disorder' and 'chaos'. But then, having brought the creation into its fullness and crowned it with humanity formed in His likeness, He then commanded us to 'fill' the earth. This would refer not only to filling the earth with a human presence, but to see the earth come to its *functional fullness*, as those who exercise divinely enabled dominion over it. And this fullness would be maintained as every element of intrusive disorder and chaos was *subdued* by us.

Genesis 2:15

—*exercising true authority over our physical environment*

[Adam was] put in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

We might initially think that the idea of 'work' in the garden would spoil it as a place of delight. But that's only because of our *fallen*-human experiences of work. Adam was *working in fellowship with His Maker*—and that made all the difference.

In all that he did Adam offered up to God what his heart was full of. That's the nature of true work. We cannot separate *work* in the Creator's world from *worship* of the Creator.

Actually, the Hebrew word for 'work' here means 'to serve'. It is also the word used for 'worship' in God's presence! Doesn't this give delightful insight into the way we may go about what we do *with God in His world*? Work, service and worship are three inseparable elements of rich human vocation.

### **so much to be discovered, developed and excellently used**

As we continue it will be seen that part of our human stewardship is also to discover, develop and make good responsible use of all the many rich resources that have been placed within the creation.

How extravagantly generous is our Creator and how abundantly His joy must have been expressed in providing these things. Many of them are probably still hidden—just

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<sup>10</sup> We were always intended to enjoy the creation in the Creator's presence. What a grand way to live in His good world!

waiting to be brought to light! The way we use them all—and rejoice in their Giver as we do—is part of our participation in the wonderful kingdom of God.<sup>11</sup>

Genesis 2:11–12

—*treasures from the earth!*

[The River Pishon] winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. (The gold of the land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there).

Such splendid gifts were placed in the world for us to discover and enjoy. Of course, they were never meant to intrude into the centre of our affections. These are all marvelous things to embrace and use according to God's will, but are, themselves, very poor objects of worship.

Such treasures were, in fact, to be found outside of the garden sanctuary, not within it. As will be seen later, the garden was intended to spread out and encapsulate all of this—and further on in the Old Testament part of our Story, these very things were to be used within another sanctuary / 'set-apart place' that God would provide for His people.

### **three basic elements of Adam's vocational life**

We have gained, at least, some understanding of the incredible gift of vocation imparted at the beginning. But, before we continue, there is an extremely significant foundation to be laid for the rest of the series.

This has to do with the three basic elements of Adam's vocational life that were essential to a true expression of his humanity as the image of God. The first of these has not yet been portrayed, but soon will. The second and third have already been depicted in some way.

IN THE GARDEN SANCTUARY, ADAM FULFILLED THE ROLES OF *PRIEST*, *PROPHET* AND *KING*. As *PRIEST* we've seen that he was *a worshipper of His Maker*. As *PROPHET* he was one who *spoke the word of God* (*prophetically* naming his fellow-creatures with the *kingly* authority given to him). As *KING* he *represented His Creator's rule over and care of the creation*.

These three elements will continue to appear in different ways throughout the Old Testament part of our Story. Then, in Study 6, when exposed to God's Son—who came as the 'Last Adam'—we will see them expressed in most the glorious ways, revealing THE VOCATIONAL FREEDOM AND FULLNESS FOR WHICH WE WERE ALL CREATED!!! And more than that: as He exercises those magnificent roles on our behalf, He will forever *liberate* into these very actions *all* who *respond* to what He has accomplished!

## **2) the covenant gift of *Marriage***

Now we come to that incredible creational gift that has, rightly, had its place at the centre of human living down through the centuries.

Genesis 2:18

The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In a later study we will be looking at the whole area of 'work', in which—among many other things—the matter of responsible use of creation-resources will be addressed.

<sup>12</sup> This statement a 'helper suitable for him' is an extremely significant one for our understanding of marital relationship. Elsewhere, the word 'helper' is very often used to describe a situation where there is a desperately urgent need for something to happen which would 'save the day': the arrival of 'the help'! A truly functional wife is, indeed, one who is the

We have seen that Adam exercised authority over his fellow-creatures by naming them: a fascinating and enjoyable task. Among the whole range of his fellow-creatures that the LORD paraded before him, there was obviously so much that was delightful to his senses. But after this noble, naming activity was completed there was, yet, a personal, relational and vocational longing deep within him which was left unfulfilled.

Genesis 2:20b

But for Adam no suitable helper was found.

Later, in Study 6, when we understand more fully the *glorious relational nature* of God the Father—eternally in intimate communion with His Son and the Holy Spirit—it will be clear that no truly functional creature formed in His likeness could be a solitary individual.

Genesis 2:21–23

So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib He had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "[At last!] This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman', for she was taken out of man."

Imagine what it must have been for Adam to first lay eyes on the beautiful creature set before him. His other fellow-creatures were a source of great pleasure and wonder. But these could not be compared with what now filled his vision.

All he could say was (to paraphrase), "YES, YES, YES!!!" Her femininity, was the perfect *counterpart* to His masculinity. What he saw struck the most wonderful chord within him. And in this he could do nothing less than to name her as one who had absolute affinity with the very essence of his own being! (The word he used was a feminine form of the word 'man').<sup>13</sup>

Of course, the newly formed woman would *also* have been utterly delighted with what was immediately before her eyes. The man was, clearly, all she could desire as a companion. This whole situation, in the midst of all that surrounded them, was 'very good'—FUNCTIONALLY EXCELLENT!!!

Genesis 1:27

So God created [humanity] in His own image, in the image of God He created [it]; male and female He created them.

*Now* something enormously significant to the rest of history had come into being. Humankind was no longer just 'man', but 'man and woman': a 'male-female entity'. Two genders which, *together*, make up one humanity that is the image of God!

There is a fundamental unity between male and female. They are not two separate creations simply 'brought together'. The male-female union is, in fact, the most basic expression of the unity of humankind.

Furthermore, God's great purpose for His world cannot be fulfilled apart from this. It is impossible to emphasize too much the significance of man and woman, together, as God's image within the creation.

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gift of God to again and again 'save the day' in the rich vocation to which a married couple are called.

<sup>13</sup>In naming this precious creature before him, Adam was *lifting up* his heart in *worship*, was *proclaiming* the reality of what God had done, and was *exercising* his God-given *authority*. In beholding his bride, Adam spontaneously expressed his priestly, prophetic and kingly role.

The image of God does naturally, among other relationships, desire a particular human covenant partner of the opposite gender, with whom deep relational intimacy can be enjoyed—as together they pursue their rich, purposeful calling.

Genesis 2:24

—*a union in which two become one*

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

Genesis 2:25

—*a communion known in the mutual serenity of an untroubled conscience*

The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

So here we have the birth of that most basic element of human society: the covenant gift of marriage. In the beginning it was embraced within an atmosphere of sweet moral purity—without a trace of personal uneasiness. They were both naked and felt no shame.

With this there was also no sense of inferiority or superiority, for both had equal dignity before their Maker. Together—in intimate communion with God—they enjoyed deeply satisfying unity and vocational activity.

Malachi 2:14

—*what Adam later would have been able to tell his sons*

[Your bride] is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.

The ‘one flesh’ union of marriage is, itself, a covenant relationship—designed to reflect the unfailing covenantal love and faithfulness of God Himself.

This of course assumes, as the Study 3 diagram showed, that any true human relationship—including marriage—must have its source in a relationship with our Creator. That will always be the primary fountain of true personal fulfillment, out of which every other authentic, human relationship flows.

### **a physically fruitful union**

Genesis 1:28a

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and [multiply]; fill the earth and subdue it.”

The Creator provided the first couple—and all who were to follow—with the capacity to fulfill this command to ‘be fruitful and multiply’ by *blessing* them. As with His blessing of the other creatures, this too was part of the *initiation* of His covenant of love with all creation. One purpose of that command to physical fruitfulness was ‘to fill the earth’.

In Study 1 it was said that, “He always intended His world to be a superb, pleasure-giving home for His family.” So, the first couple was commanded to populate every part of it with a humanity that delighted in the Creator’s Fatherhood!

This provides insight into a significant part of *the covenant gift of vocation* received by that first couple. As was alluded to earlier, they were to begin a process in which the blessedness known in Eden would spread out over the whole earth, making it one enormous, holy sanctuary! There, the Father would dwell intimately with His Family, revealing His wonderful kingdom of ‘righteousness, peace and joy’ among all of humanity.

It has been rightly said that the great purpose of God’s covenant of love with all creation was to, ultimately, ‘Edenize’ the entire world!<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Genesis 2:10–14 tells us that, “a river watering the garden flowed from Eden,” and that from there it was separated into four headwaters: the Pishon, Gihon, Tigris and Euphrates. These

Genesis 3:20

—the man's final naming task in the garden, giving the 'woman' a personal name

Adam named his wife Eve because she would become the mother of all living. The important theme of marriage as a rich covenant gift will be pursued much further in later studies. As well as looking at the practical outworking of this wonderful gift, we will see how it is a *dynamic foreshadowing* of what is to come at history's great climax.<sup>15</sup> How many songs, poems and tales have been repeated on this theme of male / female union down through the millennia! The reason is plain. It is one of our Maker's foundational covenant gifts.<sup>16 17</sup>

### 3) the covenant gift of *Sabbath Rest*

Having seen something of God's *vocational* provision, it is important to now understand this next gift: Sabbath Rest. We have already learnt in Study 4 how easy it is to be driven into a state of ceaseless, restless activism. This is definitely not what our good Creator has purposed for us!

The rich vocational living to which we are called has at the very heart of it what is indispensable to every human creature: a participation in the *rest* of God Himself.

Genesis 1:31–2:2

God saw all that He had made, and it was very good. And there was evening and morning—the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work He had been doing; so on the seventh day He rested from all His work.

Exodus 31:17

On the seventh day He abstained from work and was refreshed.

When our Maker had finished His creative work He saw that it was 'very good'. In Study 1 we learned that this means *functionally* or *purposefully* good. Every last detail was just as it needed to be to fulfill His magnificent intention for it! So He rested. But of course, for Him—the Almighty—this was not because He was exhausted.

Isaiah 40:28b

The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary.

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rivers flowed out into all the surrounding regions as a symbol of the outflowing of the life of Eden into all the earth!

<sup>15</sup> More cannot be said of the significance of man and woman as the image of God within the creation, until His purpose of love is further unfolded in the New Testament part of our Story. There it will be seen that what is foreshadowed here—in the beginning—is, in fact, the key to understanding the whole meaning of history.

<sup>16</sup> In a study entitled 'On the Way As Redeemed Husbands & Wives', we will speak of those who never receive the gift of marriage or who lose it through tragic circumstances. There it will be clear that God has made provision for them within His purpose and among His people. Although marriage is a marvelously rich vocational gift of Creation, we will see that through the grace of a faithful Creator it is not essential to human fulfillment.

<sup>17</sup> In that coming Study on marriage it will also be seen that this union is to be one that is life-long and between one man and one woman. After the 'Fall', it will be seen too, that the marital distortion of 'polygamy' (a man simultaneously having more than one wife) and even 'polyandry' (a woman simultaneously having more than one husband) began to be expressed. Polygamy was something that God tolerated for a time, even among his old covenant people, but for good reason, it was condemned with the coming of His Son among us.

When we are told that He ‘rested’ from His work and was ‘refreshed’, it simply means that He had completed the task of creation and was now able to enjoy the manifest reality of it!

The LORD was gladly refreshed in the perfection of His accomplishment and His glorious love-purpose for it. This is the blessedness He always has known and will know: His unbounded joy and delight and perfect rest and peace in the light of all that He is, has done, is doing and has planned to do.<sup>18</sup>

### **a day blessed and set apart**

Genesis 2:3

Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all His work of creating that He had done.

Having rested on the seventh day, God *blessed* it. That is, He made it to be a day that would fulfill a certain *enabling function* for His creatures. It would impart to them something of the pleasure He Himself enjoyed in it as He rested from His labours.

He also made it *holy*. That is, He *set it apart* for all time as *a day of blessing* to bring rest and refreshment. Enjoyment of this was, we may assume, a physical, mental, emotional and spiritual need that He has built into our humanity.

We have been made in the image of the Living God, who is always engaged in grand, purposeful action. But as we are vocationally one with Him in this, our personal integration, wholeness and wellbeing require a day of rest for reflection and re-creation within the seven-day cycle of each week. We were never structured for a ceaseless round of slavish activity.

Later in this study more will be said of the establishment of a day of rest among God’s people. Then, in a further study, the matter will be raised again in relation to maintaining a ‘creational lifestyle’ in the work we’ve been given to do.

But this participation in the rest of God is not merely ‘having a day off each week’. An essential part of it is our *being one with Him in His enjoyment of His works*. The rest we are to know is above all else THE LIFTING UP OF OUR HEARTS IN THANKSGIVING AND WORSHIP, as we are assured of His glorious love-purpose for us and His world. THERE IS, INDEED, NOTHING MORE RESTFUL AND REFRESHING THAN THIS!!!

Such worship, we will see, is part of *daily* vocational living. But it is also to be *especially* enjoyed within the relaxed atmosphere of our Maker’s gift of a weekly rest day. What a superb gift it is to have some space each week, in which, we may be freshly enriched in the blessedness we were created to know.

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<sup>18</sup> It is significant to note that at the end of the seventh day there is no closing statement as with each of the previous six days (“and there was evening and morning ...”). This declares that the completed creation, accomplished on that seventh day, will continue on in a functionally magnificent way. From that time, humanity could participate in the Creator’s delightful sabbath rest—fully in communion with God in the garden sanctuary and, ultimately, within the whole of creation.

Of course, there is some complexity ahead in our Story, with the tragedy of ‘the Fall’. After that, a full participation in the rest of God would be reserved for a future era. Further along in the series, it will be seen that the Father’s *redeemed* family will, ultimately, come into an *eternal rest*, as they fulfill their glorious vocation together, forever! But it will also be seen that, through the *accomplished work* of the One to come, there is for us a very wonderful capacity, even now, to richly know much of the rest we were created to enjoy.

Throughout the Scriptures the theme of rest has always had to do with our being *happily and serenely with God* in His good world, in the flow of His ‘good, pleasing and perfect will’. This is a seven-day a week calling, with one day of particular refreshment spent in the action of it.

Apart from such participation in the rest of God, the covenant gifts of vocation and marriage are sadly frustrated. Refusal to share in the divine rest is, in fact, a *violation* of the covenant-union with our Maker into which we have been called—and sure evidence that some dark, idolatrous pursuit has gripped our imagination and is exercising a deadly dominion in our lives. Of course, for those who have refused the revelation and presence of God, such idolatry pervades all of life, locking its devotees into the endless, restless struggle of Study 4—regardless of how many helpful forms of *re-creation* are pursued.

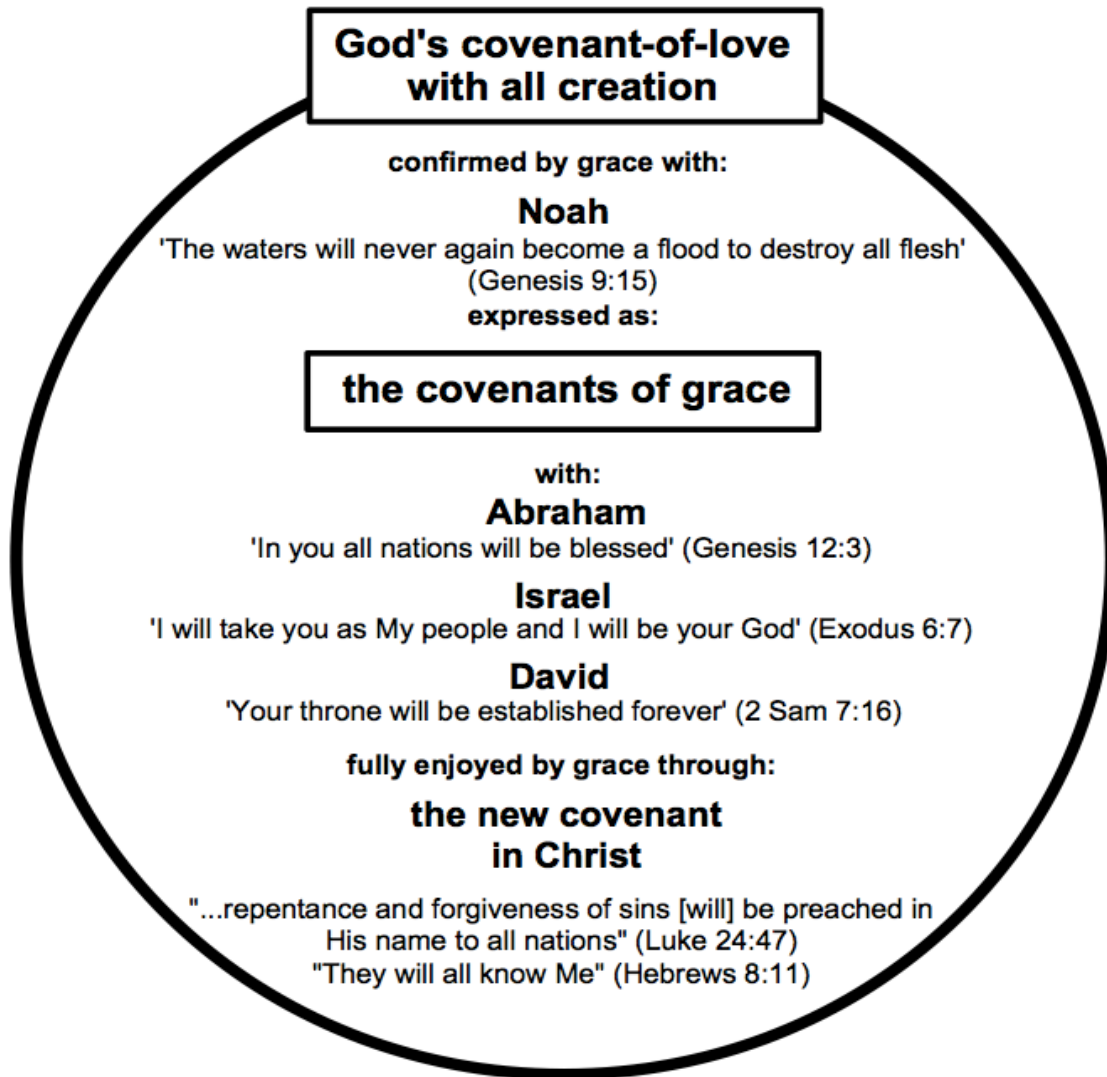
The next section briefly introduces God’s ongoing, covenant action, which brings us freely into the good of His covenant gifts of Vocation, Marriage and Sabbath rest.

### **the covenants of grace**

As already indicated, within God’s universal covenant of love with all creation—as various expressions of it—are His *covenants of grace*. These are those that are made in the context of human rebellion and sin, in order to go on assuring God’s people of His unfailing love and faithfulness—providing an *openly declared framework* for the outworking of His great, redemptive plan on their behalf.

Throughout this present study we will look at the grace covenants made with some of the major characters of our Story: Noah, Abraham, the nation of Israel and David.

The following diagram illustrates our Creator and Redeemer’s covenantal action throughout history.



These covenants of grace all point towards and are climaxed in the *new covenant* established in Christ—which will bring the covenant of creation to its fulfillment! That will be the subject of our next study and also will be the foundation for—and, indeed, the fountain of—all other studies in the series.

Like the creation covenant all these are initiated and maintained by God Himself, regardless of human response. As mentioned before, there *are* spelt out within most of them certain responsibilities that must be fulfilled. But for the LORD'S people to fail in these, does not *dissolve* the covenant—it just means that covenant blessings are forfeited and covenant judgments incurred.

Every aspect of God's covenant action is with a view to the great, coming *climax* of history. This will be the ultimate accomplishment of all that He has planned from eternity—for both His general creation and those redeemed to be His true image. As has been said already, this incredibly wonderful, final outcome—and its eternal vocational fruits—will be made known as we proceed through our first eight studies, and beyond.

Psalms 25:14

—a promise to those who gladly seek Him with reverence and awe

The LORD confides in those who fear Him; He makes His covenant known to them.



It must be so obvious to us, even at this point in our Story, that our Maker really does enjoy securing and delighting us in His presence—with the deep assurance of His covenant love and faithfulness!

## the central focus of the Divine Covenantal-Narrative of Redemption

Having established the key concept of God's covenant faithfulness, there is an extremely important point to be made before we follow through with that theme. It is this:

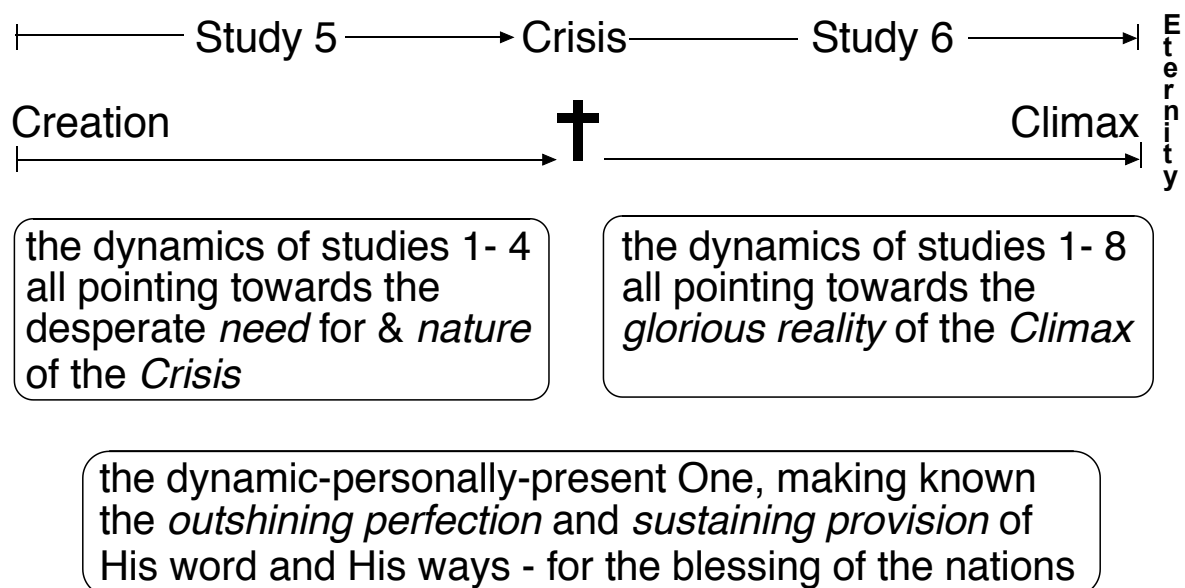
Within the Divine Narrative stretched out before us there will be a diverse and colourful procession of human characters. But these must by no means be the central focus. To centre on *them* would be to miss entirely the meaning and blessing of the biblical drama—because at the heart of it all is not the responses and reactions of humanity, but rather, *THE GLORIOUS SELF-REVELATION OF THE AWESOME 'GOD WHO IS'!!!*

From beginning to end we will be exposed to the dynamic, sovereign activity of the *Living God*, who is always *at work* sovereignly fulfilling His great covenant purpose in the history of His world.

How liberating it is for self-absorbed, fallen-human creatures to receive a historical perspective that is—although ultimately, with a view to our eternal blessedness—not primarily all about us. The significance of such a statement will be thrillingly be made clear as our series unfolds.

In the introduction to this study, we spoke of where we've come from thus far in the series and where we are headed as we proceed towards Study 8. The following diagram is a further illustration of this as we come to the commencement of the grand Story that is set before us.

## THE DIVINE COVENANTAL-NARRATIVE OF REDEMPTION



Those ‘doctrinal dynamics’<sup>19</sup> of studies 1–4, will certainly be illustrated throughout the entire Narrative. These certainly *do* show us the need for and the nature of that great *Crisis* of Redemption in Christ to be proclaimed in Study 6. And all this, of course, with a view to the glorious *Climax* at the close of history (which will be unfolded in much detail at the end of Study 8).

SO NOW, LET THE STORY BEGIN!!!

the LORD’S covenant faithfulness in working out  
His ‘place-centred, holy purpose’ during the time of:

- **the Fall**—*the self-exaltation & death of humanity in Adam*  
(gospel promised, eviction, Cain’s kind & the line of Seth)

We have already looked briefly at this historical event of the Fall in Study 3, where the emphasis was mainly upon the basic nature of its dreadful consequences. But it’s time now to add some more detail to that picture.

### **the tragic birth of human rebellion, sin, condemnation and death**

Before the creation of Eve, Adam was presented with a critical choice: one that had to do with his always remaining in a truly covenantal relationship with his Maker.

If Adam were to be a true *covenant-partner* with God—in His great purpose for the earth—then his *moral authority* would need to be tested. This moral authority had to do with what he would choose as the *basis* for every decision he made as the image of God within the creation. Would this basis continue to be the word of God, as it had been so far? Or would it be another word—arising out of his own mind apart from his Creator? And so the choice was set before him.

Within God’s covenantal relationship with us there are always two things: *command* and *prohibition*. Right human response to these doesn’t *maintain* the covenant. As we’ve seen, our Creator does that regardless of response. Right response though, does maintain the experience of His blessing and avoidance of judgment *within* the covenant.

Some of the LORD’S primary, *life-giving covenant commands* have already been set out. Now Adam receives the first *life-preserving covenant prohibition*.

### **the righteous prohibition**

Genesis 2:9, 16–17

[In the garden of Eden] the LORD made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil ... The LORD God commanded [Adam], “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for [the day] you eat of it you will surely die.”

The garden sanctuary in which Adam had been placed was full of good and pleasant things. As he walked with the LORD God in a joyous spirit of grateful affection he was free to enjoy all of these delights. The one thing he was not to do was eat from ‘the tree of the knowledge of good and evil’.

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<sup>19</sup> ‘Dynamics are realities that have strong effects.’

There was no element of unfairness in this prohibition, no reason for him to feel deprived in any way. So why would he want to grasp at what was forbidden, spurning God's love?

As already pointed out in Study 3, Adam knew the difference between good and evil on the basis of what had been made known to him. Whatever His Maker said for him to do was what he did. It was as simple as that. This was how he, as a true child, creature and servant was to live in the world of his Father, Creator and King.

But to *disobey* what God had said and eat of the forbidden tree would be an act of rebellion: a declaration that he himself desired to determine what is good or evil, pleasant or painful, right or wrong, functional or dysfunctional *apart from* the word of God. This would itself be great evil, bringing instant death.

That death would not be immediately physical, although physical death would then inevitably follow. It would be a *relational death*. The very day he chose against the word of God he would *die* to *Him* and become wrongly *alive* to *himself*.

Adam would lose his ability to respond truly to God's word, and so, would no longer have the *moral authority* needed to function authentically as the *image* of God. The kind of intimate relationship enjoyed with his Maker—together with his capacity for true, covenant partnership with Him—would be destroyed!

After Eve had been created as Adam's 'suitable helper'—that is, his *covenant partner* in the purpose of God—he had no doubt passed on to her all of the rich dimensions of their calling as God's image.

How enthusiastically, we may assume, he had spoken to her of the *covenant gifts* they had been given: the thrilling dimensions of their *vocation*, the joyous nature of their *marital relationship*, as well as the lovely provision of *a day of rest and refreshment* every seven days.

Adam had clearly also—as the bearer of His Maker's word—communicated to Eve the serious nature of the choice that had been placed before them *in regard to* 'the tree of the knowledge of good and evil'.

We saw in our key concept section, that Adam had exercised His God-given authority over the animal kingdom by naming each creature. In this, he took responsibility not only to *rule* over but also to *care* for them. And later we were told that—while still in the garden—he named Eve. Here too, he was exercising a God-given authority in relation to His deeply cherished, covenant partner.

In all of this, Adam was accepting responsibility to take the *initiative* in their vocational life together, and make *provision* for her in the fulfillment of her dynamic role. That function had nothing to do with his being superior in any way to Eve. It was simply the loving exercise of a God-given responsibility.

Understanding this—in the light of Study 4's description of Satan—what happened next in our Story is precisely what would be expected. The evil one always delights in undermining the functional flow of authority in the Creator's world, in order to both dishonour God and bring ruin to humanity. And so coming as a serpent, he bypassed Adam and approached Eve.

The devil's high-sounding proposition was a fiendishly, subtle temptation to despise the word of God and violate His covenant. He desperately desired to destroy the superb holiness of the garden sanctuary, where friendship with the LORD was enjoyed and His word gladly received. The serpent knew that to receive the word of another is to give 'worth-ship' to them. If he could persuade the couple to choose against God's word in favour of his own, then he would succeed in becoming the object of their

worship. As was seen in Study 4, this has always been the evil one's quest: to receive from humanity the worship that belongs to their Creator alone.

### **the intrusion of a false word**

Genesis 3:1b–6

The serpent said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"

The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

"You will certainly not die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

A horrible sequence of events took place in this the most tragic moment of our human history:

Firstly—as already mentioned—Satan overthrew the creational order of things by bypassing Adam. Then he questioned the word of God, inferring that it would be most inappropriate to think there would be *any* tree in the garden that was to be withheld from them. In response, Eve rightly repeated what Adam had passed on to her.

Satan then replied in three ways: with a direct assault on the authority of God's word, with an accusation against God Himself, and with the false promise of a new mental, moral and vocational capacity if she ate of the tree's fruit. What a shockingly wicked approach this was to Eve and her husband—who was *silently* looking on.

So the devil's first recorded communication in history was to blatantly contradict what God had said. He declared that the LORD'S promise of death to any who ate of the tree would never happen. "Live against the word of your Maker and you won't die—there'll be no judgment," he was saying.

He openly accused God of deception and deprivation: inferring that as their Creator He was deliberately keeping them from the dignity of being truly *like Him*. And to crown his *own* deception, Satan promised that eating the forbidden fruit would bring an *enlightenment* that would be personally and vocationally transforming. They would, at last, be *like God*, knowing—of themselves and apart from Him—good and evil.

But, of course, the temptation was not to be *like* God at all but to be *as* God—a very different thing altogether. And with the prospect of now determining what was good and evil—as if they were God Himself—they were also being tempted to set themselves over and against Him!

How subtle—and, indeed, how brilliantly devised—all this was. Before his fall into rebellion the evil one was a glorious creature, full of wisdom; but now through pride and arrogance he hated the wisdom he once knew, and instead, used his brilliance against the way of his Creator. To this very day his attitude and approach has not changed. He still seeks to turn our regard, trust, affections and allegiance away from the Father and in pursuit of a false promise of life.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Everything that the evil one says is actually a distortion of the word of God. All he ever does is take what the Creator has said, or established within the creation, and pervert it (diagonalizing what is vertical). He never says or does anything original—he only ever

## **Adam, the culpably passive onlooker**

Having faithfully told Eve earlier of the prohibition given by the LORD, Adam is now *silent* in the face of this assault upon God's word!

We read before that Adam's responsibility within the garden was to 'work it and take care of it'. The word translated 'take care of', also means 'to keep' or 'to guard'. Part of his responsibility was clearly to *guard* this 'garden sanctuary' from the intrusion of anything that would bring corruption into it.

This makes his careless and spineless passivity here to be seriously irresponsible.<sup>21</sup> So we have here at the beginning of the human race, the account of a *male, moral failure* that would develop into a dark blight upon the history of humankind.

## **the awful violation of God's great covenant of love**

Eve—turning to look at the tree—then gave birth to the three universal areas of idolatrous desire outlined in Study 3: 'the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life' (1 John 2:16). She saw that the fruit was 'good for food': it would *stimulate* sensory experience; that it was 'pleasing to the eye': a magnificent thing to be *possessed*; and that it was 'desirable for gaining wisdom': a means of *elevating* her personal status.

So she took the fruit, and ate it. And handing some to Adam—her *limp leader*—saw him eat it too.

THE GREAT MORAL DISASTER OF HISTORY HAD TAKEN PLACE!!!<sup>22</sup>

## **a tragic aftermath**

Following the violation of God's covenant-bond with them, they immediately felt the impact of this within their conscience.

Genesis 3:7

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Suddenly everything was different! A new proud and independent self-awareness had been born within them. But more than that, the sweet moral purity they'd once enjoyed was no more. And with its disappearance there had entered into their experience something that is *intolerable* to the human spirit: the dark and deadening presence of GUILT, and with that a debilitating sense of SHAME.

Together as a covenant-partnership they had despised the word of God in eating of the forbidden tree. They had willfully rebelled against their Maker, and spurned His love.

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counterfeits the real thing. He creates nothing—only vandalizes what has come from the Creator. As was said in Study 4, he and the demonic powers he commands, are merely terrorists in God's world.

<sup>21</sup> The theme of 'keeping' and 'guarding' will be increasingly developed as we move through the series.

<sup>22</sup> In the garden there was a functional flow of authority: with loving initiative coming from the LORD, to Adam, to Eve, and then to the animal creation. But in the Fall, the evil one deceptively set in motion a flow of initiative from himself (in the guise of an animal), to Eve, and then to Adam who defied the LORD. Again, we observe that there's nothing original in the devil's action here, just a reversal of what the Creator has ordained.

Eve had taken an initiative that was not hers to take. Adam had failed to give the leadership he was created to give. Both had failed God and one another. And with this, a deeply disturbing sense of uneasiness intruded into their union.

Straight away, their attention became focused upon their *genitalia*. This was what, outwardly, most distinguished them as male and female. It was also the area that signified the most intimate expression of their physical relationship. With the personally defiling sense of shame they now felt as a couple, their uneasiness was naturally concentrated there.

It seems that with the new world of independent moral choice that had opened up to them, they were confronted with a question: Is it right or wrong to be naked before one another? The intrusion of shame into their union had brought disturbance to their spirit and confusion to their mind. They were no longer sure whether their intimacy was morally legitimate.

Also because of the different nature of their eye contact now—probably indicating an attitude of fearful self-interest—there may well have come upon them a sense of *relational vulnerability*. They may have no longer felt secure in one another's presence. Whatever their thoughts and feelings were, they both concluded that there was only one thing to do: *cover up*.

How very sad that such uncertainty and complexity had entered their relationship in that garden sanctuary. And behind it all of course, as we will see now, was a deeply disturbing—indeed, dreadful—sense of uneasiness before the One against whom they had rebelled.<sup>23</sup>

Genesis 3:8

—*a humanity on the run!*

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

What previously would have been a most welcome sound to their ears now became a terror. With guilt producing its reflexive hardening of the heart towards God, they suddenly had no desire for fellowship with Him. But they found, as we saw in Study 1, that there is no place to hide from His presence.

Genesis 3:11b–13

—*Adam and Eve playing the 'blame game'*

[The LORD said to the man], "Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman You put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

Already Study 4 has described the comical process of *blaming* that went on at that time. It was, of course, also tragic and personally demeaning.<sup>24</sup> Adam blamed Eve—

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<sup>23</sup> Their conscience clouded and troubled and with every moral choice now to be determined by their own discretion, they were like a boat without a rudder. How confused and desperate is this matter of human sexuality in our fallen world. With humanity's now unresolved sense of guilt and shame, disoriented sense of personhood, fearful sense of circumstantial vulnerability and desperate pursuit of personal fullness, it is tragically caught in all kinds of extremes—from fearful inhibition through to a mad obsession with nakedness and the sexual act.

<sup>24</sup> The couple that had, until then, only ever used their tongue to speak the truth, now uttered what was perverse: speech distorted by a guilt-charged *desperation* that fell upon them.

whom, as he desperately pointed out, had been given to him by *the LORD!* And Eve blamed the serpent. But all three were to bear the outcome of their willful action.

However, before we look at the LORD'S response to each of these rebel-creatures, the *universal significance* of this event needs to be spelt out.

### **inclusion of all in Adam's sin**

According to the promise God had made, when the first couple ate of the tree they *died* in relationship to Him. But as Study 3 has shown, what resulted was not merely a *personal* consequence. Their choice impacted all of humankind for the rest of history! In this it must be understood that the primary responsibility for the Fall was not laid upon Eve, but Adam. Created first, he—as Study 3 declared—was the appointed *head* and *representative* of the entire human race.

Eve may have wrongly taken the initiative that was thrust upon her, but it was Adam, looking on, who should have intervened. She ate of the fruit first, but because of the position Adam had been *given*, the responsibility for what happened was laid wholly upon *him*. When the LORD came to the guilty pair it was Adam who was called to account first.<sup>25</sup>

Adam was the one, then, who plunged humankind into moral disaster. As the head and representative of us all, what he did was done on our behalf. Because of this we all participated in his sin and incurred its consequence.

Romans 5:12

Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin ... [In] this way death came to all people, because [in Adam] all sinned.

Romans 5:17a

By the trespass of the one man, death reigned.

Romans 5:18

One trespass resulted in condemnation for all people.

What a tragic, universal outcome this was! Because of Adam's transgression, all human beings are born into the world under a dark shadow of rebellion, sin, condemnation and death.

All have found themselves in a state of *innate, relational tension*—both with their Maker and those around them. Yes, and in this, apart from God's grace, they also find themselves in an endless, restless struggle, through the guilt, personal and circumstantial insecurity, frustration and fear of death described in Study 4—things they are *rightly* given up to.

The enormous impact that Adam's choice has had upon men and women and boys and girls is quite untellable.

HOW DREADFUL WAS OUR HEAD AND REPRESENTATIVE'S MORAL COLLAPSE!!!

### **the corruption of wisdom**

Ezekiel 28:12b–13a, 14a–15, 17, 19b

—the King of Tyre portrayed as Adam gloriously created, then—under satanic influence—shamefully fallen

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<sup>25</sup> Adam's eating of the fruit must not be seen merely as a *passive* act: his being 'caught out' in a moment of weakness. It was a blatant and willful act of *defiance*, in the face of the LORD'S clear word to him.

You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God. ... You were anointed as a guardian. ... You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. ... Your heart became proud ... and you corrupted your wisdom. ... You have come to a horrible end.

An inseparable part of Adam's moral failure was his descent into a futile way of *thinking* through the corruption of his wisdom.

We will see in the New Testament that there are two kinds of wisdom, and only two: that which is from God (from above), and that which is from the devil (from below): what is 'earthly, unspiritual and demonic'.<sup>26</sup>

With his wife, Adam fell for the temptation to be 'made wise' apart from the word of the Creator, and so he sank humankind into a situation where each person—apart from redeeming grace—is locked into a state of tragically darkened understanding.<sup>27</sup>

## **two divine responses in the face of rebellion and sin**

Within God's great covenant of love where there is joyous fellowship with Him and obedience to His will and way—that is, *true* covenant relationship—humankind enjoys its Creator's *blessing*. But we will see as our Narrative progresses that where this blessing is forfeited through rebellion and sin, there is—within that covenant of love—two divine responses: an action of *wrath* and a provision of *grace*.

### **1) wrath**

Already in Studies 1 and 4 we have seen the righteous action of God's wrath in the face of human unfaithfulness. It will continue to be seen that in the presence of persistently willful sin God's love is manifested 'at temperature'—in wrath, bringing *consequences* for the offender. These consequences are expressed in the experience of *judgment* and *cursing*.

### **2) grace**

In Studies 1–4 mention was also made of the wonder of God's grace in the face of human rebellion and sin. In future studies, in particular, it will be seen that His love is manifested in ways that thrill the hearts of repentant sinners: bringing abundant *provision* for any offender who will receive it. The reception of this provision results in the experience of *forgiveness* and *blessing*.

These two divine responses to covenant violation will be witnessed throughout our Story. But even now we are about to see them in operation immediately after the Fall.

## **consequences for the three offenders**

Here, then, we have the LORD'S response to the three creatures involved in this horrible rebellion.

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<sup>26</sup> James 3:15. The grand biblical theme of *wisdom* will continue to pervade the rest of the series—where both its true and false forms will be illustrated.

<sup>27</sup> We saw in Study 3 that 'they are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts' (Ephesians 4:18). Also, that 'their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened'; and 'although they claimed to be wise, they became fools' (Romans 1:21–22).



## 1) consequences for the serpent—and the evil one it represented

When Adam and Eve were being confronted with their sin, Satan—in the guise of the serpent—was present to delight in the results of his deception. But he would not enjoy what he was to hear. For now it was *his* turn to have terror enter *his* heart!

Genesis 3:14–15

The LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, “Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel.”

For the serpent itself there were to be two consequences of its involvement in this tragedy. Firstly, it would no longer have its natural habitat in the trees but in the dust. And secondly, it would have a cursed relationship to humanity—an enmity in which there would be perpetual violence.

This curse was, of course, not just about an ongoing conflict between snakes and people. It was a judgment upon the one whom the serpent represented: Satan. For there would be a particular Offspring of the woman who would be *against* him and his demon powers—and a terrible *encounter* would take place between the two. In this, the woman’s Offspring would mightily triumph. Although painfully struck by Satan, He would deliver to the evil one a *deadly crushing blow*!

Satan now knew that every time a life-threatening snake crawling in the dust suffered a lethal blow to its head, it was a sure sign of his own fate: *ultimate humiliation* and *devastating defeat*.

### a proclamation of grace for humanity

This judgment upon Satan, having been declared in the hearing of the now tragic pair, was in fact, a *promise* to them that all was not forever lost.

They heard in the condemnation of the deceiver the *hope* of their own salvation. A beam of light shone into the dark situation of human rebellion, sin, condemnation and death. In the midst of their misery there was a merciful proclamation of *grace*—a word they would be able to hold on to.

By the great grace of God, ONE BORN FROM THE OFFSPRING OF EVE WOULD—THROUGH HIS OWN AWFUL SUFFERING—BECOME THE CRUSHER OF SATAN!!! He would ‘destroy the devil’s work’ and so become the Redeemer and Liberator of the race!

In this curse upon the serpent there was—in principle—an assurance to be embraced by the primal couple, one they could pass on to their children and to all after them who would feel the impact of their human fallen-ness—encouraging them to ever look to their Redeemer-Creator.

What we have here is, in fact, THE FIRST PROCLAMATION OF THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD!!!

Our great Covenant-Creator is from the very outset virtually declaring the whole of His redemptive purpose. The rest of the Story will simply unfold the process that brings about its final fulfillment at the end of history. The extraordinarily wonderful details of that purpose, of course, were not contained within this first proclamation.

Satan’s purpose was to destroy God’s covenant-of-love with humankind, and in doing so to dishonour Him and bring humanity—His image—to ruin. The evil one wanted to

be, himself, the king of the creation, to have the worship of humanity and draw it into his service as his willing slaves, to accomplish his own plan.

But he did not take into account THE CREATOR'S SOVEREIGN POWER AND PURPOSE, THE *INDISSOLUBLE* NATURE OF HIS COVENANT, AND THE *GREATNESS* OF HIS REDEEMING AND RESTORING LOVE!!!

## 2) consequences for Eve

Now, Eve, was to receive a personal word from the LORD. Although not held responsible for the Fall of humankind she was certainly accountable for her part in it, and was given the dignity of bearing the consequences of her action.

Genesis 3:16

To the woman He said, "I will make your pains in child-bearing very severe; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

### painful child-birth

What was to be the grand continuation of the human race—the bearing of children in the image and likeness of God—is still a magnificent reality. The birth of every child is a truly wonderful event.

But the intrusion into humanity's nature of a moral corruption from birth has demanded a God-given testimony to such tragedy. In our sinful world there will be 'very severe' pain in childbirth. This is, indeed, a *prophetic* consequence of Eve's part in the Fall of humankind.

In the midst of the joy of seeing a new life come among us, the sign of painful childbirth is a graphic reminder that all is not as it was created to be. Every child is born into a world where there is *much pain*; and each one will, in fact—to a greater or lesser degree—contribute to it. The righteous One will not let us *romanticize* the continuance of a race which is innately opposed to Him and His way!

### an ongoing, gender conflict

This second outcome of Eve's rebellion has to do with an element of *frustration* now to be present in her fallen, marital relationship. The bliss that she and her husband had known, would be substantially diminished because of the dark dynamics of guilt, fear and self-interest that now indwelt them.

The LORD said to her, "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." In order to understand what is meant by these words, we must go to Genesis 4:7 where virtually the same statement in the original Hebrew is made. The LORD—as will be seen shortly—said to Cain, "[Sin's] desire is for you, but you must rule over it." Here the meaning is clearly that sin desired to *master* Cain but that Cain was to exercise *dominion* over it.

The same would now be true of Eve's relationship with Adam. Her desire would be to *master* him, and at the same time he would seek to exercise a *dominion* over her. The existence of this kind of *gender conflict* has indeed been a sad reality within relationships between men and women down through the millennia.

It wouldn't take much to imagine the conversation that could well have taken place between Adam and Eve after the LORD had confronted them with their evil.

We can see it now! When the LORD had gone, there was Eve, hands on hips, with a look of absolute disdain on her face, saying: "Oh, my big strong man. 'The *woman* You gave me, *she* was the one.' How pathetic you are Adam! If you hadn't stood there like a zombie when the serpent tempted me, things might have been different! You were

always full of words till then. What happened? Did you lose your tongue or something! Heck! I used to think you were absolutely wonderful. But now ... !” Eve’s frustrated reaction. And Adam’s? “What on earth is wrong with you woman ... etc.!!” It’s not recorded in the Bible, but this could well have been the first guilt-charged, domestic dispute in history!

Whether anything like this happened, or not, what we do know is that since the Fall there has been an ongoing *gender conflict* in our world.

Women, personally unfulfilled in their rejection of fellowship with God, and insecure in the presence of physically stronger but self-interested men, have desired to *master* them for their own personal ends.

Men, on the other hand, have consistently oppressed and, by sheer physical or cultural force, exercised an insecure and perverse dominion over women. And all this perpetuated by the accumulated guilt of each gender’s sinful, self-obsessed reaction to the other.

HOW HORRIBLY HAS THIS HAS SO OFTEN IMPACTED THE BEAUTIFUL COVENANT GIFT OF MARRIAGE!!! What a triumph it was for the evil one, to fracture that union designed to reflect the covenant love and faithfulness of God Himself.

Eve would know pain not only in childbirth, but also in the continual frustration of facing *complexity* in her most intimate relationship. Adam, of course, would experience the same complexity.

Here we have the wrath of God expressed as He brings the judgment of ‘cursing’ into the realm of His rich covenant gift of marriage and generational fruitfulness.<sup>28</sup>

### **3) consequences for Adam**

Adam was also given a word from the LORD. Here again the element of cursing is added to a covenant gift. This time it has to do with a particular area of the gift of *vocation*: Adam’s involvement with the ground.

Genesis 3: 17b–19

To Adam [the LORD] said, ... “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.

#### **a cursed earth**

With the Fall of humankind something had also taken place within the *creation*. Just as Eve would experience an element of frustration within her marital relationship, so also Adam, as part of God’s judgment upon him would experience a principle of frustration *built into* the creation.

This wonderful world would still produce its bounty, but now not without hardship and struggle. A creation under the influence of Satan’s dominion is rightly given up to such frustration. Just as Adam’s heart is now resistant to the will of *God*, so the soil that

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<sup>28</sup> In our future study on marriage, we will see how this gender conflict not only affects marriage itself but general male-female relationships as well. It will also be seen that the twin reactionary evils of *masculism* and *feminism* no longer need to exist. That study will show how these tragic expressions of human fallen-ness—with their foolish and fearful competitiveness—may be wonderfully dissolved by the grace of God in Christ!

sustains him will, in some ways, be resistant to *his* will. This would be a sign to humankind for all time of its tragic fallen-ness.

Life brings many pleasures. But human existence would nevertheless be basically a process of relentless and, so often, frustrated labour—followed by the inevitable intrusion of death and a return to the dust.

Left to ourselves it would amount to this: ‘We work hard, enjoy what we can, and then we die’. No matter how much philosophical gloss is put on such a grim reality, it remains what it is: an intolerable affront to a humanity created for so much more!

Just as the Fall has dreadfully impacted the covenant gift of *marriage* and *generational fruitfulness*, it has also had an enormous effect on our capacity to enjoy both the covenant gifts of *vocation* and *sabbath rest*. The difficulties of life within the context of a cursed earth tend to *intensify* the personal frustration and restless driven-ness spoken of in Study 4.

There is, in fact, in each of these cursed areas of human living, an ever-present opportunity to perpetuate an unrighteous rage against our Creator—if we will have it that way.

### **yet, hope in the midst of futility**

As already mentioned, a later study will deal with the whole matter of work in a fallen world. There it will be seen how the Redeemer’s faithfulness may bring fullness of life, joy and purpose in our work, as—by His grace—we are enabled to *walk with Him* in the midst of the frustration now built into the creation.

And we will also see that the difficulties faced are, in fact, a *gift* to keep us looking to a faithful Redeemer-Creator and the future He promises to those who seek Him. In this way there was *mercy* in the midst of the judgment.

Romans 8:20–22

—*there is always hope when the Creator is also Redeemer*

The creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the One who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

The Father’s world will not be left in its cursed condition. Study 6 will show that because He is Redeemer and faithful to His covenant of love with all creation, the future is *bright* not only for those who seek Him but also for the heavens and the earth!

### **providing a covering for the first couple’s shame**

Earlier we saw how the guilty pair immediately attempted to deal with their sense of moral defilement by making a covering of fig leaves for themselves. They knew that something very unsettling had taken place within their own relationship. They also knew that the beautiful relationship they had enjoyed with their Maker was no longer what it had been. But the LORD acted graciously on their behalf.

Genesis 3:21

The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.

The significance of the garments being made of skin is not merely a matter of the durability of skin compared to leaves. Something *drastic* had happened within the creation to provide a covering for them. *An animal had been slain!*

This covering of their nakedness and shame was, in fact, God's first act of *redeeming grace*—immediately after the Fall! It was the very first foreshadowing of the merciful and gracious covering that was to come when all sin would be forever removed from the sight of God—and so all guilt taken from the human conscience and all shame from the heart.

This was the gift to be known and enjoyed by *all* who in *faith* would embrace THAT *MOST DRASTIC MEASURE EVER TAKEN IN ALL OF HISTORY—THE FATHER'S REDEEMING ACT OF SUFFERING-LOVE IN HIS SON!!!*

### **paradise lost**

God's covenant of love having been violated—and humankind plunged into a state of rebellion, sin, condemnation and death—there was now also to be another consequence. The primal couple was to be *evicted* from the garden sanctuary!

### **driven out of the place of delight and possible immortality**

Genesis 3:22–24

The LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of Us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever". So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After He drove them out, He placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

Although Adam had known the joy of innocence in God's presence in the garden—and with that a capacity to fulfill 'the high human calling'—he had still not eaten of the tree of life and received the gift of *physical immortality*. Having been in the enjoyment of rich and full living in communion with His Maker, it seems that Adam sensed no need to partake of the *tree* of life.

But now having become 'an independent moral thinker' and 'dead in sin', this may be something else he would grasp after. And so, he and Eve were evicted from the garden. The possibility of declaring their desire for, and receiving, the gift of physical immortality was now cut off from them.

In their present fallen state, their Creator—in His mercy—would not allow them to seek such endless existence. For, if the Fall itself was tragic, how much more horrible would it be for them to be locked into such a situation forever!

So they were now excluded from the Holy One's garden sanctuary: the place of His special presence. To prevent their re-entry heavenly creatures called cherubim were posted between the couple and the garden. Together with these was 'a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way'. Adam had neglected to guard the sanctuary from corruption—and now he, himself, was kept from intruding into it.

Yes, because of this flaming, flashing sword that represented God's word of judgment, (which could not be overcome) the garden, as that place of communion with the Holy One—and the tree within it—were now totally closed off to humankind.

Stunningly, however, in our next study we will hear of the One who, on our behalf, *abandoned Himself up* to that terrible sword of divine judgment. He did this—as the One who is, Himself, the Tree of Life—in order to *open up* for all who believe in Him, a way again, into our Creator-Redeemer's very Presence!

**although immortality was forfeited for now,  
the LORD’S purpose would still prevail**

The opportunity of gaining physical immortality in this life had—mercifully—been lost. But that didn’t mean that—by God’s grace—Adam, and the humanity he represented, would be cut off from the possibility of receiving this gift in the life to come. During the Old Testament period people of faith would certainly have been given such a future—although without any real understanding of it.<sup>29</sup>

However, again, the promise of this would finally be openly secured and proclaimed by the One who was to come—who would bring ‘life and immortality to light through the gospel!’ (2 Timothy 1:10). For those created in the image of God and with *eternity* ‘set in their hearts’ by Him (Ecclesiastes 3:11), this would be an earnestly longed for revelation.

It is indeed true that nothing less than that assurance of an *eternal life* can satisfy the human spirit.

**a dark shadow is cast, but all is not lost**

Driven out of the garden, Adam was to work the ground that had now been cursed on account of him. This was the way he would live out his days until physical death. Humanity was created and called to exercise a noble rule over the creation. But now it must do so in the midst of *death* and *decay*.

But again, by God’s *grace*, there would still for Adam and the rest of humankind the possibility of fellowship with the LORD and true vocational living—through *faith* in His covenant faithfulness and *obedience* to His word.

**the Cain and Abel event: a clash of  
true and false worship—the beginning of violence**

In Genesis chapter 4 we have, out of the intimacy of the primal couple’s marital union, the birth of their first child: a fulfillment of the LORD’S statement that Eve would have offspring.

This must have been a great encouragement to them both, for it was to be ‘the woman’s offspring’ who would conquer the evil one. Could it be that this child would be the ‘Crusher’ through whom redemption would come?

Genesis 4:1

Adam [knew] his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, “With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man.”

Cain’s name means ‘acquired’, and Eve’s comment at his birth indicates that she knew he was a gift from the LORD.

When it came to the birth of their second son, however, those first parents—although joyously knowing that God had given the child—were, it seems, not as impressed. He was called Abel, which means ‘a mere breath’. Maybe his name indicated that by this time they had experienced more of the difficulties and inevitable futility of life lived in a fallen world.

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<sup>29</sup> In the process of God’s ‘progressive revelation’ of Himself and His plan, such physical immortality for people of faith was not spelt out until later in the Old Testament period. Even then, it was not made known in any detail. At this point the after-life was merely understood to be a shadowy existence in the grave or ‘sheol’.

Whatever the reason for Abel's name, he showed that he himself had a clear awareness of his need to be truly related to his Maker. Later the Scripture tells us that he was—by his faith in God's grace towards him—a 'righteous' man (Hebrews 11:4).

The same however, could not be said for Cain. He would definitely not be the promised offspring who would overcome the evil one. In fact, with him the opposite would be the case. He and his descendants would be offspring of 'the serpent'—children and servants of the devil (1 John 3:12).

### **two brothers, two offerings—and ... the unimaginable**

On one occasion Cain and Abel both brought an offering to the LORD.<sup>30</sup> Cain—a farmer like his father—brought *some* of the fruits of his labours and offered those, whereas Abel, a herdsman, brought an offering from some of the *firstborn* of his flock. Cain's offering was not the *first fruits* of his crops—which itself may indicate a deficiency in his attitude towards God. Abel's offering of portions from the *firstborn* of his flock, would express a different approach altogether.

Genesis 4:4b–5a

The LORD looked with favour on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering He did not look with favour.

We notice that the emphasis in this verse is upon *Abel* and his offering, and *Cain* and his offering—that is, upon the *attitude* of each worshipper. Abel's offering was made in *grateful humility* and *joyous faith in God's grace*, whereas Cain's was clearly not.

The focus of Cain's offering was centred on *his own determination* to gain some advantage in life from God, but this, apart from faith in His promises and obedience to His word. It will be seen as we go through this study that no sacrifice—however outwardly legitimate it may be—is acceptable where such an attitude is present.

It seems also, though, that Cain's attitude may well have produced another deficiency: that his offering was not according to what God had specifically prescribed as acceptable.

As we continue through the Old Testament part of our Story, it will be seen that—in order to foreshadow the *drastic and awesome Sacrifice for sin* that was to come, and to bring a present assurance of forgiveness and divine acceptance—the LORD required an offering up of the life of some living creature.<sup>31</sup>

If that were the case here, Cain had clearly disregarded what had been provided by God's grace and commanded by Him. Instead he had chosen to make an offering on his own terms. His protest may well have been, "I myself know what is acceptable and what is not. I'll come before God with the fruit of my own hands or not at all!" Such willful self-assertion—and proud rejection of divine grace—could *not* be acceptable, and his efforts would be rejected by the LORD.

Regardless of what the nature of his sacrifice should have been, Cain's approach was, manifestly, very wrong. The dark elements of His attitude towards God were a classic example of what is described in Study 3: disregard, unbelief, ingratitude and defiance. And in the face of rejection, deep *hostility* towards his Maker erupted to the surface!

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<sup>30</sup> By His grace, the LORD had mercifully prescribed sacrificial offerings to be brought before Him after the Fall—and Adam and Eve had faithfully taught their sons to do so.

<sup>31</sup> Already we have noted that God had taken the life of an animal in order to cover the first couple's shame in the garden. It will be seen later that the LORD commanded grain and cereal offerings as well. But with these, the emphasis was upon thanksgiving and fellowship rather than forgiveness and divine acceptance.

#### Genesis 4:5b–7

Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you so angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted [and forgiven<sup>32</sup>]? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”

God in His unfailing love and faithfulness towards Cain urged him to change both his attitude and action, and so be accepted. He was called to exercise his will *for* God rather than *against* Him, and so, overcome the ever-present power of sin to deceive and devour. He was to ‘rule over sin’ rather than be ruled by it.

But his heart was set hard. Instead of the power of sin in Cain’s heart weakening through repentance and active faith in God’s grace, it grew stronger—continuing its deadly reign over him.

#### Genesis 4:8

Cain said to his brother Abel, “let’s go out to the field.” While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

THE UNIMAGINABLE HAD TAKEN PLACE: OUR FIRST HOMICIDE!!! Tragically, this has been part of human history ever since. The guilt-charged rage of fallen humanity is never far from expression, one way or another. It is an ugly fact that the hatred anyone of us can have in our heart towards another person is enormous.

What is most evident in this horrendous situation of Genesis 4 is that its context is one of WORSHIP: a clash between the true worship of Abel and the false worship of Cain. Here we have the beginning of a *relentless* and *terrible* battle: one that has raged and will continue to do so throughout fallen-human history. True worship in a guilty world will, always, apart from the mercy and grace of God, be tenaciously resisted—often violently.

The rest of our Story will illustrate this only too well. Abel was the first of so many who would be martyred for their faith in God’s grace and the worship that flowed from it.

Of course the battle of which we are speaking is, in fact, between the kingdom of God and the counterfeit kingdom of Satan. It is all about the evil one’s hatred for his Maker and his crazy obsession with gaining the worship of humankind for himself. The devil and the demonic powers he commands, relentlessly incite opposition to the true worship of the Holy One.

### **Cain personally and relationally irresponsible**

When the LORD confronted Cain, he was totally without repentance.

#### Genesis 4:9

[The] LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?”  
“I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

Here we have something of a repeat of Adam’s confrontation by the LORD after *his* rebellion, but with some gravely notable additions. Adam had blamed Eve, but Cain just blatantly lied—showing complete disdain for his Maker.

Not only that, he denied something that is at the heart of true human community. Cain’s question, “Am I my brother’s *keeper*?” betrayed his rejection of a responsibility we each have: one to be exercised towards every person within the circle of God’s great covenant of love.

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<sup>32</sup> The word for ‘accepted’ may also be translated ‘forgiven’.



We've already seen from Genesis 2:15, that Adam's responsibility as a worshipper of God within the garden sanctuary was to 'work it and *take care* of it': 'to serve it and *keep* it, or *guard* it'. We saw that Adam failed to guard the garden from corruption, allowing what was false to intrude.<sup>33</sup>

Cain himself had been uncaring and unguarded in relation to his worship—failing to keep himself from sin's intrusive and destructive power. As Abel's elder brother he should also have been concerned to guard *him* from falsehood in this area. However, being himself given up to it, he was actually *enraged* by Abel's free-spirited righteousness before God. And instead of rejoicing in his brother's faithfulness, he slew him.

Cain was, indeed, *not* his brother's keeper in any way, shape or form!

As our series progresses, this matter of the keeping and guarding of what is true—on behalf of one another—will be increasingly developed.<sup>34</sup> It is one of the *primary moral responsibilities* given to us; and there is, in fact, no true caring for others apart from it—regardless of how kind and benevolent our actions may otherwise be.

### **unrepentant Cain—cursed, yet mercifully cared for**

There were immediate and severe consequences for Cain's wickedness.

Genesis 4:10–12

The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."

The LORD appealed to Cain to *think* about what he had done! Furthermore, he was to *listen* to the proclamation of judgment that was now, rightfully, upon him!

For Cain, a farmer, the principle of frustration built into the creation was to be magnified to the point that the ground—which he had stained with Abel's blood—would no longer yield a thing for him. Together with this, his future in God's world would be one of *restless wandering*.

Genesis 4:13–16

Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is more than I can bear. Today You are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from Your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me."

But the LORD said to him, "Not so; anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over." Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. So Cain went out from the LORD'S presence and lived in the land of Nod,<sup>35</sup> east of Eden.

Cain was faced with the dilemma that confronts every person in rebellion against God. He didn't want Him, yet he suffered the guilt-charged *dread* of living apart from Him in

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<sup>33</sup> This principle of guarding, or keeping, is an extremely important one in all of life—but particularly when it comes to the matter of *worship*. The word for 'keeper' here in Genesis 4:9, is the same as in Genesis 2:15.

<sup>34</sup> This will not of course, promote the *domination* of another person's life.

<sup>35</sup> 'Nod' means 'wandering'.

a world where sin and evil prevail.<sup>36</sup> And yet how merciful was God towards Cain! He placed upon His rebel creature a mark of protection.

Although banished from that first family unit, Cain—like all who came after him—remained within the circle of His Creator's great covenant of love with all creation. In the midst of a cursed existence Cain would still live under the umbrella of the LORD'S unfailing love and faithfulness—although without any true appreciation of it, or gratitude for it.

## **the ongoing godlessness of Cain and his descendants**

The LORD'S mercy to Cain had not softened his heart towards His Maker. The last thing we hear of him is that he was 'building a city', which he named after his son Enoch.<sup>37</sup>

Here, in the development of this first city, we have the original attempt to set up an environment where life can be lived against God—with resources to make things as ideal as possible, without Him.<sup>38</sup>

Enoch means 'to begin again'. Cain saw himself as a kind of 'new Adam', arrogantly asserting his ability to create a 'godless new world' in which he and his descendants would enjoy personal freedom and fullness. We could say that Cain was building 'Begin Again City'!

The rebel in choosing to live against God and His way will always have to construct some kind of self-extending, self-securing, self-enlivening situation. Always the same goal is pursued: to be able to say apart from Him, "I AM SOMEBODY, I AM SAFE AND I HAVE LIFE!!!"<sup>39</sup>

### **ENOCH CITY—THE 'BEGIN AGAIN' COMMUNITY**

with its false:

**cultus:** promise of life / 'worthship'

**code:** law / that which secures the 'promise': what is of supreme worth

a **place** where each person can godlessly be:

somebody

safe

satisfied

In building his city, Cain clearly would claim to have escaped the consequence of being 'a restless wanderer on the earth'. But what he could not evade in the midst of his achievement was 'the endless, restless struggle' in which he and his fellow citizens would be continually engaged.

Out of fellowship with God, a spirit of restless wandering can be experienced even in what appears to be the most idyllic situation.

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<sup>36</sup> Those whom Cain dreaded would have been other children of Adam and Eve, whom he feared would come looking for him with vengeance in their hearts. He may also have feared the actions of his own descendents. Being one who had slain his brother, he had no guarantee of safety in his familial relationships. We often fear most what we ourselves have done to others.

<sup>37</sup> We can assume that Cain had married one of his sisters who thought as he did.

<sup>38</sup> In naming the city after his son Enoch, Cain was setting up a generational procession—one of resourceful refusal of the way and will of God! Of course, it is only *godless* building of cities that is wrong.

<sup>39</sup> Points 2 & 3 of Study 4.

## **the resourcefulness of Lamech and his sons**

Several generations on from Cain came Lamech. He, seeking to godlessly secure his family line, married two wives—our first record of polygamy.

His sons were also originators. One of them, Jabal, was the first to live in tents and raise livestock: the commencement of a nomadic way of life. Another, Jubal, was the first to play stringed instruments and pipes: enhancing human life through the beauty of music. And another, Tubal Cain, began forging tools out of bronze and iron.

Aside from Lamech's polygamy, all this was part of what a good Creator had intended for humankind. They were 'subduing the earth' according to His *blessing* given at the beginning. One expression of living as the image of God is to discover resources within the creation, and develop skills that enable us to make the best use of them for the benefit and enjoyment of all.

The only problem in this is when such things are done without regard for God and in ways that cause Him grief. Unfortunately, that was how things basically proceeded among the descendants of Cain. In all of their scientific innovation and cultural creativity they were developing the framework for a 'godless, wrath-averting way of living'.<sup>40</sup>

## **the arrogance and violence of Lamech**

A clear example of the misuse of God-given resources and abilities is seen in Lamech's dreadful song to his wives. He rejoiced in Tubal Cain's skill in bronze and iron, no doubt having him forge weapons on his behalf, and this to bolster his sense of personal and circumstantial security. His song was a desperate witness to that.

Genesis 4:23–24

[Lamech said] "Listen to me; wives of Lamech, hear my words. I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times."

We can envision Lamech waving one of his swords around the room as he arrogantly boasted of his brutish exploits! How demeaning are the attempts of fallen-human beings to *snatch* at some kind of honour through violence and revenge—whether that be, physical, verbal or mental.<sup>41</sup>

God's mark of protection placed upon Cain had undoubtedly been talked about down through the generations. But—with reckless bravado—Lamech claimed that by his own exertions he would exceed by far the LORD'S promised vengeance on Cain's behalf.

He obviously felt the need to vaunt his honour and power before his wives. Maybe they perversely delighted in it. More likely they compliantly endured it! Either way, it was surely an ugly attempt to prevail in the gender conflict spoken of earlier: a godless man seeking to establish a harsh, male dominance. This was so different to the loving initiative he had been created to exercise as a husband.

One thing is very clear from the song of 'mighty Lamech': He was completely bent on pursuing a program of self-worship.

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<sup>40</sup> As described in Study 4. How tragic it is today when any nation thinks that its destiny is to be found in scientific and cultural development, while remaining indifferent to its Maker.

<sup>41</sup> Dark and complex are the devices often resorted to. Lamech's noisy effort is extreme, but the same drive is in us all, wherever the conscience is unsettled. Genesis describes the beginnings of what continues to this day, even with our 'sophisticated' methods of coping with relational difficulties. How we all need to know the calm simplicity of life lived in communion with God!

## **the preservation of a ‘godly line’ within fallen humankind**

Throughout the generations that followed, humanity—under ‘the dominion of darkness’—was continually in opposition to God and His plan. But in the midst of it all, the Faithful One preserved for Himself a godly line of people who sought Him and pursued His will and way.

Genesis 4:25b

[Eve] gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, “God has granted me another [offspring] in place of Abel, since Cain killed him.”

Seth means ‘granted’ or ‘appointed’. He was both granted in answer to Eve’s prayers and appointed by God as a substitute for Abel. In Seth’s birth there is, in fact, ‘a principle of *resurrection*’ in operation.<sup>42</sup> All seemed lost after Abel’s death. But through Seth the LORD *raised up* a godly line of descendants that would continue all the way to the coming of the promised One!

Genesis 4:26

Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to call on the name of the LORD.

What a wonderful turn our Story is taking here. In the midst of the godlessness of Cain and his descendants we now have a generation of people who are ‘calling on the name of the LORD’. There is a new stream of humanity lifting up their hearts together to their Maker! It is significant that Enosh is a Hebrew word that means ‘man’ or ‘humanity’, signifying something of a new beginning for humankind. In this one and his descendants there is to be a more authentic expression of the image of God upon the earth.

During these days there were people like Enoch (not Cain’s son) who ‘walked faithfully with God’ (Genesis 5:24), enjoying covenant fellowship and friendship with Him. They may have preserved an understanding of the Creation event, Adam’s life in the garden sanctuary, the tragedy of the Fall—and God’s grace to them all, in both His promise of redemption and provision of sacrificial worship.

Genesis 5 records a genealogical procession of Seth’s descendants through to Noah, who is the next main character in our Story.<sup>43</sup>

And so, the grizzly tale of the Fall and the immediate history that followed is told. As was seen in Studies 3 and 4, the horrible repercussions of this tragic event have littered the landscape of history. AND YET, IN THE MIDST OF IT ALL THE REDEEMER HAS BEEN—AND CONTINUES TO BE—WONDERFULLY AT WORK!!!

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<sup>42</sup> This principle will often be seen as we move through the events of the Old Testament.

<sup>43</sup> It may be observed that in the account of this godly line there is no mention of any who initiated societal developments, such as those achieved by the sons of Lamech. To draw attention to this is not to infer that God’s people shouldn’t make advancements in these ways. As already mentioned, they certainly should. The reason why the godless were advancing as rapidly as they were was probably—as previously indicated—that in their desperate drive to excel in this world apart from God they were much more likely to come up with new art-forms, discoveries and inventions. Although it is tragic that their hearts were not lifted up to the LORD in this, they were in most of these developments—as said before—unconsciously serving the purpose of their Creator.

the LORD'S covenant faithfulness in working out  
His 'place-centred, holy purpose' during the time of:

- **the Flood**—judgment by a grieved yet 'faithful Creator'  
(Noah 'finds grace' & the line of Shem begins)

We have come now to an extremely dramatic section of our Narrative: the account of the Flood. This certainly fits the category of 'incredible' and seemingly 'unbelievable' events referred to earlier. In it, we will see our awesome Creator powerfully confirming two things: His holy wrath against human rebellion and sin and His great grace in confirming His covenant of love with all creation.<sup>44</sup>

### **a tragic descent**

Before the details of this cataclysmic and momentous event are described, attention must first be given to the distressing human situation that led to it.

Unfortunately, as the generations passed the principle of 'keeping' and 'guarding' was not maintained—and *corruption* entered into the godly line of Seth! Towards the end of the genealogical list in Genesis 5 the faithfulness of these people, tragically, began to diminish—and then virtually disappeared completely.

Genesis 6:1-2

When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that these daughters were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose.

Here, the 'sons of God' are the young men from the line of Seth who had been raised in godliness—clearly distinguished from those who disregarded their Creator. But in spite of all they'd known of the way of the LORD, they began to be attracted to the godless young women around them.

There may well have been a fun-loving lifestyle attached to the culture of these potential life-partners: one in which the various arts flourished. It would have seemed innocent enough, and promised so much!

The good gifts of life are to be enjoyed—but not godlessly. For these young men who became careless in their living, the evil one's approach (discrediting the word of God, insinuating a sense of deprivation and giving the false promise of a new capacity for life apart from God's word) had clearly, bit by bit, had its alluring and deadening effect.

Their affections were now centred not on the LORD but on the *stimulation* of sensory experience, the *possession* of magnificent things and the *elevation* of their personal status—apart from Him. For them there appeared to be so much to be gained through an alliance with this new, exciting community of people!

Their Maker, however, did not share their glee. They soon became indistinguishable from godless society. And then, as the entire situation of humankind grew steadily worse, the Holy One finally gave utterance to His intention.

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<sup>44</sup> Although the Flood account is of an incredible nature, there is no reason to doubt its place in history. It is interesting to note that at least eighty aboriginal peoples have preserved records of a universal flood. It is also of interest that a growing number of geologists and other scientists believe that their research supports the historical authenticity of not only the Creation event, as recorded in Genesis, but also the unique Genesis Flood. In this, however, our primary focus is, as always, to be upon what is revealed of the nature and purpose of God as Creator and Redeemer—the Living God who is at work in His world!

### Genesis 6:3

The LORD said, “My Spirit will not contend with human beings forever, for they are [corrupt]; their days will be a hundred and twenty years.”

Grieved by the now almost universal corruption of the race, the LORD decreed that He would bear with its wickedness only for a further one hundred and twenty years. During that time—as His Spirit continued to be resisted—things would progressively degenerate. The tragedy that took place in the Fall would go on being worked out.

### Genesis 6:4

The Nephilim, [the ‘mighty men’], were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of [godless] human beings and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.

Ah, such ‘great fruit’ was borne among the godless! Powerful, world-beating personalities were produced. Surely this made the simple, humble life of the godly quite redundant.

But what these generations didn’t understand was that it was the LORD—in His deep, burning displeasure—who was giving them up to it all. The evil one was being allowed to have his way, with almost all of those in the line of Seth now showing themselves to be ‘offspring of the serpent’.

### **a prophecy of Enoch: Noah’s great-grandfather**

#### Jude 14–15

Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them: “See, the Lord is coming ... to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.”

Even during Enoch’s time the moral descent of humanity was well under way. God graciously raised him up to give witness to the consequences that would face unrepentant rebels. But his warnings were obviously disregarded. Eventually, the LORD removed Enoch from that situation which had caused him so much grief.

#### Genesis 5:24

Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.

#### Hebrews 11:5

By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: “He could not be found, because God had taken him away.” For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God.

In saying that ‘he could not be found’, Hebrews 11:5 may indicate that Enoch was being hunted down at the time (Genesis 4:14). It could be that—in taking His servant away—the LORD was simply not allowing Satan the satisfaction of stirring up violent men to *put him to death* in their rage against His word. Having given faithful witness to his generation, Enoch was sweetly removed into the LORD’S eternal presence, away from it all!<sup>45</sup>

Cain’s ‘Begin Again City’ was named after his son Enoch. But here, through the godly life and proclamation of this Enoch, the LORD was preparing for His own ‘BEGIN AGAIN ACTION’!!!

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<sup>45</sup> Such deliverance, of course, would not always be provided. As mentioned earlier, history has shown that in the wisdom of God, countless numbers of His faithful witnesses have lost their lives at the hands of the violent.

## judgment imminent

The growth of wickedness through the line of Cain and the descendants of other children of Adam and Eve—and even the line of Seth—was horrendous. In view of it all, the LORD now, in the anguish of His heart, gave voice to the nature of His impending judgment.

Genesis 6:5–8

The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil all the time. The LORD regretted that He had made human beings on the earth, and His heart was deeply troubled. So the LORD said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I created—and with them, the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground.” ... But Noah found [grace and] favour in the eyes of the LORD.

The LORD’S regret in having placed human beings on the earth was not a declaration of personal failure—not in any way the remorseful admission of a ‘divine vocational blunder’. The Creator wasn’t exclaiming, “What on earth have I done? I can’t believe I attempted such a thing!”

He had not at all been foolish in creating human beings. That was the most magnificent act imaginable—in which He continued to know unbounded joy in all He had ultimately purposed for them! The problem was that those He created as His image had made the most horribly calamitous choices. His regret at having formed human beings on the earth was, simply, an expression of the *profound, divine grief* He felt in the face of what was totally abhorrent and offensive to Him: the vandalizing of His glorious purpose of love. This generation—including the descendents of godly Seth—truly was a tragic denial of everything He had created humankind to be!

His decision to ‘wipe from the face of the earth the human race’ and all living creatures with it was yet, another, powerful declaration that sin brings the consequence of death. WHAT WAS ABOUT TO HAPPEN WAS A NEEDFUL REVELATION OF DIVINE JUSTICE. By no means was it a random act of divine frustration. As with all His mighty acts, it was with a view to bringing about the final fulfillment of His great plan—His joyous intention for the humanity and the creation He loved!

Noah, out of all the earth’s fallen inhabitants received grace and favour from the Redeemer, to be a participant in His grand purpose.

## Noah—God’s covenant partner

In the midst of the unfaithfulness of humankind at this time, only Noah remained faithful to the LORD.

Genesis 6:9b–10

—*the fruit of grace in Noah’s life; & the sons he was given*

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.

This man, Noah, was righteous—blameless among those of his generation. He was one who lived in a true and right relationship with the LORD and those around him.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Biblically, righteousness is more about living right *relationally* rather than just ‘doing the right thing’. It always has to do with responding wholeheartedly to God’s love and acting in love towards all others. As Study 2 showed, it is doing what is right according to our created nature as the image and likeness of the One who is love.

But the relationship that Noah enjoyed with the LORD was what it was, entirely, because God had made Himself known to His servant. His righteousness was the fruit of the LORD'S grace and favour towards him, not a product of his own fallen initiative. This will be the case with each of the characters in our Story who show themselves to be faithful to their Maker.

Noah was, in fact, set apart for his task from birth.

### **a prophetic word**

The naming of Noah by his father was clearly a prophetic act.

Genesis 5:29

[Lamech named his son] Noah and said, "He will comfort us [and bring us rest] in the labour and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the LORD has cursed."

Lamech—unlike the one from the line of Cain—was a godly man. He felt keenly the difficulties of life in a fallen world and named his son 'Noah', which sounds like the word for comfort and rest. This foreshadowed that the outcome of Noah's life would bring fresh hope to humankind.

The race would still know 'labour and painful toil'. But for the godly there would be comfort and rest from the LORD in it all. How He delights to assure His people of His faithfulness!

Like Adam in the garden before his fall, and Enoch in the midst of wickedness, Noah 'walked faithfully with God'. He lived in covenant fellowship and friendship with His Maker.

We are told later that Noah was 'a preacher of righteousness'. God spoke to him and, like Enoch, he gave expression to that in proclamation. He no doubt exhorted his generation to have faith in God's goodness, mercy and grace and to give Him the worship He had provided and commanded—and for which He was supremely worthy. Human relational issues would also have been addressed. And Noah too would most certainly have raised his sons in the light of such proclamation.

### **the frustration and rage of a guilty race multiplies, and judgment looms large**

Tragically Noah's preaching had fallen on deaf ears and the ugly fruits of human rebellion increased.

Genesis 6:11, 12a–13a

The earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence ... [All] the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them."

The intrusive and corrupting presence of *false worship* was producing the *violence*—physical, verbal and mental—that flows from it. The more *intense* futile, idolatrous passion becomes, the more *vehemently* it is defended.

The Hebrew word for 'violence' here refers not only to general aggression but also to an open rebellion against what God has ordained. Such *moral violence* against the way of the Creator produced all kinds of distorted relationships and dysfunctional situations—the exact opposite of how things were in the beginning when God said: "It is very good [and functionally excellent]" (Genesis 1:31).

Apart from Noah and his family, any human manifestation of God's wonderful 'kingdom of love' was non-existent. In the face of such corruption the time for a *purifying judgment* had finally come. And the LORD made this known to His servant Noah.



## **a building project**

Noah was then commanded to build an ark of cypress wood, coated with pitch inside and out and made to specific dimensions. The great Redeemer-Creator knew exactly what was required for this awesome event of judgment to be accomplished, and communicated all necessary practical details to His servant.

The building of the ark would take a long time. But it would be ready when the day for that dreadful purging of the race arrived.

1 Peter 3:20b

God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.

## **in the midst of declared judgment a confirmation of God's great covenant of love with all creation**

Before work on the ark was commenced, the LORD opened up to Noah exactly what was about to happen in the Flood—and what was behind it all.

Genesis 6:17, 18–19

[God said to Noah,] “I am going to bring flood waters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has breath in it. Everything on earth will perish. But I will confirm My covenant with you,<sup>47</sup> and you will enter the ark—you, your wife, your son's and your son's wives with you. You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures—male and female—to keep them alive with you.”<sup>48</sup>

Here, we have the first use of the word ‘covenant’ in the Bible. The word itself had not needed to be mentioned until now. The *reality* of God's covenant was fundamental to all that is recorded in the first chapters of Genesis—and was *experienced* by those who responded truly to His word. THEY KNEW WHAT IT MEANT FOR HIM TO BE *BONDED TO THEM—AND ALL OF CREATION—IN LOVE*. THEY ALSO UNDERSTOOD THE IMPLICATIONS OF *VIOLATING* THAT RELATIONSHIP.

Before the time of the Flood, the word for *covenant*, or *relational-bond*, would presumably have been present within human society—the presence of covenant being so basic to human interaction. But now Noah would understand this term in the light of the intimate relationship he had enjoyed with the LORD.

As seen earlier, Noah's understanding of covenant would from this time be very different to any *contractual* emphasis that prevailed in his day. God's use of the term ‘My covenant’ would have set it apart from all others.

But the reference to ‘My covenant’ also has great significance in another way. It is *His* covenant, in that it is His bonded-relationship of love to what He has made. A bond that *He* always has and always will maintain, no matter what!

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<sup>47</sup> The words “I will *establish* My covenant with you”, are rightly translated, “I will *confirm* ... ” The Hebrew word here consistently refers to the confirmation of an existing situation.

<sup>48</sup> Some have wondered about the ark's capacity to hold the many creatures it would need to carry. It has been estimated that about 35,000 vertebrate animals (basic kinds)—with the average size of a sheep—would have had to enter the ark. The vessel that Noah was commanded to build in Genesis 6:14–16—with its three decks—had both the stability and capacity to carry 125,000 such animals. It would hold about 43,000 tons. By contrast, vessels described in other ‘flood stories’ were hardly even seaworthy in their design. As said earlier, there is no reason to doubt the Flood's place in history.

It is not in any way an *agreement* He has entered into with His world. That would make it ‘*our* covenant’—or even ‘our contract’—rather than ‘My covenant’. Noah was being assured of the *LORD’S* unique covenant bond with him and all of creation!

So Noah was shown that through the Flood God was to bring just and devastating judgment upon the race. However, in spite of human rebellion and sin He would remain faithful to His covenant with creation—providing for the *preservation* of the entire range of His creatures in the midst of it all.

Psalms 36:6b–7a

—*faithful to His whole creation*

You, LORD, preserve both people and animals. How priceless is Your unfailing [covenant love]!

In particular, Noah would have this—now openly stated—covenant wonderfully *confirmed* to him personally, as he was preserved to be a kind of ‘new Adam’ in God’s world.<sup>49</sup>

## the Deluge

Preparation in word and deed was complete.

THEN THE LORD SET IN PROGRESS THIS AWFUL EVENT.

Genesis 7:15–16b

—*Noah involved, but God at work*

Pairs of all living creatures ... came to Noah and entered the ark.<sup>50</sup> Then the LORD shut them in.

It was a moment of great drama for Noah and his family when God secured them in this way. The ark was indeed, a specially provided ‘place’ for Noah and his family, within which they, in particular, would know the LORD’S saving presence in the midst of the awful chaos taking place outside of it. But what a *terrible* moment it was for the godless. For *they* were shut out.

AND SO, THE DEVASTATION BEGAN.<sup>51</sup>

Genesis 7:11b–12

—*an inescapable, universal judgment*

All the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. And rain fell on the earth for forty days and forty nights.<sup>52</sup>

What a horrendous event this was! The subterranean depths that had watered the ground exploded to the surface—and the face of the earth was torn apart! And with

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<sup>49</sup> In the light of the Redeemer’s intention for Noah, it is significant that he is the first person in the Bible to be described as ‘righteous’. The one through whom the LORD would establish a ‘new beginning’ for humankind was—by grace—*rightly related* to his Maker. An illustration of this relationship is seen in his repeated, unquestioning obedience to the LORD: “Noah did everything just as the LORD commanded him” (Genesis 6:22; 7:5, 9, 16; 8:15–18).

<sup>50</sup> The One who gives to all of His creatures life and breath, led the ones He chose to preserve into the ark—maybe, settling them down into a kind of ‘hibernation mode’ for the duration.

<sup>51</sup> So great was the nature of this devastation that the creation was during these days, in a sense, reduced to the primeval condition described in Genesis 1:2: “Now the earth was formless and empty, [and] darkness was over the surface of the deep.”

<sup>52</sup> Genesis 2:5–6 tells us that “God had not sent rain on the earth ... but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground.” And now, the immense reservoirs from which these streams came were all released with great force.

this, colossal volumes of water unrelentingly fell from the heavens, causing a violent surging and massive upheaval over the whole of creation.

All this was, in fact, a graphic image of the *moral violence* that had already wreaked havoc within God's good world.

Genesis 7:23a

Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out.

How terrifying it must have been for the men and women and boys and girls who were swept away in this merciless deluge!

The deeply tragic nature of it all is seen in the fact that—in spite of the warnings received—that generation was taken totally by surprise. In their blind rebellion they continued to graspingly enjoy the creational gifts of their Maker, right up to the time of their destruction.

Luke 17:27

[Jesus said: In the days of Noah] people were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.

2 Peter 2:5

[God] did not spare the ancient world when He brought the Flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others.

The Flood is a merciful foreshadowing of the dreadful, universal judgment yet to come at the end of this 'present evil age'. But it is also a foreshadowing of the complete *deliverance* of all who embrace the mercy and the grace that is held out to them before that time!

### **a new beginning for all creation**

After the horrible carnage of those 40 days—when the waters had risen to seven metres above the highest mountain—Noah and his family remained in the ark for almost another year. During this time the LORD 'sent a wind over the earth' causing the waters to recede (Genesis 8:1). Finally, with the sending out of a dove that no longer needed to return, it was clear that they could leave their 'vessel of salvation'.<sup>53</sup>

Just as at the creation when the Spirit of God moved 'across the surface of the deep' like a mighty wind, so now a wind was sent over the earth. Then, as the creation rose up again through the receding waters, we have the heralding of a new beginning for God's world. It was like it had been reborn through the waters of the Flood!<sup>54</sup>

Genesis 8:15–17

Then God said to Noah, "Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons wives. Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so that they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number."

So out they all came!

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<sup>53</sup> The ark landed on Mt. Ararat, which is in modern day Turkey.

<sup>54</sup> In this we have a foreshadowing of what will be brought into being after the universal judgment at history's conclusion—an eternally renewed creation! The Flood is actually a grand picture of hope, confirming God's promise that in the end His great purpose will triumph over the plan of the 'serpent'.

Here, we almost have a repeat of the creation account in Genesis chapter 1. The only difference is that instead of the creatures being called into being, they all come out of the ark ‘one kind after another’!<sup>55</sup>

### first things first

There was only one way for Noah to respond to God for all He had done for him, his family and the creatures that had now been sent back into the world.

Genesis 8:20

Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it.<sup>56</sup>

The first thing Noah did was to worship the LORD! In deep gratitude for God’s incredible grace, he built an altar on which to sacrifice prescribed burnt offerings. Such faith—and its relational fruits—was the only thing that separated Noah and his family from those who had rightly perished in the Flood.

This new beginning for God’s creation was commenced with the one thing that could prevent physical and moral violence from re-emerging: *sacrifice*, which would cleanse the conscience and free the human spirit for fellowship with God.

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<sup>55</sup> Obviously, just as God led the pairs of animals into the ark for their preservation and sustained them during that time, He also would have made provision for them to be settled in their various habitats around the world. Questions relating to post-Flood circumstances often arise in the minds of some. And this matter of creatures being resettled is one of the frequently raised difficulties. Different reasonable explanations have been suggested, which could well indicate how it all happened. But it may also be that the Creator could have done it in a way, or ways, that are far beyond the normal range of human reason. It would be a strange thing, indeed, to demand that the God who made all things ‘out of nothing’ at Creation—by simply calling them into being—should only operate within the realm of humanly understood principles when working out His purposes in Redemption.

As was said earlier, we will see again and again throughout the Story before us that the Redeemer-Father-Creator-King has consistently operated in ways that are ‘unbelievable’ from a natural point of view. The record of such actions, then, may be observed in the presence of our Creator with joyous creaturely faith and amazement, rather than unbelief.

When faced with questions raised by the biblical record, it would seem to be the most logical approach to have our emphasis upon THE PERFECTIONS OF THE GOD WHO IS rather than our own limited capacity to understand His ways. In the light of such perspective, little emphasis will be placed throughout the series upon seeking to explain divine actions within human history. By and large the great Story will simply be told and its grand implications spelt out.

If we will humbly and patiently receive the entire biblical revelation of what our Maker has done, is doing and has promised to do—and what He calls us to in response to that (Studies 9–25)—then the overwhelmingly reasonable nature of what He has made known will become very apparent. And no one will feel they have had to ‘assassinate their brains’ in order to believe!

<sup>56</sup> The LORD had commanded that, extra ‘clean’ animals be brought into the ark for this purpose. These clean animals were those that He had distinguished from all others, to be used when sacrifices were offered. Only what God had pronounced as clean for this purpose could be used. Sacrificial worship had to be according to what He had prescribed and provided. These sacrifices, however, were not something that God Himself needed, but were His provision for the rest and comfort of His people. This makes the sacrificial offerings in the Old Testament to be so much different to idolatrous sacrifices, which the gods were said to ‘feed upon’ for their own ego. The LORD’S good gift of sacrifice produced nothing of the desperate striving that exists within religious idolatry. Such systems offer only an uncertain hope of gaining favour from unpredictable deities.

The LORD'S gift of a 'burnt offering' was the sign of a rightful, devastating judgment upon sin through the slaying of an animal: bringing the person offering it assurance of His forgiveness and deliverance from His wrath.

It was 'an *atonement* sacrifice', one that 'covered' their sins.<sup>57</sup> The animal being 'burnt whole' as an offering to God was also, a sign of the forgiven person's *complete surrender* to their Maker. What a great way for humankind to begin its new life in a refreshed world!

As a kind of new Adam, Noah was leading a 'new humanity'—and, indeed, the whole of the renewed creation—in what is absolutely essential to its nature: full-hearted *worship* of its redeeming Father, Creator and King. Like Adam, he was, in fact, exercising a grand priestly, prophetic and kingly role.

### **the Creator's covenant faithfulness**

The LORD responded with pleasure to the offerings of Noah and his family, and—in the light of these—established His intention for the creation He loved.

Genesis 8:21–22

[The LORD] said in His heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of human beings, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures as I have done. As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease."

In the midst of this new beginning there is a sober reality: Every inclination of the human heart is still evil from childhood. It would take more than the Flood to erase the tragic effects of the Fall!

Also as we continue, it will be evident that this new beginning that was taking place did not cancel out the elements of 'cursing' that had previously been brought upon both humanity and the creation.

God's holy-grief over human sin and evil remained. However, the LORD would never again curse the ground with such devastation or destroy His creatures as He had in the Flood. Instead humankind could now, by and large, look forward to an uninterrupted flow of annual seasons and produce from the soil—with each night giving way to another brand new day in which His faithfulness may be known.

THE CREATOR'S BOND OF LOVE WITH HIS WORLD WOULD CONTINUE AS STRONG AS IT ALWAYS HAD BEEN!!!

The offerings of Noah and his family were a pleasure-giving sign to the LORD of their faith in the *grace* He had provided for them and their descendants. And this grace would continue to keep them in the *enjoyment of covenant union with Him*—if they would have it that way.

### **the creational mandate renewed**

Just as the animals leaving the ark were to move out into a new life of fruitfulness, so too were Noah and his family.

Genesis 9:1

Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, "Be fruitful and [multiply] and fill the earth."

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<sup>57</sup> The great reality of 'atonement' for sin will be progressively unveiled as we proceed through our Story.

With this new beginning came a renewal of the mandate given at creation. A new beginning required refreshment in their understanding of covenant responsibilities. Not only was the mandate restated, the original *blessing* was also renewed—enabling them to fulfill their calling.

All this was to be joyously worked out as they ‘breathed the air of forgiveness’.

So then, the creator’s intention for humanity to populate the whole earth was, again, set in motion!

## **humankind’s relationship to animal life**

Another vocational aspect that needed restatement—as well as enlargement upon—had to do with humanity’s authority over the creation as the image of God. Here the emphasis was, firstly, on a provision of *physical protection*, and secondly on the provision of a *dietary need*.

### **protection**

Due to the impact of the Fall, some level of safety within the creation was now required.

Genesis 9:2

The fear and [terror] of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands.

We saw in Genesis 3 the way that the Fall had affected humankind’s relationship to the *ground*. It would provide food—and visual pleasure—but not without difficulty. But here we also have opened up to us the Fall’s effect on our relationship to the *animal kingdom*.

The various predatory creatures of the world had multiplied greatly over the first 1600 years of history. But now with the promise of an unlimited time of fruitfulness before them, they would ultimately patrol the earth, sea and sky in vast numbers, becoming potentially a danger to humankind. To meet this reality the LORD would now put into the animals a certain fear and terror of human beings.

In the light of the Creator’s provision, it is a fact that even the most savage creatures of the world *do* keep their distance from human communities, unless they are very hungry. Generally, predators would rather retreat from humans than attack. We are not all the time terrorized by them. Nevertheless, in this there is a sad commentary on the nature of the Fall. The common, creational covenant bond we have with all living creatures has—in many ways—been tragically fractured by violence and fear.<sup>58</sup>

### **food**

The LORD also initiated a new expression of humankind’s rule over the creation. From this time on *animal flesh* could be part of the human diet. This would, no doubt, also contribute to the fear and terror that animals would know. Up till then they had only been slain—by the godly, that is—for sacrificial worship. But now humanity has also in a sense become a predator. Together with our responsibility to care for our fellow-creatures is the provision of their flesh for food.

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<sup>58</sup> The animal creation, unfortunately, has had much *undue* cause to fear us down through the centuries, as we have failed to exercise a good and noble dominion over them. There has sadly so often been a careless and needless *exploitation* of our fellow creatures.

Genesis 9:3–4

Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. But you must not eat meat that still has its lifeblood in it.

The eating of animal flesh was now the Creator's good gift. However, it was not to be consumed unless the blood was first drained. In the Old Testament period of 'Redemption History' animal blood was used in sacrificial worship and so was *set apart* for that purpose alone. Any other use was rightly prohibited.

### **the sanctity of human life established**

There was also need now for instruction regarding the blood of those who are the image of God.

Genesis 9:5–6

And for your lifeblood, I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being. Whoever sheds human blood, by human beings shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made humankind.

In a fallen world humanity was not only in danger from animals but also from *other people*—as history had shown. With the escalation of violence before the Flood our Creator's attitude towards the shedding of blood needed to be made very clear. It had to be realized that to attack the image of God would be to virtually attack God Himself!

A new beginning for the race must involve a new understanding of the sanctity of human life. And so, it was declared that the life of anyone who willfully slayed another must now be forfeited.<sup>59</sup>

### **the creation covenant confirmed again**

The LORD was intent on providing *assurance* for Noah and his family as they began a new phase of human history in a cleansed world.

Genesis 9:8–11

God said to Noah and to his sons with him: "I now [confirm] My covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. I [confirm] My covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."

God confirmed His covenant not only with Noah and his family but also with 'every living creature on earth'. In His bonded-love for them all He was making a promise that would never be broken!

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<sup>59</sup> Whether 'capital punishment' can be justly exercised in many societies today—i.e. if legal systems are corrupt etc.—is a difficult question to answer. But the fact remains: our Maker requires us to uphold the absolute sanctity of human life, without compromise.

## the creation covenant ‘set forth’ through the sign of the rainbow

The LORD’S covenant of love with all creation had been comprehensively confirmed through the *preservation* of His creatures in the midst of judgment and also, through the *promise* just given: to never again destroy all life by a flood.

Now, He graphically ‘set forth’ His covenant through the *provision* of a *sign*: a rainbow set in the sky. This time the assurance is not just for Noah and his family—it’s for ‘all generations to come’!

Genesis 9:12–17

—a universal sign of the Creator’s covenant faithfulness

And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am [setting forth] between Me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set My rainbow in the clouds, and it will be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember My covenant between Me and you and all living creatures of every kind.” Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.”

So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have [confirmed] between Me and all life on earth.”<sup>60</sup>

Imagine what it must have been like for Noah and his family to come out of the ark and see a beautiful bow of colour overarching the creation. And then to hear from the LORD that it was a sign of His covenant: His relational bond with His world and the promise He had made.

What a merciful gift is the rainbow! There is, in fact, no generation of history that would *not* deserve a repeat of the devastation that took place in the Flood. But each of these generations to come may look to the sky when storm clouds have gathered and—seeing the rainbow—know that the great Flood will never happen again. God will not forget His promise!

Psalm 103:10

He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

One thing is absolutely clear in God’s confirmation here of His creation covenant: there is not the slightest hint of a *contract*. We find no suggestion at all of an *agreement* made between two parties. There is nothing for the people and creatures of the Creator’s world to do in order to *preserve* the covenant.

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<sup>60</sup> The Flood having passed, there seems to have been some very significant changes in the environment. Prior to the Flood people lived to extremely advanced ages. But now that immediately began to change.

Some think this is due to the removal of the vast protective body of moisture—referred to earlier—that was said to envelop the atmosphere of the world before the Flood. It is considered that with this gone an atmospheric process was begun which increasingly exposed the population of the earth to higher levels of radioactivity—gradually settling to life-spans of around 70 to 80 years (Psalm 90:10).

We may also see a particular ongoing purpose in such a reduction of life span. It is now clear that there may be no *imagined immortality* in this present age for a fallen humanity. Previously with long life spans there may have been more scope for illusion in this regard. But now, before we know it, this life is passed!



It is completely a faithful Creator's unconditional relational bond with all that He has made—a powerful manifestation of His *freedom* to sovereignly act in love.<sup>61</sup> His provision of the rainbow is a gracious *setting forth* of His covenant and the promise that has flowed from it. A rainbow is always a declaration of the wonder of God's great covenant of love with all creation—and a beautiful sign of the colourful spectrum of that creational purpose to which He has pledged Himself!

Godly Lamech's prophetic word about his son had certainly been fulfilled. In the midst of all the labour and painful toil of life in a fallen world there is great *comfort* and *rest* for the people of faith. THROUGH NOAH, THEY HAVE WITNESSED A POWERFUL CONFIRMATION OF THEIR CREATOR'S INTIMATE RELATIONAL BOND WITH THEM AND ALL THINGS!!!

In the whole event of the Flood humankind has received clear and unambiguous revelation. Of course, there is much more divine communication to come as our Story unfolds!

**‘the flesh’ surviving the flood, with sin bringing  
‘cursing’ and righteousness bringing ‘blessing’  
—the line of Shem beginning**

In our fallen-human optimism we often imagine that all we need is a ‘fresh start’ and everything will be fine. Well, the days after the Flood certainly put an end to such wishful thinking!

After Noah had planted a vineyard and produced the first batch of wine he naturally desired to celebrate the fruitfulness of this venture. But unfortunately he failed to exercise proper restraint and fell into a shameful, drunken state.

His fresh start soon came to a stale and musty end. If the future of the race was dependent upon Noah's faithfulness the outlook was very grim indeed. But—as we have seen—it is the faithfulness of Another to which we look!

Genesis 9:21b-27

[Noah] became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, he said, “Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers.”

He also said, “Praise be to the LORD, the God of Shem! May Canaan be the slave of Shem. May God extend Japheth's territory; may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be the slave of Japheth.”

Ham had clearly taken a perverse delight in seeing his father's moral lapse and its culturally shameful outcome, and had rushed to his brothers to include them in his mockery. But they would have no part of it and discreetly covered their Father's body. Having slept off his drunkenness and keenly feeling his own disgrace, Noah nevertheless saw clearly something he had, no doubt, sensed for a long time. Ham was one who neither had regard for him nor God. It would appear that by divine

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<sup>61</sup> As seen in Study 1, to act ‘sovereignly’ is to operate independently of all else—not controlled or limited in any way by anyone or any thing.

revelation Noah understood in that moment that Ham and his son Canaan and their descendants would not follow in the way of the LORD—but would be offspring and servants of the ‘serpent’.

It will in fact be seen that the people of the land of Canaan were hostile to God, despisers of His covenant and enemies of His plan.

And so, in this ‘newly created’ situation on earth there is the first recorded confrontation with human sin—and with it, *cursing*. Canaan, Noah’s grandson, would have no authentic place within the family. The outcome of his way of life would find him existing among his family members as ‘the lowest of slaves’.

But there is also here the first recorded evidence of post-Flood *righteousness* (that is, apart from Noah’s offerings after leaving the ark): Shem and Japheth had—out of regard for God—protected their father’s honour. The LORD had obviously revealed Himself to them and made known His way. Like Noah, they had found grace and favour in His sight. For them—particularly Shem—there was *blessing*. Although the youngest of the two (Genesis 10:21) he was to be the foremost. Japheth would have much territory<sup>62</sup> and would live in the good of Shem’s prosperity.<sup>63</sup>

As Noah received the Holy Spirit’s impression in relation to Shem, all he could say was “Praise be to the LORD, the God of Shem!” He doesn’t describe what the blessing was. Its ultimate outcome was evidently beyond description. In Study 6 we will see how powerfully accurate this impression was!<sup>64</sup>

Central to Shem’s blessing was that the LORD would be ‘THE GOD OF SHEM’. As our Story proceeds, it is the line of Shem that continues to receive abundant revelation and blessing from God—together with His judgments when they persisted in unfaithfulness.

This remained the case all the way through to the coming of the One who was promised. As we will see, there was no human reason as to why Shem and his descendants were given this privilege. It was simply the ‘good, pleasing and perfect will’ of the LORD.

### **the creation mandate in operation**

What God had commanded in the beginning was eventually fulfilled through Noah’s descendants.

Genesis 10:32b

—*populating the whole world*

From [the clans of Noah's sons] the nations spread out over the earth after the Flood.

Before that spreading out happened, however, there was another event that was to take place within a city later to be called Babylon. This city would become a symbol of human rebellion, depravity and corruption—and will feature prominently as our Story continues.

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<sup>62</sup> Japheth’s descendants eventually spread out into India and across all of Europe—and beyond.

<sup>63</sup> Study 6 will show that after God’s great redemptive act in His Son Japheth’s descendants would, by grace, ultimately share in Shem’s *spiritual* heritage too. So—also by God’s grace—would Ham’s!

<sup>64</sup> In spite of his moral failure, Noah was graciously enabled to speak *prophetically* into this situation.

the LORD'S covenant faithfulness in working out  
His 'place-centred, holy purpose' during the time of:

**- the Babel Scattering—'mighty' Nimrod foiled**  
(nations created & given up to idolatry; but not Shemite Job)

We have just been reminded that in Genesis 1:28 and 9:1 God commanded humankind to "be fruitful and [multiply], *fill the earth* and *subdue* it." They were to spread out in every direction until the earth was filled, and all of its resources discovered and developed for the good of all. But in this the Creator had a grand *primary purpose*: that the *relational intimacy* and *vocational partnership* with Himself—known in the garden sanctuary of Eden—should ultimately be enjoyed over the entire earth. As expressed already, an 'edenizing' of the whole world!

Unfortunately, as we've seen, after the Fall—apart from a godly line preserved by the LORD—people knew little or nothing of the fellowship and partnership with Him that was to be enjoyed throughout the earth.

Neither, it seems, did they have the taste for a daring venture into the unknown. And so instead of spreading out they determined to godlessly secure, extend and enliven themselves by congregating in one area. By pooling their united resources, they—like Cain—would create an environment that would promote their human significance, safety and fulfillment apart from trusting and obeying the One who had made them. And this was certainly the case during the period that followed the Flood.

Genesis 11:1–4

The whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar [(or Babylonia)] and settled there. They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar and mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

Babel was to be built with baked bricks and with tar. It's been pointed out that these were *waterproof* building materials. Could it be that the designers of this city had no comfort from the sign of the rainbow—and were determined to secure themselves from any future watery judgment?

Genesis 10:8–10 tells us that it was Ham's descendent Nimrod—a *mighty* man—who was behind the erection of this city. He was the founder of the first world empire, a warrior-king and a hunter and driver of people for his own purposes—arrogantly and defiantly pursuing his godless agenda in the presence of the LORD.

His name means 'rebellion' or 'let us rebel'. In this he is a prime example of those who decide what is good and evil apart from their Creator and, accordingly, set up their own kingdom against His.

History has shown that people will follow such leaders in their quest to find the security and quality of life that has been forfeited. Often—as it seems to have been with Nimrod—they are actually *enslaved* by these leaders against their will. We will see that Nimrod is the exact opposite to the One who would come to establish His Father's kingdom of freedom and truth!

One thing we know about this city is that it was a centre of idolatrous worship—the exact opposite of that HOLY PLACE, Eden! Babel meant 'gateway of the god'. The tower—in this and future Babylonian cities—was seen as the place where a god would

dwell. It was thought that the god they worshipped would ‘come down’ to them there—bringing safety and prosperity. Humankind was determined to establish its own grand destiny within history on the basis of false worship.<sup>65</sup>

Although these people had their own meaning of the city’s name, the LORD’S people later gave it another one. Babel sounded like the Hebrew word for ‘confused’. To people of faith the ‘gateway’ of false worship was nothing less than ‘the place of confusion’! It will now be seen why this was so.

### **the nations created**

The Almighty, who is ever at work in His world according to His will, was not about to allow this situation in Babel to continue. He had a purpose that included the whole earth, and proceeded to act towards its fulfillment.

Genesis 11:6–7a, 8a

The LORD said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let Us go down and confuse their language.” ... So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth.

This is quite a statement made here by the Maker of humankind. He knew that those created as His image had an inbuilt drive for creativity and purposefulness. And He also knew that in their godless quest for significance, safety and fulfillment apart from Him, they could—as a unified community—accomplish virtually anything they set their minds to! The issue was that in their fallen-ness such plans would always be against *His* plan.<sup>66</sup>

And the LORD—not their devised god—‘came down’ to them and revealed His mighty presence in their midst.

Having built the principle of frustration into the *earth*, He now brought it also into the area of *communication*. Confusing their speech with the creation of different languages amongst them, He forced them to move out away from one another into their various language groups.

The Creator obviously knew how He would foster the development of common genetic types and physical traits among these particular groups, which would set them apart as distinct peoples. And so, the different nations of the world were created. That, of course, was always within the LORD’S sovereign intention.

What incredible variety was now being formed within the human race! Different skin colours, physical features, vocal tonal qualities etc. Rich and wonderful diversity—and all to bear the image of God!<sup>67</sup>

Although always within the LORD’S intention, the creation of these nations was also divine judgment upon a godlessly unified race; and through this judgment our Creator’s incredible plan would continue to be worked out.

The stage was now *set* for God’s great mercy and grace to be ultimately revealed to all the nations of the world—as through His amazing coming Act of *redemption* they

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<sup>65</sup> As with all cities, it was Babel’s worship that shaped the nature of its life.

<sup>66</sup> This post-Flood community at Babel possibly comprised the entire population of the world under Nimrod, its oppressive warrior-king. After ‘the Scattering’ the magnificent city of Babel became the capital of Nimrod’s ever-increasing empire.

<sup>67</sup> There would also be remarkable *developmental* and *cultural* elements that would emerge. But as seen both in this study and Study 3, such things—although with their own magnificence—also would have the marks of human fallen-ness upon them.

would be liberated into true, life-giving worship! In this, people of every nation would come to know an authentic inner liberty, personal and vocational significance, circumstantial security, human fullness and eternal hope, together with a wonderfully intimate bond of unity. And all of it, entirely to the glory and praise of God—not rebellious human achievement!

However, at this point in our Story that great redemption is still far off. Much more will need to be told before the unfolding of its accomplishment. In the meantime, humanity—in general—will remain determined to go its own way.

### **given up to idolatry**

Although choosing to live apart from their Maker, fallen human beings—as creatures structured for dependence upon Him—inevitably seek out some other object or objects of trust and allegiance.

In His holy wrath against such wicked inclinations, the One who formed the nations progressively gave each of them over to the futile creation of their own gods and religious and philosophical systems.<sup>68</sup>

Deuteronomy 4:19b

*—the scattered nations given up to idolatry*

The LORD your God has apportioned [idolatrous worship] to all the nations under heaven.

Acts 14:16b

He let all nations go their own way.

Psalms 9:16b–17b

*—the impact of their choice to ignore their Creator*

The wicked are ensnared by the work of their hands ... [That is], all the nations that forget God.

We could never overstate the evil of the situation at Babel. It was a willful rejection of the presence and purpose of the LORD. And it was a prime example of the way that fallen-human creatures constantly strive—in their stubborn and hostile rebellion—to set up systems that seek to *lock out* the One who gives them ‘life and breath and everything else’.

So now, the newly formed nations are rightly given up to their own devices.

### **the tragedy of an ongoing, international violation of God’s universal covenant of love**

To enjoy the blessing of God’s covenant love and faithfulness there must be simple, reverent trust and a loving, grateful obedience towards Him. But as the nations of the earth had tragically rejected such a relationship, they knew the ongoing, burdensome consequences of their choice.

Isaiah 24:5–6a

The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt.

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<sup>68</sup> In this situation, the distorted versions of ‘the Creation’ and ‘the Flood’ etc. which developed within the various idolatrous cultures that were formed would have been passed on—together with, as history progressed, what have often been, intricate systems of philosophical speculation.

The nations have themselves ‘broken the everlasting covenant’ by their rebellion. That is, they have *violated* it by disregarding the responsibilities it brings.

But this has by no means *dissolved* God’s great covenant of love. Its violators simply incur the pain of living in it yet against it. HOW THE NATIONS NEED THE MERCY AND GRACE OF THE DIVINE REDEEMER!!!

### **Job—a man who knew God after the time of the Babel Scattering**

Job lived in the land of Uz, presumably some time during the period following the scattering of people over the earth. He was part of a community that clearly had received their Maker’s Self-revelation, which had been passed on through the godly descendants of Shem after the Flood. The land of Uz was named after Shem’s grandson.

Something very wonderful, then, is revealed in the story of Job. WHILE THE NATIONS WERE BEING GIVEN UP TO THE FUTILITY OF IDOLATRY, GOD WAS MAKING HIMSELF KNOWN TO A COMMUNITY OF SHEM’S DESCENDANTS!!!

This community enjoyed a way of life that acknowledged the LORD’S worthiness to be worshipped and adored. They could say:

Job 36:24

“Remember to extol [God’s] work, which people have praised in song.”

Although the Creator’s covenant is not specifically mentioned in the Book of Job, His covenant name ‘the LORD’ is often used. It was God’s covenant faithfulness that was always operating in Job’s life. He was one who knew the LORD’S grace and favour and responded in ways that were pleasing to Him. He was a righteous man.

Job had been richly blessed with a large family and much material wealth. In it all he walked with God. And concerned for the spiritual welfare of His children after their various days of feasting, he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them in case they had sinned against their Maker in their hearts. For him, as for all godly parents, the worst outcome in his children’s lives would be that they did not know the fear of the LORD. Job understood that in all things it is LORD’S honour that must be supreme—because He is worthy of it and because true humanity is unknown where He is disregarded.

### **Satan at work**

One reason why the story of Job is significant is that it gives much insight into the activity of Satan during the Old Testament period. Although always pursuing his agenda among the nations, only here and in one other place is he explicitly named throughout this time.

The evil one’s assault upon Job provides something of a window into what is always going on behind the scenes as the Story of Redemption is worked out. It illustrates the fact that the devil is relentlessly opposed to any manifestation of the LORD’S great kingdom of love on earth. As has been seen, he hates both God and humanity and is incessantly engaged in his desperate quest to dishonour the One, by ruining the other.

Job 1:7

—*the restless ‘lord’ of his dark domain*

The LORD said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Satan answered the LORD, “From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it.”

Satan, doomed to invisibly roam the earth until the time of his final judgment, was always looking for any evidence of ‘righteous offspring of the woman’, who might become his ‘crusher’. He would do his best to destroy such a person or group of people out of whom this One might come.

### **a great drama begins**

The dramatic story of Job commences with the LORD’S taunting of Satan.

Job 1:8–11

The LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.”

“Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied. “Have You not put a hedge around Him and His household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But now stretch out Your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face.”

God virtually said: “Well Satan, have you seen Job lately? I’m sure his godliness must be a great delight to you!” The devil—no doubt inwardly fuming with rage and trembling with dread—demanded permission to prove a point: that Job’s *righteousness* was not based upon deep love for His faithful Creator but upon something far less noble: mere self-interest.

Job 1:12

The LORD said to Satan, “Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself, do not lay a finger.”

Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

Here from the very outset we learn an extremely significant thing about the work of the devil. THE EVIL ONE CAN ONLY DO WHAT HE IS GIVEN PERMISSION TO DO, ACCORDING TO GOD’S SOVEREIGN PURPOSE!!!

### **the first satanic assault and Job’s response**

Seizing his opportunity, Satan, in one day—by raising up evil men and creating two ‘natural disasters’—caused the plunder and death of Job’s animals, the death of his servants, and—to Job’s deepest grief—the death of his children.

Job was devastated. But by God’s grace, his response was faithful.

Job 1:20–22

At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.”

In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

Apart from his wife, everything that he treasured was gone. But Job—in the midst of his crushing sorrow—continued to worship the Faithful One! He acknowledged that God had the right to do as He pleased, according to His divine purpose of wisdom and love. In this Job was also declaring that it was the LORD Himself who was his greatest treasure—to the bitter annoyance of the evil one looking on! The LORD then continued His taunting of Satan.

## **the second satanic assault and Job's response**

Job 2:3b–8

Then the LORD said to Satan ... “[Job] still maintains his integrity, though you incited Me against him, to ruin him without reason.”“Skin for skin!”<sup>69</sup> Satan replied. “A man will give all he has for his own life. But now stretch out Your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to Your face.” The LORD said to Satan, “Very well, then, he is in your hands’; but you must spare his life.”

So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes.

We can imagine Job's incredible perplexity at this point. He had already lost his family and possessions, and now his health. What did it all mean?

Job's broken-hearted wife—in the pain of her own great loss and now seeing her husband in such a state—incited him to unfaithfulness. But his response remained true.

Job 2:9–10a

His wife said to him, “Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!” ... He replied, “You are talking like [one of the foolish women]. Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?”

Job knew that nothing touched his life apart from the hand of his Maker, and could not bring himself to doubt the trustworthiness of God—regardless of what was happening.

Job 2:10b

In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

But this agonizing experience of the LORD'S servant had only just begun. A person may know God's enabling to honour Him in the moment of a tragic loss or personal suffering. But what about when the painful outworking of it continues on day after day and night after night? This is what Job experienced.

Job 7:3–4

[Job said,] “I have been allotted months of futility, and nights of misery have been assigned to me. When I lie down I think, ‘how long before I get up?’ The night drags on and I toss and turn.”

We are told in Job 7:5 that by then his skin was cracked and covered with festering, pussy sores and scabs from head to toe, which were infected with worms! The physical agony of this must have been horrendous.

We will see now that Job's affliction not only involved his grief and physical pain but also the cruel comments of his friends, who were determined to condemn him for what had happened.

### **Job's friends and the foolish debate**

His friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar heard of his affliction and agreed together to go and sympathize with him. When they saw him he was barely recognizable to them, and in such agony that they could not bring themselves to say a word for seven days.

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<sup>69</sup> ‘Skin for skin’ was probably a trading term at the time: one skin being traded for another. Satan was insinuating that Job would gladly trade the skin (life) of his family as long as his own skin (life) was preserved.



After those seven days—and the months of suffering that had already passed—Job then broke the silence with a cry of utter despair, declaring a wish that he had never been born. The long trial of emotional and physical agony had taken its toll. He didn't curse God—but did begin to question Him.

Job 3:11, 20–21a

Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb? ... Why is light given to those in misery, and life to the bitter soul, to those who long for death that does not come."

From this point on the situation degenerated into a sad and relentless debate, mostly centred around mere human wisdom and understanding. For all the talk of God—a good deal of which was very true—it was, in fact, an airing of ideas that completely missed the *truth* of what was actually happening.

Job's three friends assumed that he was under the curse of God and that his suffering must have been the result of some unacknowledged sin. He just needed humility. If he were honest with himself, his Maker and them, the reason for it all would be plain to see! But Job could not think of any area of willful sin in his life deserving of such punishment.

Bit by bit as he was harassed by his companions' mounting accusations, he found himself tormented by all kinds of questions: "If I've not willfully done anything to warrant all this, why then am I suffering? Is God turning away from me in anger? If so, why? Does He care about me at all? Is there any fairness in what is happening to me?"

In his pain and confusion Job not only questioned God, but even went as far as to accuse Him of injustice!

If at any point Job had ever thought he possessed any righteousness of his own apart from what the LORD had given him, he was now to discover how totally wrong he was. In the midst of his suffering there arose within him a dark attitude of defiance and an arrogant assumption that God had to give an account for His actions. The old hostility of 'the flesh' flared up. And he began to assert himself in God's presence—demanding a fair hearing of his case!

The problem with each of Job's three friends was that they had come to a wrong understanding. They believed that all suffering had to do with a person's *moral performance*. In their minds suffering was clear evidence of the judgment of God upon sin. There was no mystery involved in the face of life's troubles. The matter was very simple. Those who suffered were displeasing to their Creator.

On the basis of his friends' forceful reasoning, Job could only conclude that because he had not done anything worthy of such suffering then his punishment by God must be unjust. It seemed that the LORD was acting against His own righteousness. How could this be!

Through faulty thinking all four found themselves caught in a verbal battle that, although very *logical*, was utterly *foolish*! They were in desperate need of 'wisdom from above'.

But although Job—in his pain and bewilderment—stumbled and staggered in his understanding, he had by no means forsaken God. In spite of his inexcusable foolishness, he did, nevertheless, seek to affirm his trust in the LORD, acknowledging His divine sovereignty and faithfulness in all things. At one point he said, "Though He slay me, yet will I hope in Him" (Job 13:15). Then later, he was able to declare in faith,

“I know My Redeemer lives!”<sup>70</sup> And later still, lamenting that he had lost all sense of the LORD’S presence, he nevertheless declared: “But He knows the way I take; when He has tested me, I will come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).

In the midst of his anguish and confusion there remained within him a deep and desperate cry towards the One whom he treasured above all else—who was supreme in his affections.

The debate between Job and his companions took the form of three cycles in which each friend spoke and Job answered. Except for the third cycle. There the whole thing wound down. The second friend had only a few words to say and the last was silent. Even with the sinfulness of Job’s bewildered reactions, they could not answer the righteous cry of his heart with their over-simplified and crude view of human suffering.

### **the contribution of Elihu**

After Job’s final speech a fourth, younger friend, Elihu, entered the debate. His approach was different to the others in that he came to Job more as a brother than a judge. Like the others Elihu insisted that Job had no right to complain, and he *was* rather blunt at times. But he also took a different and more faithful *view* of the situation. Job’s young friend didn’t speak of suffering as punishment but as God’s means of *disciplining* and *refining* His servants—to open their ears to correction and to direct them in the way of righteousness.

Job 36:15

[Elihu said,] “Those who suffer He delivers in their suffering; He speaks to them in their affliction.”

Elihu saw that it is in the midst of suffering that the righteous are *delivered* from things that are hidden in the heart—things needing to be exposed and dealt with. He insisted that Job’s accusations against God betrayed the presence of a lingering inner pride. Job did not feel the need to answer any of the things this younger man said.

In his lengthy address Elihu came much closer to the truth of the matter—and his words were, in fact, something of an introduction to the LORD’S response to Job immediately after. In the end, unlike the other three friends, Elihu did not receive a rebuke from the LORD.

### **the foolishness silenced and Job restored**

After Elihu’s long discourse God Himself spoke out of a stormy whirlwind—and Job was delivered from his confused though inexcusable self-obsession!

Job 38:2–3

[The LORD said to Job,] “Who is this that obscures My plans with words without knowledge? Prepare to defend yourself; I will question you, and you will answer Me.”

Similarly, two chapters later:

Job 40:1–2, 6–8

The LORD said to Job: “Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? Let him who accuses God answer Him!”

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<sup>70</sup> Job 19:25. The Spirit of God had clearly embedded this assurance deeply in Job’s heart over the years, through the LORD’S faithful dealings with him in midst of life’s difficulties. The people of the living God would come to understand much more of this, as the Story of Redemption continued.

... Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm: “Prepare to defend yourself; I will question you and you will answer Me.” Would you discredit My justice? Would you condemn Me to justify yourself?”

For four chapters God relentlessly questioned His servant in the light of His awesome power and wisdom in the creation.

He was saying, “Are you the one who plans, creates and works out all these things? Are you able to stand in My place, ordering and maintaining the untellable wonders of My world? Do you think that I—the Almighty, Wise and Faithful Creator—am not aware of and do not care about your suffering? Do you think that I am unable to achieve My good purpose in it just because you don’t understand what I’m doing? Do you—a mere creature—dare to set yourself up as My judge?”<sup>71</sup>

After the first two chapters of the LORD’S overwhelming confrontation of Job with His sovereign wisdom and power, His servant could only say: “I am unworthy—how can I reply to You? I put my hand over my mouth” (Job 40:3–4).

Then after the next two chapters Job was not only silenced in his protests, but was entirely restored to soundness of heart and mind.

Job 42:1–6

Then Job replied to the LORD: “I know that You can do all things; no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. You asked, ‘Who is this that obscures My plans without knowledge?’ Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. You said, ‘Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer Me.’ My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen You. Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”

In the beginning Job was devastated by his family tragedy and physical affliction. But *now* he was devastated by his unthinkable arrogance in the presence of his Creator! The shocking revelation of his inner depravity—in the light of what God had overwhelmingly made known of Himself—worked within him a deep and transforming repentance. He was brought back to wise humility before the LORD—and the storm within was stilled.

To his great relief the focus was no longer upon himself and his own righteousness but upon God and *His* righteousness, faithfulness, wisdom and love—and His right to be honoured and trusted as He does what He wisely wills in His world!

Job felt that up until that time he had only *heard* certain things about God. But now, it was as if he had actually *seen* Him! What had been revealed brought him into an intimate experience of the greatness and majesty of His Maker—a PLACE that was far more wonderful anything he had ever known!

The spirit of worship that Job had long taken pleasure in and had expressed at the beginning of his suffering was restored; but now, with wisdom that would greatly enlarge his sense of blessedness in the LORD’S presence.

Not only was Job restored to fellowship with God, he also regained his health, was given a new family, greater wealth than before and a long life that enabled him to see his great, great grandchildren!

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<sup>71</sup> Some who have known much suffering often say things like, “When I see the LORD I’ll have a few questions to ask Him!” The inference being that He may have to be apologetic as He is called to account for mismanagement of their, or another’s, situation in life. But they may find, like Job, that it will be questions regarding *human* unfaithfulness that will be the subject of such an encounter!

Furthermore, his three friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar were severely rebuked by the LORD for their foolishness—but were forgiven after responding to the LORD'S direction to present a burnt offering and have Job pray for them.<sup>72</sup>

So Satan's endeavour to bring dishonour to God and ruin to His servant came to nothing. In fact it had the exact opposite effect! God's great grace had prevailed, Job was blessed, Satan was humiliated and the Holy One, Himself, was glorified!<sup>73</sup>

### **the LORD'S purpose in it all**

In the account of Job's experience, he and his friends were being taught that moral performance is not, by any means, the only element involved when people suffer in God's world. There are things happening in the unseen spiritual realm and divine wisdom being worked out in the midst of every situation of life.

On this occasion, as well as doing a refining work within the heart of His servant and revealing Himself to him in a greater way than before, the LORD was also *demonstrating* to Satan—and to the myriads of spiritual powers watching on—that He was supreme in the affections of Job. This proclamation within the unseen realm was *hugely* significant—so much so that the LORD did not hesitate to bring Job into poverty and immense heartache and pain to accomplish it!<sup>74</sup>

Satan considers it a great triumph when he can cause a human creature to reverse the order of true value: to place possessions, family and health above the One who is the greatest treasure of all. The LORD knew that although Job wasn't a perfect man, his heart had been so impacted by divine grace that ultimately Satan would not be able to pervert him in this way.

The righteousness that God had produced within Job over the years was seen in his strong repentance when confronted with divine revelation. Although in the midst of his suffering he gave way to foolishness in reaction to his accusers, he nevertheless responded with all his heart when the word of the One He adored came to him.

Through Job, GOD WAS DECLARING THAT IN SPITE OF THE EVIL ONE'S WORST EFFORTS, THE *REDEEMED* HUMAN HEART WAS ABLE TO *PREVAIL* IN EXALTING *THE SUPREME WORTH OF GOD*. We must say that NOTHING—EITHER THEN OR NOW—COULD BE *MORE IMPORTANT* THAN THIS

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<sup>72</sup> God affirmed Job in the eyes of his friends by giving him a priestly function: assisting his fellow-worshippers to make sacrifice and praying for their restoration. The LORD wanted *them* to know His grace in restoration too! This role was important for Job as well. His repentance needed to be expressed in terms of setting aside any bitterness that had grown in his heart towards these men who had dealt with him so brutally. We will see that no experience of God's grace is ever complete without such forgiveness of others.

<sup>73</sup> Much to Satan's dismay, his worst efforts will always serve the purpose of the sovereign One. In his rage against his Creator he is, nevertheless, the LORD'S reluctant servant. Full of bitter and violent hatred for God's people, he finds himself contributing to their best interests. Doing all he can to bring them to ruin he equips them for greater service to the One they adore. Attempting to destroy their heritage, he in fact, secures their ultimate enjoyment of it! How all this works out will be seen in a later study on suffering and affliction.

<sup>74</sup> In Study 1 from Daniel 7:10, we saw that, "Thousands upon thousands [of heavenly beings] attended [the LORD]; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him." Such a vast body of spiritual powers—both holy and demonic—would have been witnesses of what was taking place. In fact *every* time one of the LORD'S people overcomes the devices of the evil one—steadfastly and reverently declaring their confidence in the perfections of God—there is great effect in the unseen realm. Holy creatures exalt in the LORD'S victory and the demonic, like their dark master, groan in humiliation!

DECLARATION!!! According to God's great purpose of love, the day was to come when the whole world would be filled with such a redeemed humanity! Back then the devil was being served notice of that future reality.

Although what had been happening behind the scenes was later understood, Job's restoration did not depend upon such information—just *revelation* of the Creator's glory! In fact, if he had known the true situation then the whole thing would no longer have required faith and would have been no real test of Job's affections.

### **the ongoing value of Job's experience for all of the LORD'S people**

Although this is not the place to spell out the application of Job's experience for us today, it is appropriate to make just a few concluding comments.

In this amazing event we have a truly awesome revelation of the 'God Who Is'. He is shown to be the Unsearchably Great, Sovereignly Wise and Faithful Creator, who is involved in every circumstance within His creation. He is the *Living God* who is always at work, fulfilling His magnificent covenant purpose!<sup>75</sup>

Through the things Job suffered he had come to see the deep sinfulness of his heart. His physical and emotional affliction—together with the provocation of his friends—aroused within him a proud hostility towards God. Placed in a situation like Job's—complicated by distorted thinking and with our conscience under attack—such dark defiance naturally rises up in us all. This is what brings much of the debilitating complexity often experienced in the midst of personal suffering.<sup>76</sup>

The LORD had incited Satan in order to bring a richer understanding of Himself and His ways to Job and to that community of Shem's descendants. And now through the record of this dramatic episode, God's people may always have available to them the revelation it produced, to save them from foolish and futile thinking in the face of life's troubles.

What Job learned of the ways of God through his ordeal is what *any* of the LORD'S people may grasp during baffling experiences of personal pain and anguish. Basically, all they need in order to be able to embrace this sustaining wisdom is two things: God-given understanding of their deep sinfulness and His abundant grace in the provision of forgiveness. A clear conscience and a free spirit are the environment in which revelation abounds!

In the midst of life's perplexing outcomes the LORD'S servants certainly need this wisdom from above. It alone may keep them from a brooding—or openly defiant—self-righteous hostility towards their Maker. With it, in all that comes their way they may be enabled to reverently lift up their hearts to Him, trusting that He is their good and sovereign Father, Creator and King.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> In order to 'protect' God's name some assert that He is not personally involved in certain tragedies of life. Sometimes, the inference is, "He'd better not be!" But to attempt to exclude God from personal involvement in tragic events is never honouring to Him. It actually robs Him of His divine glory. What an awful world it would be to live in if there was *anything* that could happen apart from the sovereign permission and action of an almighty, wise and faithful Creator. The account of Job's experience declares that this will never be the case!

<sup>76</sup> Of course, even with the best of understanding we are prone to this kind of reaction because of the natural rebelliousness of our hearts. Knowledge of the truth doesn't guarantee that it will be embraced!

<sup>77</sup> Much more will be said about the nature of personal affliction in the future study already mentioned. There, the issues of both human suffering and divine provision will be dealt with in

What a gift this account of Job's experience is to us all!  
But now we must continue on with our Story.

### **a grand redemptive process about to begin**

At 'the Babel Scattering' the nations had been formed and given up to idolatry. Even then the LORD continued to reveal His glory to Shem's descendants. But His covenant faithfulness was yet to be made known in a far more significant way.

Up to this point in the divine Narrative there have been some clear indications of God's redemptive activity. But now we are about to witness His decisive initiation of A GRAND REDEMPTIVE PROCESS—one that would lead on to the liberating work of the Messiah, and ultimately to the Creator's great goal for all things at the end of history.

the LORD'S covenant faithfulness in working out  
His 'place-centred, holy purpose' during the time of:

- **the Patriarchs**—*covenant with Abraham, Isaac & Jacob*  
(promised a people, a land & blessing for the nations; Jacob named 'Israel'; Joseph betrayed & blessed for Israel's sake)

The first eleven chapters of Genesis have been a preparation for this section. In them there were four great *events*: the Creation, the Fall, the Flood and the Babel Scattering. Through these the scene has been set for what is now before us.

Throughout the rest of Genesis there are four great *characters*: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Through them we will see how God faithfully fulfilled His covenant promises in their day—in the midst of the unrelenting presence of human rebellion and sin.

### **frail servants of the Living God**

In the beginning of this study, it was said that at the heart of the biblical drama is the glorious SELF-REVELATION OF THE AWESOME 'GOD WHO IS'. He is the central focus of our Story. The various characters within the Narrative are members of a fallen humanity, who are given the privilege of being called to participate in His great redemptive purpose.

It will be increasingly evident as we progress that the Scriptures are not a record of exceptionally righteous people being chosen for great tasks. They are, rather, the account of a wonderfully righteous God of grace—the Living God—who chooses morally frail and sinful people whom He prepares to do His will.

We are told in Joshua 24:2 that Abraham, although from the line of Shem, came from a family of *idolaters*. It was only after 'the God of Glory' appeared to him (Acts 7:2) that his heart was changed. Even then, Genesis records that he was prone to the occasional act of foolishness. We will see that the Scriptures are very open about the flaws and failures of its characters.

Although mention has been made of the four 'great characters' of Genesis 12–50, it will be apparent that their greatness did not lie in themselves but only in the place they had within the great plan of God.

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a way that will bring a sense of personal nobility and a spirit of joyous perseverance—in spite of what sometimes appears to be bitterly unfair.

## **a new era of promise begun in Abraham**

It was also said at the beginning of this study that the Old Testament is continually pointing forward to, and making preparation for, the coming of the Christ. That is absolutely true. But also, within this grand theme it will be ultimately seen that Abraham (first known as Abram) is the *key figure* in the whole of the Old Testament, and everything finally accomplished by the Messiah in the New Testament is, in fact, a fulfillment of what was *promised to him*.

We will see in this section how Abraham was blessed in abundant ways. But this was not merely for his own sake. It was for the fulfillment of the LORD'S great redemptive purpose of grace for the nations.

Because Abraham is such an important character throughout the rest of our Story, we will be dealing with his part in it in some detail.

### **Abram called by the LORD**

Abram's father Terah had taken him, his wife Sarai and nephew Lot *from* Ur in Chaldea (or Babylonia) with a view to their going to the land of Canaan. But they settled in Haran. The LORD, however, had determined that Abram was not to remain there.

Genesis 12:1–3

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Right from the outset God announced that the future of the nations of the world would, very much, depend upon their response to what He did through Abram. They would receive either blessing or cursing. That is, they would be enabled and equipped to be all they were created to be, or they would be continually frustrated in the pursuit of their foolish imaginings.

Unlike Cain and Nimrod, Abram was to receive significance, security and prosperity not by his own godless devices, but by trust in and obedience to his Creator. He would also *be* a blessing!

Abram was—by God's grace—taken out from among the nations to be, himself, the head of a new nation. He was, in fact, like Noah, something of a 'new Adam'. Through this one man—delivered from the dark and deadly grip of idolatry—God truly was beginning a *new era* in His world and in the history of redemption.

The LORD'S great covenant of love was about to be expressed towards Abram in the form of a wonderful 'covenant of grace'. This further affirmation of God's creation covenant would finally result in the idolatrous nations of the earth being brought into the true, life-giving worship of their Maker. It is in this—above all else—that they would enjoy God's 'blessing'. What incredible grace the LORD was preparing for a wickedly rebellious, God-despising, unbelieving, ungrateful, defiant and self-obsessed humanity!

And so the powerful covenantal theme of *blessing* continues on from the time of creation—and will do so through to the great *climax* of our Story.

### **evidence of God's grace: an instantly obedient response**

As with Noah and all whose hearts are deeply touched by the grace of God, Abram was immediately responsive to the LORD'S word.

Genesis 12:4–5

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

To just pack up everything and go to an unknown place was quite a thing to do. But Abram had received revelation of the ‘God Who Is’ and knew He could be trusted. Many of the characters in our Story will be asked to do things that would be puzzling and perplexing if it wasn’t for who they knew the LORD to be. But like Abram, it will be seen that their faith and obedience was not disappointed!

### **the promise of a land and Abram’s heart moved to worship**

After they had travelled as far as ‘the great tree of Moreh’ at Shechem—which was right in the centre of Canaan—Abram again received direct communication from God.

Genesis 12:7

The LORD appeared<sup>78</sup> to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him.

When Abram was promised that this land he had journeyed to would someday become the possession of his descendants, his only response was to *worship!* Then as he moved on into the hill country he built another altar—between Bethel and Ai.

Everywhere he travelled in this land the promise of the LORD was now always before him, and so he continued to lift up his heart in faith and gratitude for what he’d been told.<sup>79</sup> These altars and others later erected throughout the land, were the proclamation of an absolute future certainty: the idolatrous worship of Canaan would be replaced by worship of the Living and True God!

### **near disaster through anxious devising—but the LORD acted**

With a famine coming upon the land, Abram took his household down to Egypt where there was plenty. But because of Sarai’s beauty Abram became fearful that the Egyptians would seize her and then kill him, so he told her to say she was his sister.<sup>80</sup> When the Pharaoh heard of this beautiful foreigner, she—claiming to be Abram’s sister—was taken into his palace, and Abram was given many possessions. But when the LORD inflicted serious diseases upon Pharaoh and his household, Sarai was restored to Abram and they were sent on their way with everything they had. Pharaoh insisted that he would have let Sarai be, if Abram had identified himself truly.

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<sup>78</sup> This is the first time in the Bible that the statement ‘the LORD appeared’ occurs. Such an occasion is called a ‘theophany’: an ‘appearance of God’. A theophany does not involve a vision or a dream but some kind of direct, visible manifestation of God to a person. Because we know that God is spirit, this manifestation is not, literally, Him but is a representation of His presence. As was mentioned earlier, such appearances were often made in the form of ‘the angel of the LORD’.

<sup>79</sup> His family—and, we assume, all the various servants with them—would have joined with him in these joyous acts.

<sup>80</sup> She was, in fact, Abram’s half-sister.



Despite Abram's lack of faith at this point the LORD protected his union with Sarai for the sake of His purpose.

### **separating from Lot—and free to give, as a man under promise**

Abram then eventually returned to the hill country where he had built an altar and 'called on the name of the LORD'. His nephew Lot had been with him all this time, but now—with the increase in their possessions—things had become difficult and conflict arose between their herders.

And so Abram suggested they part company, and—sure of the LORD'S promise—gave Lot first choice of the land. Lot chose the fertile, well-watered plains to the east, and 'pitched his tents' near the godless city of Sodom. Abram remained in Canaan.

Genesis 13:14–15, 17–18

The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever ... Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you."

So Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he pitched his tents. There he built an altar to the LORD.

This separation of Abram and Lot was certainly according to the LORD'S will; for His promise was made to Abram and his descendants, not to Lot's.

### **Abram's amazing encounter with Melchizedek —the priest-king who knew God**

Sometime later five kings—including those of Sodom and Gomorrah—rebelled against a king who had conquered them previously. But this king with four others allied with him defeated the five, and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah had all their goods and food taken from them and their people carried off. And Lot—who now lived in Sodom—was also carried off with all his possessions.

When Abram heard of this he called out the 318 trained men born in his wider household, and—through a surprise night attack with some neighbouring allies—was enabled to liberate Lot and the people of Sodom, together with all their possessions.

Then we have the mysterious appearance of Melchizedek, the king of Salem, who came to congratulate Abram on his incredible victory.

Like Job, Melchizedek was another person to whom the LORD—by His grace—had revealed Himself. He was not only the king of Salem but also a priest. As such, he is the first literal example in the Bible of a true king: one who was a worshipper and servant of His Maker, and so a true servant of those under his rule and care.

Genesis 14:18–20

Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was a priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand."

Having provided bread and wine to refresh Abram and his men, Melchizedek pronounced a blessing upon him, to which Abram responded by giving Melchizedek a tenth of all the possessions that had been recovered. Secure in the blessing of the LORD he chose to honour this godly king, rather than gloat over his own victory. It may well be, too, that he sensed something very special about this priest-king from Salem.

Abram also gave a share of the possessions to his men but refused the king of Sodom's insistence that he keep the rest for himself—so that no one would be able to say, "I made Abram rich." It was to be known to all that it was the LORD who had caused him to prosper. Also, he would have had no interest in forming close links with godless Sodom. One thing seems to be certain though: his rejection of the king of Sodom's offer would not have been seen as an act of friendship!

Melchizedek means 'king of righteousness' while 'salem' means 'peace'. And so Melchizedek was the 'king of righteousness and peace'.

The city of Salem would later be called Jerusalem—outside of which God would accomplish His great redemptive Act through His Son, the Messiah. Abram's encounter with Melchizedek pointed forward to this One to come, who, as the Righteous One, King of kings and Priest over all the earth, would proclaim peace to the nations from the city of Jerusalem—eventually establishing His own righteousness within every nation, tribe, people and language!<sup>81</sup>

### **the promise of an heir, many descendants and a land**

After Abram's conflict with the kings, he may have been wondering just how strongly the nations roundabout would contest the LORD'S promise of the land. He may also have been having second thoughts about virtually insulting the king of Sodom! And so God spoke to him.

Genesis 15:1

The word of the LORD came to [Abram:] "Do not be afraid Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.

The One who had promised him the land of Canaan would be his *shield* and *protector*. But more than that, He would be Abram's *very great reward*.

Abram was not to think just in terms of inheriting a land. That was a wonderful promise. But THE BIG THING WAS THAT—EVEN NOW—HE WAS AN *INHERITOR* OF THE LORD HIMSELF!!!

What is central to this whole Story is that God is calling His people into the blessedness of the covenant relationship He has formed with them—into the intimate friendship and communion this brings. Yes, the LORD would shield Abram from his enemies and secure the promise. But above all, *He* would be with him.<sup>82</sup>

However, Abram was still concerned. Just now the reward that occupied his mind had to do with the other promise made to him—that he would be 'a great nation'. The problem was that Sarai was barren, still unable to bear him an heir.

Genesis 15:2–3

But Abram said, "Sovereign LORD, what can You give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."

Abram had apparently adopted his servant Eliezer as a son so that he wouldn't be without an heir. But the LORD'S promise was not to be fulfilled in that way.

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<sup>81</sup> More will be said of this one-off appearance of the mysterious Melchizedek later in our Story.

<sup>82</sup> Later, in Isaiah 41:8 Abraham was referred to as 'the friend of God.'

## righteous by faith

The following event introduces us to a powerful reality that will be proclaimed later in our series: the ‘crediting’ to people of faith of the grand status of being ‘righteous before God’.

Genesis 15:4–6

Then the word of the LORD came to him. “This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.” He took Him outside and said, “Look at the heavens and count the stars—if you indeed can count them.” Then He said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Abram believed the LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness.

Abram’s response to the promise of an heir and descendants was, precisely, what would be expected from one who is in covenant relationship with the LORD. He believed! The LORD’S response was to declare him to be *righteous* in His sight. Simple faith in God’s grace always brings that result!

What a gracious sign it was that God gave to Abram when He directed His servant’s eyes to the heavens. From now on, every time he looked up at the night sky he would see a visual proclamation of the LORD’S promise: the staggeringly vast number of those who would trace their heritage back to him!

Genesis 15:7

[The LORD] also said to him, “I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.”

So the promise now had three clear dimensions to it: Abram would have a true heir, a vast multitude of descendants and the land of Canaan.

Genesis 15:8

But Abram said, “Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?”

Although Abram believed God’s promise of an heir and descendants, he also felt the need to ask for some assurance in regard to possessing the land. He remained concerned that it was full of other nations who would, naturally, defend it. His request was for something that would help him and his descendants stay strong in faith into the future—in the face of such an incredible promise.

In Abram’s plea we have encouragement in relation to the simple faith that makes us to be right before God. At first it may be far from ‘mighty faith’. That’s why the LORD has given certain faith strengthening ‘covenant signs’. These will continue to be seen as our Story progresses throughout both the Old and New Testaments.

## the promise confirmed by the ‘cutting’ of a grace covenant

Responding to Abram’s need to have his growing faith strengthened, God did give him a powerful sign—one that he could always recall and pass on to his descendants. This sign would be very significant, particularly for those who were to come. For, as will be seen, the land would not be inherited for a long time.

Genesis 15:9–11

So the LORD said to him, “Bring Me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> The animals Abram was commanded to slay were the five ‘clean’ animals that the LORD would later prescribe for His people Israel to use in sacrificial worship.

Abram brought all these to Him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, He did not cut in half. Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

This was a very symbolic act with which Abram would have been familiar. The placing of these severed animals in this way was—in that day—preparation for the cutting of a covenant, which established a serious and solemn agreement between two parties.

### **an insight into the future**

God's plan involved the creation of a people from Abram, to whom He would give a land in which He would fulfill His intention for them. But their receiving of this land was to include a particular *context* in which His great mercy and grace would be made known. That surprising and disturbing context is now revealed.

Genesis 15:12–16

As the sun was setting Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. Then the LORD said to him, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and ill-treated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterwards they will come out with great possessions. You however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here [to Canaan], for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.”

With a ‘thick and dreadful darkness’ coming over him, Abram received from the LORD a proclamation regarding his descendants. Before inheriting the land they were to be enslaved in a strange country for 400 years! Their experience of harsh slavery—which was to take place in Egypt—and their deliverance from it, will be covered in our next major section, ‘the Exodus’. The darkness that came also pointed to the awesome nature of what God was now to proclaim through this sign.

The Amorites mentioned above were one of the godless and idolatrous nations that presently occupied the land God had promised. It was not yet time for judgment to come upon them, when they would lose that land to the LORD’S covenant people. But when their sin against Him had reached a certain level, this day would surely arrive.

Four hundred years would be a long time to be in an oppressed situation, especially if you are a nation to whom God has promised much blessing. Things do often seem to move slowly in the outworking of His plan. It is, however always accomplished! The Scriptures—recording the entire Story of His saving actions—are a powerful record of this.

As was seen in Study 1, the Redeemer’s dealings with nations and peoples span the centuries. In our own day we need always to remember that He is ever at work in the midst of history, fulfilling His grand, international purpose. And always, in a way that will ultimately most fully reveal the greatness of His perfections—for the revelation of His glory and the final pleasure of His people.<sup>84</sup>

### **the covenant ‘cut’**

Having received the revelation of his descendants’ long years of slavery to come, Abram was, evidently, woken from his sleep to see the cutting of the covenant take place.

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<sup>84</sup> The tremendous significance of those years of slavery will be evident as our Story progresses.

### Genesis 15:17

When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.

What a sight that must have been to wake up to! With the making of such covenants both parties would walk between the severed animal carcasses, indicating that if either of them broke the arrangement the same fate would be theirs.

But on this occasion, it was not Abram and God who passed between the carcasses but only God—His fiery presence symbolized by a smoking firepot with a blazing torch. It was the LORD alone who guaranteed the promise of a great deliverance and inheritance for Abram's descendants. Abram was merely an awestruck spectator! The LORD, as always, took sole responsibility for the maintenance of His covenant.<sup>85</sup> Of course, He also required both Abram and all others to respond to His grace in its outworking—as we will see.

### Genesis 15:18

On that day the LORD [cut] a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land from the [river] of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates."

And so the LORD gave Abram the assurance he requested for himself and those who would come after him. This *grace covenant* with Abram was, of course, a particular historical expression of the *creation covenant*, which would be brought to its goal at the climax of history.

The symbolic 'cutting' of this covenant did not just have to do with the promise of the land of Canaan, but with all that was declared in Genesis 12:2–3—including the ultimate blessing of all the nations!

## **Abram listens to another voice—attempting to fulfill the promise in a 'fleshly' way**

For all of Abram's faithful response to the word of the LORD, he found himself—like Adam—suddenly giving heed to a voice other than his Maker's. What he heard 'made sense' in the light of the seeming impossibility of Sarai being able to conceive.

### Genesis 16:2

[Sarai] said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my servant; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram [listened to the voice of Sarai].

Sarai certainly came up with a 'logical' answer to their problem. But sadly, Abram, in embracing it, lost sight of the fact that the LORD would provide them with a son *entirely* on the basis of faithfulness to His promise—not by their devising.

From the outset, Abram and his descendants would need to understand a foundational principle: that the fulfillment of the LORD'S grand redemptive plan, could only be accomplished by the operation of His own *sovereign power*. The eventual conception of their son would be miraculous. The present 'solution' would come to nothing.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Abram's part in this cutting of the covenant was simply to worship His Creator—as a sinner in need of grace and an heir of rich promise. In our next study it will be seen how the elements of this action were, powerfully symbolic, of just how God Himself would awesomely take responsibility for the 'covenant breaking ways' of the whole world!

<sup>86</sup> As we continue there will be a number of miraculous births among key characters of our Story. All these, in fact, are pointing towards the *supremely miraculous birth* of the One who was to come!

Although the use of a servant as a second child-bearer was a culturally acceptable thing in those days, it was not the way the promise was to be fulfilled. It was a ‘fleshly’ human solution that produced its own bitter fruit in the birth of a son named Ishmael.

Ishmael’s descendants were to trouble God’s people and resist His purpose for a long time to come. It was from them that the religion of Islam arose. Of course, it may be said that over the past millennium, Ishmael’s Arabic descendants have also, been troubled by those who have sought to act in God’s name, but in a misguided way.

Once Sarai’s Egyptian servant—Hagar—became pregnant she began to despise her mistress, and Sarai’s harsh reaction and mistreatment of her led to Hagar fleeing into the desert. It was there, near a spring, that the angel of the LORD appeared to Hagar telling her to return to Sarai, and assured her of a huge number of descendants. He also described the character of the child within her.

Genesis 16:11b–12

[The Angel of the LORD said to Hagar], “You will give birth to a son. You shall call him Ishmael [which means ‘God hears’], for the LORD has heard of your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone’s hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all His brothers.”<sup>87</sup>

In naming Hagar’s unborn child Ishmael (‘God hears’) the LORD was bringing a rebuke to Abram and Sarai. He had ‘heard’ Hagar’s cry of misery through Sarai’s unkindness and Abram’s unconcern. They had to know that the LORD would never tolerate mistreatment and injustice within His covenant community. Ishmael’s name would be a constant reminder of that.

That day Hagar learned something very wonderful about the God of Abram. She named this One who had come to her in her distress ‘the God who sees me’. The place was named Beer-Lahai-Roi, which actually means ‘well of the Living One who sees me’.

Ishmael was a dearly loved son of Abram. But he was not the one who was promised, through whom the Redeemer’s purpose would be accomplished.

### **the LORD reaffirming His promise of descendants and a land**

Abram was once again assured of the LORD’S intention through a reaffirmation of the covenant promise.

Genesis 17:1b–2

[The LORD appeared to Abram and said,] “I am God Almighty; walk before Me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will [set forth] My covenant between Me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.”

The LORD made Himself known to His servant as ‘God Almighty’. What was to take place in fulfillment of His promise could only be accomplished by One whose power was far beyond Abram’s imagining.

This, might, was not like that of Nimrod, who prided himself on being a ‘mighty one’. Abram would see that no human power could compare with or overcome the working of God as He set forth His covenant. The LORD’S servant was simply to walk before Him faithfully on the basis of His word and be blameless.

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<sup>87</sup> We are told in Genesis 25:18 that Ishmael’s descendants ‘lived in hostility towards all the tribes related to them’.

Abram—and all who would follow him—must always live before the LORD in the light of two great realities: the covenant promises He gave and the covenant responsibilities that are to be fulfilled.

Genesis 17:3–5, 7–8

Abram fell face down, and God said to him, “As for Me, this is My covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram [which means ‘exalted father’]; your name will be Abraham [which means ‘father of a multitude’], for I have made you a father of many nations ... I will [confirm] My covenant as an everlasting covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”

We were told after the Flood that the LORD would be ‘the God of Shem’. Now He declares His desire and intention to be the God of Abraham’s descendants. We will see that “I WILL BE THEIR GOD AND THEY WILL BE MY PEOPLE” IS, A KIND OF ‘COVENANT-THEME-SONG’ THROUGHOUT OUR STORY.

How different was the LORD to the devised gods of Abraham’s day, who had to be ‘acted upon’ to gain any hope of response—and to whom human beings were quite insignificant. HOW COMPLETELY WELL-PLACED WAS ABRAHAM’S WORSHIP!!!

### **the covenant sign of circumcision**

Abraham was then given a sign that would identify his descendants as the LORD’S covenant people.

Genesis 17:10

[God said to Abraham], “This is [the sign of] My covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep [and guard]: Every male among you shall be circumcised.”

This sign which declared that a man and his household belonged to the covenant people of God, was a means by which the LORD’S covenant union with them could be *kept* and *guarded*.

Circumcision was the cutting away of skin from the place that represented the centre of a male’s personal potency. This was the first act of ‘cutting away’ that would need to characterize *the entire life* of each one who belonged to the LORD’S covenant community.

Each was called to pursue a distinctive way of life: one of joyous humility before the LORD, which *eliminated* anything that would intrude into and corrupt their worship of Him. It was absolutely essential, then, that the head of each family-unit should bear the sign of circumcision from birth.

This covenant sign of circumcision was to be the distinguishing mark of the LORD’S people for many centuries, until the Messiah came. The ‘new covenant’ that He would inaugurate—as the final ‘grace fulfillment’ of the creation covenant—would be one that had its own wonderful personal sign, as we will see in a later study.

Genesis 17:11b–12a, 14

[God said, “Circumcision] will be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or [foreigners] ... Any

uncircumcised male ... will be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.”

It was impossible for an uncircumcised man to claim to be part of the LORD’S people. The covenant sign of circumcision was now an indispensable part of belonging to the covenant community.

And what is greatly significant here is that, even at this stage in the LORD’S grand redemptive process, *foreigners* brought into a covenant household were also to be regarded as part of the people of God! But whether born as the LORD’S people or brought in from outside, all would definitely have to bear the God-given sign of belonging. For any individual to refuse this sign was to ‘break’ the indissoluble covenant and—in this particular instance of its violation—be ‘cut off’ from a place within it.<sup>88</sup>

So Abraham and every male in his household were circumcised that very day.

### **the promise of a son reaffirmed**

To be given a son through his aging, barren wife seemed unbelievable. But it would surely happen!

Genesis 17:15, 16a–19

God also said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of many nations ... ”

Abraham fell face down; he laughed and said to himself, “Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?” And Abraham said to God, “If only Ishmael may live under your blessing!”

Then God said, “Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will [confirm] My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.”

Abraham was staggered by the word of the LORD and lapsed momentarily back into unbelief. Surely Ishmael—the son he already had—could be blessed instead. After such a long time, the promise—in that moment—seemed to be so wildly incredible that all he could do was laugh at the thought of it!

The LORD assured Abraham that Ishmael would be blessed, but not as ‘the child of promise’. One from Sarah’s womb to be named Isaac must be his heir.

Isaac’s name—meaning ‘he laughs’—would be forever a statement that God’s ‘laughable promise’ was fulfilled! In anticipation of this amazing event, Sarah was given a ‘freshened up’ identity. Her name still meant the same thing (heroic princess or queen),<sup>89</sup> but she could know that now there was before her a wonderfully new realm of participation in the LORD’S plan.

### **just one year to go**

When the angel of the LORD appeared later to Abraham, Sarah too found herself *laughing* at the ‘unbelievable’ promise that was given.

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<sup>88</sup> It will be seen later that when the LORD’S people ‘broke’ the indissoluble covenant in various ways, they incurred the promised cursings that were experienced *within* it. But if there was refusal of ‘the sign of belonging’, this resulted in nothing less than being cut off from the covenant itself.

<sup>89</sup> It seems that she was originally named after a ‘moon goddess’ when her family were idolaters in Chaldea. So she was now no longer identified with idolatry but with the LORD.



Genesis 18:10–14

[The Angel of] the LORD said [to Abraham], “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.”

Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, “After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?”

Then the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really have a child, now that I am old?’ Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son.”

We immediately then have a slightly humorous illustration of the wrath-averting mechanism spoken of in Study 4: ‘Denying the facts’.

Genesis 18:15

*—a little lie should fix it!*

Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, “I did not laugh.” But [the Angel of the LORD] said, “Yes, you did laugh.”

Just as well this was a covenant of grace!

### **Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed—an awesome judgment upon willful violators of the creation covenant**

Abraham—as God’s covenant partner—is now taken into a situation in which he would learn something that was of enormous importance.

Genesis 18:17–19

The LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep [and guard] the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that [the LORD] will bring about for Abraham what He has promised him.”

The LORD was about to perform a terrible act of judgment, and because of Abraham’s place in His purpose He decided to make known to His chosen servant what He was about to do. Through what Abraham witnessed in this entire situation he would understand more fully his covenant vocation. Above all else he was to pass on to his family—and the generations to come—their absolute responsibility to ‘keep and guard the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just!’

The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah had witnessed the LORD’S mercy in enabling Abraham to recover their people and goods, together with Lot and his family. But this had not moved them to honour their Maker. Both cities had become centres of human unrighteousness and moral depravity. And so the Angel of the LORD informed Abraham that judgment was about to come upon them. This was frightful news, as Lot—a righteous man—was living in the city of Sodom!

Finally—through fervent intercessory prayer<sup>90</sup>—Abraham secured an agreement from the LORD that if there were ten righteous people found in the city it would be spared. The reality was that ten such people were not to be found in that place, and both cities were totally destroyed by burning Sulphur—but only after Lot, his wife and daughters were enabled to flee.

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<sup>90</sup> That is, ‘prayer on behalf of others’.

Lot's wife, however, made a grave mistake. She disobeyed the LORD'S command to not look back to the city and was turned to salt! Her fate would be a graphic warning for future generations to heed. They must always be careful not to look back to what they have rightly left behind.<sup>91</sup>

Genesis 19:29

So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, He remembered Abraham, and He brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.

Although there were not ten righteous people in the city, the LORD had heard the intercessory cry of His covenant partner and delivered Lot.

In the destruction of these cities we have yet another powerful and sobering statement of God's complete hatred for sin, and His righteous judgment upon it. The relieving mercy and life-giving grace that was ultimately coming to the nations through Abraham was not, in any way, an indication of the LORD'S acceptance or even tolerance of human wickedness.

In this fearful event we also have another foreshadowing of the final judgment to come at the close of this present age.

2 Peter 2:6

He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly.

Jude 7

Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns ... serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

Lot's choices, too, are important to note. There is a sad progression in his story because of them. First, he pitched his tents near Sodom, whose people he knew "were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD" (Genesis 13:13). The next we hear of him he is living in Sodom itself. Even though he himself remained separate from its spiritual and moral corruption—being deeply grieved by it—he evidently had some kind attraction to the city and its benefits.<sup>92</sup>

Lot's daughters were pledged to be married to men from Sodom, both of whom—in their godless attitude—laughed at the prospect of the LORD'S judgment upon the city and refused to flee (19:4). And then after the city's destruction, when he and his daughters were, though fear, living in seclusion in a cave, the two young women—by twice enticing their father into a drunken stupor—slept with him in order to preserve their family line. The result? Two sons from whom came the people of Moab and Ammon—godless nations and enemies of the LORD'S people (Genesis 19:30–38).

Although Lot was a righteous man, having great regard for the LORD and His way, he certainly lacked discernment, and his poor choices were to serve as a sober caution to coming generations. The difference between him and Abraham is that Abraham was

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<sup>91</sup> Unfortunately it will be seen that down through the centuries God's people continued to struggle with this temptation to look back.

<sup>92</sup> 2 Peter 2:7–8: "God rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard.)" Maybe Lot saw Sodom as the only opportunity for him to provide a husband for his daughters and so continue the family line. But to expose them to such a godless situation was foolish. We will see that later Abraham trusted the LORD to provide a wife for his son from among his own people in the land he had come from.

given a *promise*, and although capable of wavering from it, he finally—as we will see—in the face of a great trial held fast to the LORD’S word to him. In this he was an example to people of faith for all time. Lot, on the other hand, seemed to live by human resourcefulness rather than divine promise.

**once more, near disaster through anxious  
devising—but again, the LORD faithfully  
*intervening* to protect His promise**

For the second time, Abraham’s anxiety-based policy of having Sarah tell local inhabitants that she was his sister almost brought calamity. This time through Abimelek the Philistine king of Gerar who, thinking Sarah was unmarried, attempted to add her to his harem. Sarah’s aging—though still obviously stunning—beauty had attracted the king.

The problem here was not only the possibility of Sarah being personally compromised, but also that it was during this time that she was to miraculously conceive the promised son. How Satan would have delighted to bring complexity into that situation, causing doubt as to the legitimacy of Abraham’s fatherhood!

Once more judgment fell on the household of the intruder. Before Abimelek was able to go near Sarah God came to him in a dream and—informing him that Sarah was married and that her husband was a prophet—declared that the king was virtually a ‘dead man’ because of his intention. He was told that if he didn’t return Sarah to Abraham, not only would he lose his life but his whole household would die as well. Even then, ever since Sarah’s enslavement all the women in the king’s household had been unable to conceive.

Greatly distressed, Abimelek released Sarah, gave Abraham abundant material compensation and offered him unrestricted access to his land. At this—after Abraham prayed for the king—the LORD withdrew His hand of judgment.

So now there was a king in Canaan, who knew that Abraham was a servant, prophet and priest of the Living God! Later, at Beersheba, Abimelek—aware of the Authority behind this ‘wandering’ household leader—was keen to initiate a treaty between Abraham and himself (Genesis 21:22–34).

**the promise of an heir is fulfilled**

The recent fate of Sodom and Gormorrah had given another terrible example of the judgment deserved by all who set their hearts against their Maker. It is significant at this point, then, that the promise of an heir is fulfilled—opening the way for the ultimate fulfillment of God’s redemptive plan for the nations.

Genesis 21:2, 4–6

Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him ... When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Sarah said, “God has bought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me!”

Sarah could laugh all she wanted now! The LORD’S word proved to be absolutely true. Abraham obediently circumcised his new son, declaring him to be part of a ‘grace-covenant-community’, which would be maintained to the end of history. There was in this—and would continue to be in all that was to come—so much to laugh over with joy!

## Hagar and Ishmael excluded from the covenant household

A year after Isaac's birth at a feast celebrating his weaning, Ishmael, then fourteen years old, mocked the occasion. His heart was set hard against the promised son. Sarah was extremely upset, demanding that he and his mother should be sent away. The thought of this was greatly distressing to Abraham, but the LORD confirmed to him that it should be so, assuring him that for his sake Ishmael would become a nation.

Although Hagar and Ishmael were no longer to be part of the grace-covenant-community' within Abraham's household, the LORD appeared to Hagar when she was despairing in the desert, provided for her need and also assured her that Ishmael would become 'a great nation'. We are told that, "God was with the boy as he grew up."<sup>93</sup>

## Abraham tested by the Faithful One, and proved, by grace, to be faithful

The LORD having given Abraham much evidence of His faithfulness now put him to the test—and in doing so created one of the most powerful Old Testament pictures of His redemptive plan.<sup>94</sup>

Genesis 22:1–2

Sometime later, God tested Abraham, He said to him, "Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you."

Sacrifice Isaac? The promised heir—his dearly loved and only son! How could this be? In commanding such a thing wasn't the LORD destroying any hope of fulfilling His promise? But Abraham by now had learned too much of God's faithfulness to doubt Him. So he responded immediately to the divine command.

Genesis 22:3

Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.

And so, Abraham begins yet another journey. He has the promise of God but also a command to do what seemed to make its fulfillment impossible. And *with* him is his

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<sup>93</sup> Genesis 21:14–21. It is significant to note that when the LORD spoke to Hagar on this occasion, the angel who appeared was called the 'angel of God' rather than the 'Angel of the LORD' (as when appearing to her previously). This may well have indicated that although embraced by the creation covenant, she and Ishmael—now outside the household—were openly excluded from the grace covenant cut with Abraham.

That, however, did not exclude Ishmael's descendants from eventually participating in the grace covenant. We will see that 2,000 years later, it was some from his race who came to worship the One who had recently been miraculously born—having finally come from His Father to redeem the nations!

<sup>94</sup> As it was in the beginning so it is throughout the Story of Redemption that the servants of the LORD—called to be His image—are taken through times of testing. To truly represent Him in His world their *hearts* must be tested—bringing them to a place where they decisively choose faith and obedience in the face of extreme predicaments. This principle of testing will continue until the climax of our Story at the close of history.

treasure, Isaac. This would be a journey like no other. The whole thing was unthinkable—yet he knew the LORD was trustworthy.

Genesis 22:4–6a

On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants. “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife.

How solemn would have been the silence as they made their way up the mountain: Isaac sensing the gravity of the occasion; and Abraham tortured by the thought of what may lay ahead—yet still unable to disbelieve the promise made to Him. They would worship and ‘come back’. It could be no other way.

Genesis 22:6b–14

As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?”

“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied.

“The fire and the wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.

When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the Angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

“Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld your son, your only son.”

Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The LORD Will [See and Provide]. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain [the LORD sees and provides].”

What an incredible experience that was for Abraham and Isaac to go through!

As we were told before, God was *testing* Abraham. It wasn’t that the LORD didn’t know what was in His servant’s heart. He was well aware of the work of grace He had done within him. What He wanted was for Abraham to have an opportunity to *express* this in the fullest way possible. He was *inciting* His servant into the blessing of faith and obedience!

Abraham was told to go and worship the LORD on the mountain in Moriah. The problem was that such worship would involve the offering up of his one and only son. In this the LORD was bringing Abraham to a place of mental clarity in relation to Isaac. He had to know in his own mind that the big thing for him was not the gift of a son, as wonderful as that was. Nor was it the promise of descendants and a land. As seen earlier, it was the, LORD Himself, who was to be his ‘very great reward’. And He was worthy of absolute *worship*—no matter what the context!

Abraham needed to be put in a position where, facing the loss of everything, he would know that the only thing that ultimately mattered was to hear, believe and obey God’s

word—freely lifting up his heart to His Maker. In coming to this, he would set an example of *covenant response* to the LORD for all who would follow after him.<sup>95</sup>

The purpose of the test was magnificently achieved! Abraham now understood that whatever the circumstance, the LORD'S servant could wholly trust and obey, sure that his Maker would *see* and *provide* according to His 'good, pleasing and perfect will'. Nothing else mattered!

Genesis 22:15–18

The [Angel] of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, "I swear by Myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your Offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed Me."

Delighted with the response of His servant, the LORD confirmed that He would indeed 'set forth' His covenant—fulfilling every promise He had made.

### **the principle of resurrection**

The Scriptures make it clear that the LORD had so convinced Abraham of His faithfulness that he believed that even if Isaac had been sacrificed, the One who had commanded the act could have raised him from the dead!

Hebrews 11:17–19

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.

And so, the principle of resurrection appears once again.

### **the prophetic significance of this great drama**

The test through which Abraham passed was certainly powerfully prophetic. It pointed towards the day when God, the Father, would give up His One and Only Eternal Son for the sins of the world. This terrible, yet wonderful, event would, in fact, take place in that same area where Isaac was to be offered—and where the LORD'S Old Testament Sanctuary at Jerusalem was later to be situated.<sup>96</sup>

The *place* (where God was *present* to the one He had called) was well named by Abraham: 'The LORD Will See and Provide'. The LORD *saw* Abraham's obedient faith and also his great need of a sacrifice, which could be *provided* as a substitute for Isaac. Just as later He would *see* the need of all the nations and *provide* an awesome 'substitutionary Sacrifice' for them! The action and significance of that coming Event will be portrayed and spelt out as our Story continues into the next study and beyond. This account of Abraham's testing not only points forward to the Father's offering up of His Son, but also to the Son's obedient love for His Father. Here it is Isaac who provides this foreshadowing.

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<sup>95</sup> Vocational privilege always involves such responsibility—whether leading a nation, a community or a family.

<sup>96</sup> Abraham had, then, been led to sacrifice Isaac in the very area where Melchizedek reigned as priest-king.

Later, Isaac's actions were not always as faithful as they could have been. But on this occasion—maybe buoyed up by the spirit of Abraham—his response was remarkable. Not a mere child at the time, he could have easily overpowered his aging father. But he obediently submitted himself to what appeared to be a horrible outcome.

Our next study will show, of course, that the Son's submission to the Cross was actually a free offering up of Himself, not only in loving obedience to His Father's will but also, in love for the world whose sins He would bear!

Unlike the promised One to come, Isaac, as Abraham's promised son, was a 'sinner' deserving of death. The substitutionary animal provided for him pointed forward to the one Sacrifice that would ultimately cover his sins—and those of all who believe God for His grace.

### **the first installment of the land**

Later, with a deeply sad experience of loss, Abraham also received a pledge of what was to come.

Genesis 23:2,19–20a

[Sarah] died ... in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went to mourn for [her] and to weep over her ... Afterward, Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre (which is at Hebron) in the land of Canaan. So the field and the cave in it were deeded to Abraham.

Sarah's death was the occasion of Abraham receiving a title deed for her burial place. A piece of Canaan now belonged to its heir! We are told that Abraham insisted on paying the full price of the site. This was not to be a gift from Canaan's inhabitants but from the LORD.

### **a wife for Isaac**

The time had come for Isaac to marry. But his wife would not be found in Canaan.

Genesis 24:1–8

Abraham was now old and well advanced in years, and the LORD had blessed him in every way. He said to the chief [steward] in his household, the one in charge of all that he had ... "I want you to swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living, but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac.

The servant asked him, "What if the woman is unwilling to come back with me to this land? Shall I then take your son back to the country you came from?"

"Make sure that you do not take my son back there," Abraham said. "The LORD, the God of heaven, who brought me out of my father's household and my native land and who spoke to me and promised me on oath, saying, 'To your offspring I will give this land'—He will send His angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son from there."

Isaac was not to have a wife from among the Canaanites. Neither was he, himself, to go to Abraham's former homeland to gain one. His place was in Canaan, the land that had been promised. Abraham's godly steward was to go and bring back the wife that the LORD would provide. This would, of course, continue the line of Shem among Abraham's descendants.

Having arrived at the town of Nahor (Abraham's deceased brother), the prayerful servant was amazingly led to the very girl Isaac was to marry: Nahor's granddaughter,

whose name was Rebekah. At this all the servant could do was to worship the LORD for His kindness and faithfulness to Abraham!

Then, having spoken with Rebekah's father Bethuel and her brother Laban, he returned with Isaac's beautiful and eager young bride.

Genesis 24:67

[Rebekah] became [Isaac's] wife, and he loved her.

### **the death of Abraham**

With Isaac's marriage to Rebekah, all was in place for the promised godly line to continue. In this, the time had arrived for Abraham's departure from this life.

Genesis 25:8,10b

Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age ... [He] was buried with his wife Sarah [in the land of Canaan].

He was able to say towards the end of his days that he had 'walked faithfully' before the LORD (Genesis 24:40).

Abraham had been promised all the land of Canaan. But during his many years within it he was only ever a nomad, and all he had to his name was a burial site. He wandered from place to place, never linking himself with the various cities and cultural centres round about. He knew the land was his inheritance and would finally be wholly possessed by his descendants. But he desired no part of the societies that were corrupted by idolatrous worship within it.

Hebrews 11:8–9

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and [his grandson] Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.

Both Abraham and his descendants were called to be separate from the nations. Only in this way could the One who would come from among them bring redemption and renewal for the entire human race. This theme of *faithful separation* will go on having a prominent place within the rest of our Story.

### **the line of promise continues through Isaac**

Apart from the dramatic event at Moriah we are not told a lot about Isaac. But of great significance is the fact that he received from the LORD an affirmation of the covenant promise made to Abraham.

Genesis 26:3b–5

[The LORD appeared to Isaac and said]: "I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My requirements, My commands, My decrees and My instructions."

As mentioned previously, Isaac was not always as faithful as he could be. For instance, just after this affirmation of the covenant promise he repeated his father's folly by trying to pass Rebekah off as his sister—not daring to trust himself solely to the divine pledge



he'd received. What is more, the deception was enacted towards the same king—Abimelek—whom Abraham had offended those years before.<sup>97</sup>

However, the LORD had promised to be *with* Isaac and to *bless* him; and His presence and blessing soon became apparent as Isaac grew extremely prosperous. So great was his prosperity that the Philistines, out of envy, stopped up the wells that Abraham had previously dug; and Abimelek, intimidated by Isaac's influence, asked him to leave the area.

Even when Isaac moved away the opposition continued. He went on to reopen wells that Abraham had dug. But every time he dug a new one the Philistines disputed its ownership. Finally, after moving further on, he dug a well that was not contested, naming it 'Rehoboth', which means 'broad places' or 'room'. He said, "Now the LORD has given us room and we will flourish in the land."

After this Isaac moved on to Beersheba, where Abraham had previously 'called on the name of the LORD'. Here he was given a further word of encouragement.

Genesis 26:24

The LORD appeared to [Isaac] and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of My servant Abraham."

Like his father, Isaac also built an altar there and 'called on the name of the LORD'. His heart too was enlarged in worship towards the Faithful One. In this he had no cause to fear the Philistines or anyone else. The first thing he did after that was to act as a man who knew what was his. He had his servants dig a well right there at Beersheba!

At this same time Abimelek came to Isaac seeking to make a treaty. He openly acknowledged that the LORD was, indeed, *with* Isaac and had *blessed* him, and he sought to guarantee peace between them. Then on the day that the treaty had been sealed with an oath and Abimelek had left, Isaac's servants came running in with news about the well they'd dug. It was full of water!<sup>98</sup>

Just as Abimelek had recognized the LORD'S faithfulness on behalf of Abraham, it was now acknowledged to be the case also for his son Isaac. Ultimately, every nation will acknowledge the faithfulness of the Holy One towards His people, from generation to generation!

## Jacob and Esau

Isaac's wife Rebekah was childless. But when he prayed for her the LORD answered, and she conceived. The Story that God is telling through His people is consistently

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<sup>97</sup> This king may have been a son of the one Abraham was involved with. But either way, Isaac's fear-based ploy was still a repeat of his father's. It will be seen as we progress through the Old Testament part of our Story that the people of God were notoriously slow to learn from the past.

<sup>98</sup> In this provision of water at Beersheba—the place of revelation and worship—there is something of a foreshadowing of enormous future blessing. The springing up of that well, in a way, pointed towards the constantly needed provision of life-giving worship for the people of God. When the One who was to come had accomplished His awesome work of bearing the sins of the world, a great 'new covenant' promise would be marvellously fulfilled. Each person of faith would have *sprung up within them* a beautifully refreshing well of 'living water' that would never run dry: the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. However, we will have to wait until Studies 6 & 8 to hear about this amazing gift. Until then, though, we will see again and again the imagery of water as a foreshadowing of the LORD'S future enlivening and invigorating supply of blessing for His redeemed people.

worked out on the basis of such faithful intervention. He is ever showing that His purpose of redemption is by nature *miraculous*—totally dependent upon His own strong and trustworthy hand.

Actually, Rebekah was carrying twins. But the LORD made known to her that only one of these two sons would be part of the continuing godly line.

Genesis 25:23

The LORD said to [Rebekah], “Two nations are in your womb, and two people’s from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.”

The natural order was to be reversed. According to God’s purpose, the youngest would receive the inheritance of the firstborn son and exercise his authority as family head in the future.

Genesis 25:24a–26a

The time came for [Rebekah] to give birth ... [and] the first to come out was ... Esau. After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau’s heel; so he was named Jacob [which means ‘he grasps the heel’: a Hebrew idiom for ‘he deceives’].

Esau, we are told, was a rugged man and a skillful hunter. Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, favoured him rather than Jacob, who was more domestic and close to his mother.

If—as we would assume—Rebekah had told Isaac what the LORD had said about the two brothers, Isaac certainly acted as though he were determined not to believe it. Maybe he felt that she had got it wrong. Surely the one who was to head up the next generation and to see the promise to Abraham fulfilled, would need to be ruggedly strong—like Esau!

Esau, however, given to momentary sensory pleasures, ‘despised his birthright’ and through Jacob’s craftiness was deceived into selling it to him during a fit of hunger—in exchange for some red lentil stew (Genesis 25:29–34)!

Jacob—no doubt due to Rebekah’s encouragement—was determined to have the status of being Isaac’s firstborn son. How much he understood of the covenant responsibilities this involved we don’t know. Esau, however, clearly spurned the calling and promise that the covenant brought—causing Isaac and Rebekah grief by marrying two Hittite women. He had no desire to remain separate from the idolatrous nations round about.

Later—together with his mother—Jacob also deceived *Isaac* into giving him his brother’s blessing.<sup>99</sup> This younger brother who was born ‘grasping the heel’ truly was one who lived up to his name!

Jacob—‘the deceiver’ or ‘schemer’—was, it seems, always on the lookout for the best chance of self-advancement: of himself, not a particularly righteous man. But as is always the case, he was not chosen by God to fulfill His purpose because of personal virtue, but only by grace.

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<sup>99</sup> Genesis 27:1–38. Isaac did express his doubts about the situation. Maybe he was aware of the deception but went along with it, realizing that to resist would mean going against what he actually knew to be the will of God.

It will be seen that the LORD wasn't going to fulfill His promise through either the manly strength of Esau, or the wily conniving of Jacob and his mother.<sup>100</sup> This younger son was clearly to have a central part in the divine purpose. But God was far from finished with His servant. Jacob would eventually be brought to the place where he understood the way of his Maker.

### **to Abraham, to Isaac, and now the promise comes to Jacob**

After hearing that his brother Esau had vowed to kill him as soon as his father Isaac had died, Jacob set out from Beersheba to travel to the country of Abraham's family to find a wife.<sup>101</sup>

Genesis 28:11–15

When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the LORD, and He said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your Offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

So Jacob, himself, now had the promise of the LORD affirmed to him! The One who had chosen him was still faithfully at work in accordance with His plan. Jacob would constantly be the object of divine attention; the LORD would never cease to act towards him until His promise was fulfilled.

The angels on the stairway provide a picture of the LORD'S faithful activity towards Jacob. The imagery portrays that these would *ascend* from him to heaven communicating his need, and then *descend* to him in order to operate on his behalf according to God's will. To put it another way, we could say that there would always be a highway of supply and provision for fulfillment of the LORD'S purpose in Jacob's life.

Genesis 28:16–17

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> The LORD needed neither Jacob's nor Rebekah's engineering to accomplish His purpose, but nevertheless worked through them—or, should we say, in spite of them. It will be seen, though, that their scheming may not have been without consequences for them both.

<sup>101</sup> The country he travelled to was Aram, modern day Syria. One of the consequences of Jacob and Rebekah's actions may have been this painful separation. Actually, there is no evidence that Jacob and Rebekah ever saw each other again. Could it be that Jacob needed to see that his confidence as heir of God's promise was not to be on the basis of an alliance with his mother?

<sup>102</sup> What we see here is yet another example of the LORD providing a 'place' in which He could be both known and worshipped—a theme which will be ultimately worked out in the most glorious way imaginable in the establishment of the new covenant!

Jacob was coming to see what it meant for him to be heir to God's covenant promise. He was *shocked*, thinking, "The LORD is actually with me all the time. And He's here, in this place, right now!"

Jacob learned something that night about his need—and, indeed, his responsibility—to acknowledge the LORD'S presence. His future was not to be worked out by his own determination to make things happen. It had to be on the basis of the LORD'S own faithfulness and might. But there was still much for Jacob to learn in this regard.

At that point, however, he did make a particular response to the LORD.

Genesis 28:18–19a, 20–22

Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel [which means 'house of God']<sup>103</sup> ... Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's household, then the LORD will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that You give me I will give You a tenth."

It's good that Jacob responded to the LORD. But what he said seems to indicate that his relationship with his Maker was still less than a settled reality in his heart and mind. There appears in his vow to be something of a bargaining tone: "If God will be with me ... so that I return safely ... *then* the LORD will be my God." He seems to be not yet sure whether the LORD will, in fact, be his God. It will depend on whether or not He proves faithful!

Jacob's vow included two things. Firstly, if the LORD proved faithful to him then the stone he had set up as a pillar, would always be a place where God's presence was acknowledged. And secondly, he would give the LORD a tenth of all he had received. In that second aspect he was following the example of his grandfather Abraham, who gave a tenth of everything after receiving a blessing from the priest-king Melchizedek.

### **labouring under Laban's deception**

Continuing on in his journey he finally arrived in the land of his mother's father. But there he found that he had to deal with a father-in-law—his mother's brother, Laban<sup>104</sup>—who was even more deceitful and scheming than *he* was! Maybe Rebekah had helped reproduce the family likeness in her son.

Jacob was tricked into marrying not one but two of Laban's daughters—and working long and hard for the privilege!

For twenty-one years he was oppressed by Laban's deception and conniving—though, on at least one occasion, he gave as good as he got.<sup>105</sup> But then after the LORD spoke

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<sup>103</sup> Jacob, by *anointing* that stone, was setting Bethel apart as a 'dwelling place of God', where He would be worshipped. In addition to the previous footnote, it may be added that, ultimately, after the One to come had accomplished His great redemptive work on behalf of all nations, the *entire earth* would be set apart in this way. Study 6 will show how *that* anointing took place in Jerusalem on 'the Day of Pentecost'. It will be seen what a wonderfully awesome and significant event that was. But then it will also be seen that Pentecost was only the beginning of what is to be so in the age to come—when the whole earth will be, in every sense, Bethel, the very 'house of God'!

<sup>104</sup> Laban was an idolater (31:30).

<sup>105</sup> Genesis 30:25–43. Although Jacob was at his 'tricky best' in this (acting on a belief current at the time) the LORD did make known to him later (31:10–13) that what appeared to be the result of a clever piece of deception was actually divine blessing in the face of Laban's injustice!

to him he returned home with his two wives, Rachel (the one he had set his heart upon) and Leah, two female, childbearing servants (Bilhah and Zilpah), eleven sons, a daughter and much prosperity.<sup>106 107</sup>

When the LORD had told him to return, Jacob was afraid that because of Laban's callous tendencies he might not release his daughters. So, without telling him he fled with them and all that he had gained there.

Laban was furious and set out in hot pursuit. But the LORD came to him in a dream, warning him not to use either flattery or anger to persuade Jacob to return. The time had come, at last, for separation from this idolatrous community.

The LORD certainly proved faithful to His servant during those long years away from his home, and Jacob made this known to Laban after he had caught up with them.

Genesis 31:42a

If the God of my father, the God of Abraham ... had not been with me, you would surely have sent me away empty handed. But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands.

It is interesting that here Jacob doesn't speak of the LORD as "my God". He asserted that it was "the God of my father, the God of Abraham" who had been with him.

It was true that He who had acted on behalf of Abraham and Isaac was also the One who had been faithful to Jacob. But it appears that he was still one step removed from the full relationship that his father and grandfather had enjoyed with the LORD.<sup>108</sup>

After agreeing to make a treaty with Laban—to ensure no ongoing hostility between the two groups—Jacob went on his way. As he continued, however, he was shocked to be met by angels.

Genesis 32:2

When he saw them, he said, "This is the camp of God!" So he named the place Mahanaim [which means 'two camps'].

The LORD was assuring His servant that regardless of what lay ahead He was with him. Wherever Jacob camped on his journey there would always be two camps: his and the LORD'S!

## **Jacob becomes 'Israel'**

Having finally overcome Laban in his long battle with him, Jacob now faced the fierce wrath of his brother Esau at home, and dreaded the prospect. His fears were multiplied

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<sup>106</sup> Actually, he had more than one daughter as is clear from Genesis 37:35 & 46:7. But the biblical narratives often only mention those who are necessary to the events being described. This daughter, Dinah, is mentioned because of her part in a tragic situation later on. It may be too that the other daughters were born later in Canaan.

<sup>107</sup> This beginning of the fulfillment of the LORD'S promise of many descendants was worked out in the midst of both Laban's deception and the bitter jealousy of Jacob's wives (Genesis 29:20–30:24). The Holy One's purpose is not dependent upon ideal circumstances. He is always sovereignly at work in a sinful world to fulfill His grand intention. As each son was born, he was sanctified—set apart—for the 'setting forth' of the covenant with Abraham. Each of them would be the head of a tribe among the people of God. Furthermore, through this far from perfect situation both Leah and Rachel came to acknowledge the LORD'S mercy and kindness to them.

<sup>108</sup> All was not as it could be in Jacob's family either. When they left Laban to return to Canaan, Rachel stole some of his household idols—maybe thinking these could help her to conceive another son. For until now she had only been able to bear one. The 'flesh' is always pressing us to seek godless solutions!

when messengers reported that Esau was coming out to meet him with four hundred men. He was terrified. What would happen to him and his family!

Genesis 32:9–12

Then Jacob prayed, ‘O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, LORD, You who said to me, “Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,” I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness You have shown Your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two [companies of people]. Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid that he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. But You have said, “I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.” ’

This greatly distressing circumstance had certainly sharpened Jacob’s focus. He saw that he was *unworthy* of all that the LORD had done for him, and His attention was fixed upon *the word* he had been given. A different spirit was forming within the LORD’S chosen servant.

However, in typical ‘Jacob style’ he still put in place everything he could think of to pacify his brother! (Genesis 32:13–21).

But now, before he was to meet Esau, the most important struggle of his life was to take place.

### **the great crisis**

After sending his wives, family and possessions across the River Jabbok during the night—probably to avoid being attacked by Esau during a daytime crossing—he remained alone on the other side. He stayed back, presumably, to seek the LORD’S blessing as he faced the potential horrors of the next day. Jacob knew that only the LORD could secure him in this predicament; and this was just the place in which he needed to be.

Then the One he sought came to him in no uncertain manner—in the form of the Angel of the LORD.

Genesis 32:24b–29

[That night] a man wrestled with [Jacob] till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.”

But Jacob replied, “I will not let you go unless You bless me.”

The [angel] asked him, “What is your name?”

“Jacob,” he answered.

Then the [angel] said “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because [as ‘a prince with God’] you have [striven] with [Him] and with human beings and have overcome.”<sup>109</sup> ... Then He blessed him there.

Jacob surely had struggled with human beings. But now he had struggled desperately with God Himself, and prevailed—even with his hip out of joint!<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Israel means, ‘a prince with God’, or ‘he strives with God’. This is a most appropriate title for both him and the nation that would come from him—as they were called into participation with the LORD in His divine purpose.

<sup>110</sup> Hosea 12:3–4 tells us that, “[Jacob] struggled with God. He struggled with the angel and overcame him.” To wrestle with ‘the Angel of the LORD’—God’s direct Representative—was, in fact, to wrestle with God Himself.

In this he showed that his one real confidence was in having the *covenant blessing* of God. Nothing else mattered! After a lifetime of striving—with his eyes fixed on people, situations and things—he now knew that *the LORD* was the One with whom he had to do.

Jacob was, actually, to become the father of a nation—the *people of Israel*—whose only true significance, security and life would be found in the assurance of that same blessing.

He called this place of wrestling and striving *Peniel*, which means ‘face of God’. Having ‘overcome’ in his struggle with the Angel who directly represented the LORD, Jacob was himself *overcome*. He sensed keenly the mercy and grace of the One who had engaged with him in this awesomely immediate and intimate way—and Who yet had allowed him, in his sinfulness, to live!<sup>111</sup>

### meeting Esau—beholding the grace of God

Emerging from his all-night contest, Jacob was physically weakened and limping because of his hip.<sup>112</sup> Then the new day brought Jacob ‘face to face’ with his brother. But he encountered a different kind of Esau than he expected—one who warmly welcomed him!

Genesis 33:4

Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept.

Jacob had done everything he could to pacify this one whom he had feared. But he need not have bothered. Esau was confused by all the gifts that had been sent on ahead, one after another. The LORD had already softened his heart!

Jacob then said something very significant to his brother.

Genesis 33:10b

To see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favourably.

The LORD’S servant saw in the face of his brother whom he had dreaded *the grace of God*—the grace that had lavished such favour upon him, in spite of his life of willful and wily self-seeking!

### Jacob ‘arrives’

Now the climax of this part of Jacob’s story is to be seen.

Genesis 33:18b–20

[Jacob] arrived safely at the city of Shechem in Canaan and camped within sight of the city. For a hundred pieces of silver he bought from the sons of Hamor,

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<sup>111</sup> Jacob had clearly become increasingly aware that this was a divine encounter—particularly when a touch of his hip instantly wrenched it out of joint! He knew that it was the LORD Himself who was contending *against* him, and understood that his lifetime of deceptive grasping after personal advantage, deserved more than a dislocated hip. The LORD would have been *right* if He had not only refused to bless him, but had snuffed out his life. And so Jacob pleaded with Him for His mercy. Hosea 12:4 says that Jacob ‘wept and begged’ for His blessing. His only confidence was the word that the LORD had spoken to Him at Bethel. Upon this basis alone could he say, “I will not let You go unless You bless me!”

<sup>112</sup> It seems that Jacob bore that physical infirmity for the rest of his days. Sometimes it takes drastic affliction to bring us to the place where knowing God and His blessing is the only thing that matters. But no one who is taken there ever regrets the process!

the father of Shechem, the plot of ground where he pitched his tent. There he set up an altar and called it El Elohe Israel.

Jacob symbolically bought some land in Canaan as a place of worship. And what does 'El Elohe Israel' mean? 'Mighty is the God of Israel'. AT LAST, THE LORD IS THE GOD OF JACOB!!!

He had finally arrived not only in Canaan, but also at that PLACE of wonder-filled assurance—to which he, as the LORD'S covenant partner desperately needed to come!

### **trouble at Shechem**

Although Jacob now enjoyed a true covenant relationship with the LORD, that didn't mean that the way ahead was to be smooth. It never is for any of the people of God. The world, the flesh and the devil usually see to that!

Genesis 34:1–4

Now Dinah, the daughter Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land. When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of that area, saw her, he took her and raped her. His heart was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob; he loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. And Shechem said to his father Hamor, "Get me this young woman as my wife."

Jacob and his sons were offered anything they wanted in exchange for their permission for Dinah to marry Shechem. They were enthusiastically invited to settle in that place and intermarry with the Hivites.<sup>113</sup>

The sons of Jacob pretended to wholeheartedly respond to the proposal, but they insisted that they could never become one people with those who were uncircumcised; each man would have to undergo that procedure. Because the Hivites were keen to be aligned with such a prosperous community they agreed to the condition.

However, when all the men of the city were still in pain from their circumcision, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, put all the men to death with the sword. Then with their brothers they looted the city and carried off the women and children.

Jacob was distraught. Not only because of their, uncalled for brutality, but also, because these two vengeful sons had virtually guaranteed disaster for their family. The peoples of the land would almost certainly join together in hostility against them.

The event did, though, have one positive effect. The LORD told Jacob to go to Bethel, where He had appeared to him those many years before. So Jacob commanded his whole household to get rid of all their foreign gods and prepare themselves for a time of worship and sacrifice at Bethel.<sup>114</sup> The result was God's merciful protection of them in spite of what had happened.

Genesis 35:5b

The terror of God fell on the towns all around them so that no one pursued them.

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<sup>113</sup> Unfortunately, for some reason, Jacob seems to have retreated into the background throughout the negotiations that followed, leaving the matter in his son's hands. Over the years, such weakness of character continued to manifest itself from time to time.

<sup>114</sup> Even with all that the LORD had done for him, Jacob had been slow to deal with the presence of idols among his family. It took this drastic situation to move him to action. And it is significant that it was under the oak at Shechem (where Abraham had received the first promise of the land of Canaan) that Jacob had them purify themselves of their idolatry before going to Bethel, where the LORD had first appeared to him and affirmed him as heir of the promise made to Abraham and Isaac.



However, that hideous act of Simeon and Levi was not forgotten. On his death bed Jacob finally spoke his mind. They received cursing rather than blessing.

Genesis 49:5–7

Simeon and Levi are brothers—their swords are weapons of violence.  
Let me not enter their council, let me not join their assembly, for they have killed men in their anger and hamstrung oxen as they pleased.  
Cursed be their anger so fierce, and their fury so cruel!  
I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel.<sup>115</sup>

### **confirmation at Bethel**

At Bethel the LORD proclaimed Himself to be ‘God Almighty’ (Genesis 35:11)<sup>116</sup> and reaffirmed to Jacob His promise of many descendants and inheritance of the land.

Genesis 35:13

Then God went up from him at the place where He had talked with him.  
After speaking to Jacob the LORD ‘went up from him’. That is, He left him for a substantial period of time without communication. It was up to Jacob now to live by the word he had received until the next phase of God’s purpose was made known.  
While journeying on from Bethel, Rachel died giving birth to a son named Benjamin. So Jacob now had twelve sons, who were to become the twelve tribes of Israel. In the order of their birth: Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah (from Leah); Dan and Naphtali (from Rachel’s servant Bilhah); Gad and Asher (from Leah’s servant Zilpah); Issachar and Zebulun (from Leah); Joseph and Benjamin (from Rachael).<sup>117</sup>

After Jacob had returned to his father at Hebron, Isaac died and was buried with his father Abraham.

The rest of our account of the patriarchs will now focus upon Jacob’s eleventh son, Joseph. He was the one who had a special place in Jacob’s heart—born as the first child of his now departed sweetheart, Rachel.

### **Joseph, the 4<sup>th</sup> great character of Genesis 12–50**

When Joseph was seventeen Jacob made a multi-coloured, full-length robe for him. This, with the many other obvious signs of his father’s affection as well as his own tendency to tell Jacob of their corrupt behaviour, caused his brothers to hate him bitterly.

To make matters worse, Joseph told them of two dreams he had, which portrayed him as their ruler. God’s servants—chosen by grace—can have some annoying characteristics! But the dreams he told were from God and were to be fulfilled in the most amazing way.

Genesis 37:6–11

[Joseph said to his brothers], “Listen to this dream I had: We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it.” His brothers

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<sup>115</sup> The tribes of both Simeon and Levi did, in fact, have no territory of their own when the nation of Israel finally possessed the land.

<sup>116</sup> As He had done for Abraham in 17:1 and as Isaac had declared Him to be in 28:3.

<sup>117</sup> Although Reuben was the firstborn, because of his despicable action of sleeping with Bilhah—his father’s concubine—he was stripped of that privilege as Jacob spoke on his deathbed.

said to him, “Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?” And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. “Listen,” he said, “I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, “What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to you?” His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

### **eliminated by his brothers**

Later, Jacob’s oldest ten sons were grazing his flocks near Shechem where after the rape of their sister Dinah they had caused such trouble, and Jacob sent Joseph off to check on how they were.

Seeing Joseph approach, they plotted to kill the ‘dreamer’. But in the end—at Judah’s insistence—they decided to sell him to Ishmaelite traders who were on their way to Egypt.

Dipping his ‘smart robe’ in goat’s blood, they returned to tell their father of his ‘tragic death’, apparently by some ferocious animal. Jacob was, of course, totally devastated by the news.

### **the blessing of the LORD in Egypt in the midst of suffering**

In Egypt Joseph was sold to Potiphar, one of the Pharaoh’s officials. God gave Joseph success in all he did, and Potiphar was so impressed that he made him his steward.

Genesis 39:5a–6b

From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph ... With Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything.

But complexity soon came into the picture. Potiphar’s wife was attracted to this well-built, handsome, young man, and tried to seduce him. Day after day he refused her approaches and wouldn’t go near her. But, humiliated, she accused him of making sexual advances toward her, and an enraged Potiphar had him imprisoned.

While in prison, however, God continued to be faithful to Joseph.

Genesis 39:21–23

The LORD was with him; He showed him kindness and granted him favour in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph’s care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

When Pharaoh’s cupbearer fell into disfavour and was imprisoned, he had a dream that Joseph correctly interpreted. Joseph predicted the cupbearer’s release and reinstatement within three days—which happened just as he had said. But though this fellow promised to mention Joseph to Pharaoh, he forgot all about him. However, the LORD had not forgotten His servant!

One night two years later, Pharaoh himself had two dreams that greatly puzzled him. Then the cupbearer remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh of his ability to interpret dreams. Joseph was made presentable and brought before Pharaoh. And after he

explained that only God could interpret his dreams, Pharaoh recounted them to him and was given the interpretation.

Genesis 41:28–33

[Joseph said]: “God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do. Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt, but seven years of famine will follow them. Then all the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten, and the famine will ravage the land. The abundance in the land will not be remembered because the famine that follows it will be so severe. The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon. And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt.”

With God-given wisdom Joseph then spelt out a plan of action for such a man to implement—and Pharaoh was so impressed that he immediately made him Prime Minister of Egypt!

And so, at thirty years of age, Joseph was given absolute authority in the land, being subject only to Pharaoh himself. His strategy during the seven years of abundance resulted in Egypt being the only land to escape famine throughout the next seven years.

### **grain supplied for Jacob and his family**

Learning there was grain in Egypt, Jacob sent his ten oldest sons to buy some in order to save the family from starvation. But young Benjamin was kept at home for the sake of his safety.

The ten brothers soon appeared before Joseph, bowing down before him. They didn't recognize him, but he did them.

Then having been accused by their now powerful brother of being spies, they explained their family situation and that Jacob and Benjamin had remained back in Canaan. Joseph then had Simeon imprisoned until they should return with their youngest brother, as proof that their story was true. He, of course, simply wanted to see his mother Rachel's other son, Benjamin.

Joseph also assured them of the fact that he was a man who *feared God*. He would honour their fulfillment of his demand by providing more grain for them on their return.

When they arrived back in Canaan, Jacob was horrified at the request to send Benjamin to Egypt and refused to entertain the thought of it. He could not risk losing Rachel's only other son and the unbearable grief it would bring him.

However, after their supply of grain had run out, Jacob finally agreed to send Benjamin back with them—swayed by Judah's pledge to take full responsibility for his young brother's safety. Being referred to as 'Israel' in Genesis 43:11, he committed Benjamin and his whole household into the hands of 'God Almighty'.

On their arrival in Egypt Joseph was deeply moved at the sight of Benjamin. He then provided a feast for his eleven brothers seating them in order of age, with Benjamin receiving the largest share.

### **Joseph makes himself known—and the family reunited under his care in Egypt**

Later, Joseph caused his brothers great trauma by setting up a situation where it appeared that Benjamin would become his slave. But after Judah's heart-rending

portrayal of his father's grief if Benjamin didn't return, Joseph at last could bear it all no longer. With loud crying and tears he revealed himself to his brothers.

They, of course, were terrified. But they had no cause to fear. Although Joseph had obviously enjoyed seeing his treacherous brothers briefly squirming under his power, this was short-lived. By God's grace Joseph's years of suffering had not embittered him. Rather, through them the LORD had revealed His unfailing covenant love and faithfulness—bringing him to faith and humility. And in that moment, seeing clearly the LORD'S purpose in all that had happened, he responded kindly to them:

Genesis 45:5a, 14–15

“Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing or reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God ... Now hurry back to my father and say to him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay. You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. I will provide for you there’ ” ... Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him weeping. And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

At last the sons of Israel were united—which is what the LORD desires in every age for His covenant people. When they returned home with the news of all that had happened, ‘the spirit of their father Jacob revived’!

Genesis 46:1–4a

So Israel set out with all that was his, and when he reached Beersheba [where he had been raised] he offered sacrifice to the God of his father Isaac. And God spoke to Israel in a vision at night and said, “Jacob! Jacob!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

“I am God, the God of your father,” He said, “Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again.”

In Egypt, Jacob and Joseph enjoyed a tearful reunion. And after meeting with Pharaoh Jacob and his family were settled in the best part of the land of Goshen. They were settled there because Joseph told his brothers to be sure to tell Pharaoh they were shepherds. Egyptians despised shepherds and wouldn't associate with them. This would enable the household to remain separate from the idolatry of the Egyptian nation.

We may say that in all of Joseph's sufferings and ultimate exaltation he foreshadowed the One who was to come. In fact, Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath Paneah, which means ‘redeemer of the world and preserver of life’!

### **Jacob comes to the end of his life —speaking of the future**

After seventeen years, as Jacob was on his deathbed he honoured Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh as his own. With prophetic insight he blessed Ephraim as the firstborn, even though he was the younger of the two. Ephraim's descendants in fact went on to become a significant tribe within Israel. And from his line came Joshua,

whom we will see, God raised up over 400 years later to lead His people into the land He had promised.

Then Jacob blessed Joseph, focusing upon the future of Ephraim and Manasseh.

Genesis 48:15b–16

“May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked faithfully, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the Angel who has delivered me from all harm—may He bless these boys. May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly on the earth.”

Jacob then spoke prophetically over his twelve sons.

Of much significance to our Story is the blessing he gave to Judah, one of Leah’s sons. Judah was certainly not without blemish within the family. He had married a Canaanite woman and later treated his daughter-in-law shamefully. However, he did come to recognize his sin against her, saying, “She is more righteous than I” (Genesis 38:1–26).

The blessing Judah received affirmed him as Jacob’s firstborn son in place of Reuben. It also announced that the tribe of *Judah* would be the one through whom the Messiah would come. This would be the case even though Judah’s heir—Perez—was born out of his own injustice and immorality. The ‘godly line’ always proceeded upon the basis of grace alone!<sup>118</sup>

Genesis 49:10

[Jacob declared,] “The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until [the coming of the Rest-Giver to whom tribute belongs] and the obedience of the nations is His.”

In the midst of blessing his sons, Jacob cried out, “I look for your deliverance, LORD” (Genesis 49:18). Having spoken of the Redeemer-King who was to come, he was filled with an expectation of the LORD’S mighty, liberating work!

When Jacob died Joseph and his brothers buried him—according to his request—with his fathers in Canaan.

### **the redemptive process continues**

And so we leave the account of the *patriarchs* with Israel in Egypt, enjoying the favour of Pharaoh.

But as indicated earlier this favorable situation was not to remain. God had a purpose by which He would greatly expand His people and ultimately bring them into the land He had promised.

He would do this, however, in a way that dramatically revealed His goodness, mercy and grace. Through that action, Israel—and all others—would have a powerful insight into the incredible nature of divine redemption.

In the next section we will not only see God’s amazing redemptive activity on Israel’s behalf, but also, the tremendously significant *calling* they received. They were to be a nation that would foreshadow and prepare the way for the One who would accomplish that glorious liberation we have been speaking of—on behalf of all nations!

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<sup>118</sup> See Ruth 4:12.

the LORD'S covenant faithfulness in working out  
His 'place-centred, holy purpose' during the time of:

- **the Exodus** — *Israel redeemed & Moses mediates at Mt. Sinai*  
(freed from awful oppression in Egypt & consecrated as a holy  
priest-nation, receiving divine wisdom in the covenant gifts of  
the law & tabernacle worship; rebelling, then made to wander)

In the opening verses of the book of Exodus we read of the sad and desperate situation  
in which Israel found itself in the years after Joseph and his brothers had died.

### **a people oppressed**

All that had been foretold to Abraham of Israel's future suffering was now to unfold.

Exodus 1:7–14a

The Israelites were exceedingly fruitful; they multiplied greatly, increased in numbers and became so numerous that the land was filled with them. Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. "Look," he said to his people, "the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country." So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labour, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly. They made their lives bitter with harsh labour in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields.

This awful oppression continued for generation after generation, but the people of Israel kept on multiplying. Then after every attempt to prevent their growth had come to nothing, the current Pharaoh finally decided to take cruel and decisive action.

Exodus 1:22

Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the [River] Nile, but let every girl live."

### **the birth and deliverance of Moses**

It was in the midst of this violent and callous campaign that Moses, the next major character in our Story, appears.

Exodus 2:1–10

Now a man of the house of Levi married a Levite woman, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the river to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it. She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This is one of the Hebrew babies," she said.

Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?"

“Yes, go,” she answered. And the girl went and got the baby’s mother. Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you.” So the woman took the baby and nursed him. When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh’s daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, “I drew him out of the water.” [‘Moses’ sounds like the Hebrew word for ‘draw out’].

### **Moses reacting to his people’s pain —and having to flee**

Within Pharaoh’s household Moses grew up into a well-educated and capable man. But at forty years of age he was very much burdened by Israel’s plight.

Exodus 2:11–15

One day ... he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labour. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Glancing this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, “Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?” The man said, “Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moses was afraid and thought, “What I did must have become known.”

When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian.

Moses rightly felt the predicament of his people, but he was yet to learn the major lesson of his life. It would not be by the strength of his own human powers that Israel’s deliverance would come.

### **the One who ‘remembers’ His covenant appears to Moses in Midian**

Meanwhile, the Israelites groaning in their slavery, cried out to God. He heard them and ‘remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob’. That is, He determined that now was the time to fulfill what He had promised.

Having fled to Midian, Moses married Zipporah the daughter of Jethro, a Midianite priest. Then, one day forty years later as he was tending his father-in-law’s flocks, he saw a bush that was on fire that did not burn up.

Exodus 3:3a, 4a, 9b, 12, 14–15

Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight.” ...

God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!”

And Moses said, “Here I am.”

“Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” Then He said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. ...

“I have indeed seen the misery of My people in Egypt ... So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey ... So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring My people the Israelites out of Egypt ... I will be with you ... When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”

Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘what is His name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you’.”

By now Israel had known 400 long years of slavery. But the LORD was about to make Himself known to His people as ‘I AM’: THE ONE TRUE, ALWAYS ACTING, UNCHANGING GOD OF ALL HISTORY—THE ONE WHO NEVER CEASES TO BE FAITHFUL TO HIS EVERLASTING COVENANT!!!

### **the LORD reveals His mighty power and divine authority**

Moses was no longer the confident man he once was. But although extremely reluctant at first—pleading with the LORD to send someone else—he obeyed and went back to Egypt. He took with him a staff, by which he would be enabled to perform certain signs before Pharaoh. And as a concession to his lack of confidence as a speaker, the LORD sent his brother Aaron along with him to talk to Pharaoh on his behalf if necessary.

Exodus 6:5–9

[God said to Moses,] “I have heard the groaning of the Israelites whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered My covenant.”

“Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as My own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you into the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD.’”

Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and hard labour.

The people were so downcast and embittered through their suffering that faith was far from them. Nevertheless, through Moses the LORD successively brought ten awesome plagues upon the land of Egypt. On each occasion Pharaoh was commanded to let the people go that they may rest from their labour for three days and worship the LORD in the wilderness.

But throughout the first nine of these plagues, Pharaoh, in arrogant pride and hardness of heart, would not yield to the LORD’S supreme authority and obey His command. Pharaoh’s heart had, actually, been hardened by God (Exodus 10:1–2).

Exodus 11:9

The LORD had said to Moses, “Pharaoh will refuse to listen to you—so that My wonders may be multiplied in Egypt.”

Every one of the plagues was a direct assault on the power of the various Egyptian gods. For example, when darkness came over the land for three days it showed the LORD’S power over Ra, the sun god.

Pharaoh himself was worshipped as a divine god-king—one who was able to maintain order and harmony within the creation. But the ten plagues threw the whole land into complete chaos! In this the LORD showed that He alone is God and exposed the impotence of Pharaoh and the other gods in which Egypt trusted. He said:



Exodus 12:12b

“I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD.”

The LORD was not about to merely liberate His people from physical slavery, but also from the oppression of a whole system of dark, spiritual power. They would be delivered from an environment of false worship into the joy of knowing the Living and True God!

### **the Passover Feast, a tenth plague —and deliverance at last!**

Then, through Moses, the LORD announced to Pharaoh that there would be one more plague—so devastating that it would finally change his mind. Death was to come to every firstborn son in Egypt, including the son of Pharaoh. Even the firstborn of the cattle would die.

Before that terrible night the LORD commanded each Israelite household to take a year old, male lamb without any defect. Then at twilight they were to slaughter this animal and sprinkle its blood on the sides and tops of the doorframes of their house.

Exodus 12:13b–14

[He said,] “When I see the blood I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt. This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD—a lasting ordinance.”

The lamb was to be roasted over the fire and eaten that very evening, along with bitter herbs and bread made without yeast. It was a meal that they were to ‘eat in haste’, dressed ready to travel, because immediately after the events of this night they would be delivered from their dreadful enslavement.

Then the tenth plague came upon the land.

Exodus 12:29a–30b

At midnight, the LORD stuck down all the firstborn of Egypt ... There was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead.

Pharaoh finally gave in.

Exodus 12:31–32b

During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the LORD as you requested ... And also bless me.”

The ‘god’ Pharaoh asking for the LORD’S blessing!

Exodus 12:33–36

The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country. “For otherwise,” they said, “we will all die!” So the people took their dough before the yeast was added, and carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing. The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. The LORD had made the Egyptians favourably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians.

Numbers 33:3–4

They marched out defiantly in full view of all the Egyptians ... for the LORD had brought judgment on all their gods.

What a sight it must have been to see this vast number of people—from the very old to the very young—with great joy and awe virtually striding into freedom!

Psalm 106:8

He saved them for His name's sake, to make His mighty power known.

### **crossing the sea—and final triumph over their dark oppressor**

Then the LORD led the people of Israel towards the Red Sea.

Exodus 13:21

By day [He] went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light.

Moses was then told to turn the people back a little way to give the impression that they were wandering around in confusion, hemmed in between the desert and the sea—for Pharaoh had changed his mind.

Exodus 14:4a

[The LORD said,] “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for Myself through Pharaoh and all His army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD.”

So Pharaoh came after them with all his chariots, horsemen and troops, catching up to them as they were camped by the sea.

Exodus 14:10b–14

[The Israelites] were terrified and cried out to the LORD. They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians’? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!”

Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.”

As usual, it was when all seemed *hopeless* that the LORD acted mightily on behalf of His chosen ones.

The LORD kept the Egyptian army from coming upon the Israelites by causing the pillar of cloud (indicating His presence) to come between them—enshrouding the Egyptians in darkness throughout the night but providing light for the people of Israel. And then:

Exodus 14:21–22

[At the LORD’S command] Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

The Egyptian army was incited to pursue them. Then later the LORD, having thrown the attackers into confusion at daybreak, commanded Moses—now on the other side with his people—to stretch out his hand again. When he did the waters flowed back over the Egyptians. Pharaoh’s entire army was swallowed up; not one of them survived. It was a total victory for the LORD’S covenant people! Daybreak was, indeed, the dawning of a new day for them.

This whole event, of course, had a mighty effect upon them—one that would need to be recalled again and again.

Exodus 14:31

When the Israelites saw the great power of the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in Him and in Moses His servant.

Then Moses and his sister Miriam led all the people in a great song of worship and praise!

Exodus 15:1b–2b, 3a, 6a–7a, 11, 13–14a, 18

“I will sing to the LORD  
for He is highly exalted ...  
He is my God and I will praise Him,  
my father’s God, and I will exalt Him.  
The LORD is a Warrior ...  
Your right hand, LORD, was majestic in power ...  
In the greatness of Your majesty  
You threw down those who opposed You ...  
Who among the gods is like You, LORD?  
Who is like You—majestic in holiness,  
awesome in glory, working wonders? ...  
In Your unfailing love you will lead  
the people You have redeemed.  
In Your strength You will guide them  
to Your holy dwelling.  
The nations will hear and tremble ...  
The LORD reigns for ever and ever.”

### **an eight-week journey to Mount Sinai—the LORD making faithful provision for His people**

From the Red Sea they travelled into the desert, heading for the mountain on which the LORD had first appeared to Moses. During this time, the LORD gave both the people and Moses a taste of the kind of faithfulness they could always expect from Him.

#### **provision of water at Marah and Elim**

For the first three days of their journey they found no water. Then when they did come upon some at Marah they couldn’t drink it because it was bitter—and the people ‘grumbled against Moses’. He cried out to the LORD and was directed to throw a piece of wood into the water—and it was made sweet.

Exodus 15:25–26

There the LORD issued a ruling and instruction for them and put them to the test. He said, “If you listen carefully to the LORD your God and do what is right in His eyes, if you pay attention to His commands and keep all His decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD who heals you.”

He wanted them to know that they were being led by One whose desire was not to afflict them but to heal them!

Exodus 15:27

Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water.

A spring for each tribe of Israel! Also of symbolic significance is that later, seventy faithful elders—out of the many others—would be chosen to represent the people in the LORD'S presence on the summit of Mount Sinai.

### **provision of manna and quail**

Halfway between Elim and Mount Sinai they entered the Desert of Sin. Again, Israel gave way to a complaining spirit.

Exodus 16:2–3

In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the LORD'S hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this whole community to death."

Moses and Aaron reminded the people that they were not grumbling against them, but the LORD.

Then the LORD told Moses that He would 'rain down bread from heaven' for the people. From then on they were to go out each morning and gather enough for that day. None was to be saved for the next day, for each morning would bring a fresh supply.

On the sixth day, however, they were to gather enough for the seventh. On the seventh day none would be provided. What was to be eaten on that day had to be prepared the day before, for the seventh day was to be 'a day of sabbath rest, a holy sabbath to the LORD'. They were no longer the oppressed slaves of Pharaoh—labouring seven days a week—but a people who could enjoy rest and refreshment before their Maker!

Exodus 16:11–14

The LORD said to Moses, "I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.'"

That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When it was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor.

The people called the flakes 'manna', which means 'what is it?' For they had never seen anything like it before. It was 'white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey'. He had given them 'the grain of heaven' (Psalm 78:24)!

However, the people were not content to take the LORD at His word. Some went out to collect manna on the seventh day but found nothing. And during the week others tried to save some of it for the next day but found that it was 'full of maggots and began to smell'. In His jealousy for the LORD'S honour Moses was rightly angry with them because of their distrust and disobedience.

Exodus 16:35

The Israelites ate manna forty years ... until they reached the border of Canaan.

### **water from a rock at Rephidim**

From the desert of Sin they travelled from place to place as the LORD led them until they arrived at Rephidim—located on the long, flat stretch of land that led up to Mount Sinai. But there was no water there.

Exodus 17:2–4

So they quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink."

Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?" ...

[Later, they] grumbled against Moses, [saying], “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?”

Then Moses cried out to the LORD, “What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.”

The people’s complaint had now clearly taken on a threatening tone. But Moses was not left to himself. The LORD told him to take the staff with which he had been enabled to perform signs in Egypt, and to go to a large crag of rocks in the area. There—in the LORD’S presence and in sight of far-off Mount Sinai—Moses, together with some of the elders of Israel, was to witness God’s provision for His people. He was to strike a rock with his staff and watch water bubble up out of it to quench their thirst.

Psalms 78:16

[The LORD] brought streams out of a rocky crag and made water flow down like rivers.

Exodus 17:7

[Moses] called the place Massah [which means ‘testing’] and Meribah [which means ‘quarreling’] because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

### **victory over the attacking Amalekites**

While Israel was encamped at Rephidim an army of the Amalekites suddenly came upon them. The Amalekite nation lived in the area of Canaan later to be occupied by the tribe of Judah (from whom the Messiah would come). This attack would, no doubt, have been incited by dark spiritual powers, seeking to prevent the people of Israel from reaching their goal in the land promised to them.

Exodus 17:9–13

Moses said to Joshua, “Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.”

So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses’ hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one of the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.

What an amazing provision this was for Israel! Not just the victory, itself, but the way it was gained. There, was Moses on the hill with his staff raised high, affirming the LORD’S mighty deeds done on their behalf in Egypt—and believing that He would be faithful to His promise to bring them safely into their inheritance. It was only while Moses’ staff was raised in faith that Israel prevailed over their enemy.

Here, right from the start, the LORD’S people were being shown the *only* way they could overcome any obstacle that was before them. In obedient faith they must *continuously* remember what the LORD had promised and had already done—and continuously depend upon Him for His power on their behalf.

This was so important that the LORD told Moses to write on a scroll an account of the whole event. And he was to personally spell out the nature of the victory to Joshua, who would eventually lead the people into Canaan. He was to emphasize it to Joshua in such a way that it would be ‘set in his ears’!

On that day the LORD also declared that—as Israel’s great Warrior-King—He would ‘be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation’, eventually bringing them to nothing as a nation—because their hands ‘were lifted up against the throne of the LORD’.

This event was then concluded by worship of the One who would always *rightly* be the exalted focus of His people’s confidence: the One who would lead them into every battle!

Exodus 17:15

Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner.

### **a merciful provision for Moses in his ongoing leadership**

At this time Moses’ father-in-law Jethro, the Midianite priest, came with Moses’ wife and two sons, and he rejoiced in all that the LORD had done for Israel—acknowledging His supremacy over all.

The next day Jethro watched Moses being surrounded by people from morning to night, as he dealt with their disputes and informed them of God’s decrees and instructions.

Exodus 18:17–19a

[Jethro said], “What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. Listen to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you.”

He then explained in some detail how Moses could appoint godly men to share the load.

Exodus 18:23

[He said], “If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied.”

Moses saw this as the LORD’S will and did just as Jethro suggested. It was, indeed, a merciful provision from the LORD for His servant as he faced the, awesome task, of leading this vast number of people through all that was before them.

## **arrival at Mt Sinai—and an announcement from the LORD to Israel**

After the events at Rephidim they finally came to Mount Sinai. When the people had set up camp in front of it, Moses went up into God’s presence and received a stunning message for the liberated nation.

Exodus 19:3–6

The LORD called to him from the mountain and said, “This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did in Egypt, and how I carried you on eagle’s wings and brought you to Myself. Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession. [Because] the whole earth is Mine, you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”

Having assembled the elders and the people, Moses ‘set before them all the words the LORD had commanded him to speak’.

Exodus 19:8

The people all responded together, “We will do everything the LORD has said.”

What a defining moment this was for Israel. They were to be the LORD'S treasured possession, a priestly people and a nation wholly set apart to worship and serve their Redeemer! And it was because the whole earth belonged to the LORD that Israel was to serve Him in this way. HIS PURPOSE FOR ALL THE NATIONS WOULD BE FULFILLED THROUGH THEM!!!

He had carried them to this place 'on eagles wings'. When an eagle's offspring is learning to fly, it is caught on its mother's wings if it falls. This is exactly what had been happening during Israel's journey.

The LORD said, "I ... brought you to Myself." And now they were all before Him in the PLACE where He would be, specially, present to them. Here they would learn what it means to be the covenant people of God.

### **an awesome revelation of the Holy One**

When Moses returned with the people's answer, the LORD spoke to him again.

Exodus 19:9

[He said], "I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear Me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you."

Then the LORD told Moses that in two days He would reveal His presence to the people from the mountain. In preparation for this time they were to be specially consecrated. Anyone who dared to approach the mountain before the long blast of a ram's horn would be put to death—for it had been set apart as holy.

Exodus 19:16–19

On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently. As the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.

The LORD then called Moses to come to Him and told him to warn the people again not to touch the mountain or He would 'break out against them'. They would be His 'treasured possession' and would come to know and delight in His presence among them—BUT THEY COULD APPROACH HIM ONLY IN THE WAY THAT HE WOULD PROVIDE FOR THEM!!!

### **God gives His people the Ten Commandments**

In the midst of that awesome setting, God gave Israel the Ten Commandments, or Ten Words. And He introduced these in a most wonderful way.

Exodus 20:2

[He said,] "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

The One who was about to reveal His law was He who had already made known to them His great goodness, mercy and grace! It was the *lover* of His people who was instructing them. They had been brought out of bondage by their Redeemer to *live in freedom*, according to His way!

We will notice that this instruction is made up mostly of *prohibitions*. Like the prohibition given to Adam in the garden, they were *covenant* prohibitions—designed to keep Israel from doing what was against their created nature as the image of God.

These ten words, then, spell out Israel's *covenant responsibilities* as the LORD'S holy people. And they have to do with two things: love for God (the first four) and love for others (the next six). Here, we will simply summarize them briefly.

- 1st word: the LORD must be their only God;
- 2nd word: they must not make anything to represent the LORD, and give it the worship that belongs only to Him;
- 3rd word: they must not use the LORD'S name in a wrong or empty way;
- 4th word: they must keep the Sabbath as a holy day of rest—set apart for Him;
- 5th word: they must treat their father and mother with honour and respect;
- 6th word: they must not commit murder, but recognize all people as created in the image of God;
- 7th word: they must not have sexual union outside of the holy gift of marriage;
- 8th word: they must not steal but recognize the ownership that God has given to others;
- 9th word: they must not speak falsely about another person but be honest and just in what they say;
- 10th word: they must not give in to an envious, greedy and grasping mind, but be content with the LORD'S provision.

### **Israel's response to all they had seen and heard**

When the people had experienced the LORD'S awesome majesty in the thunder, lightning and violent trembling of the ground, and heard His voice coming from the blazing fire at the top of the mountain, they shook with fear and stayed at a distance—pleading to have God not speak directly to them again.

Deuteronomy 5:27

[They said to Moses,] "Go near and listen to all that the LORD our God says. Then tell us whatever the LORD our God tells you. We will listen and obey."

The LORD'S response to their words reveals something of His yearning desire for Israel.

Deuteronomy 5:28–29

[He said to Moses,] "I have heard what this people said to you. Everything they said was good. Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear Me and keep all My commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!"

### **further instruction for their future life as God's people**

Moses then entered into the 'thick darkness where God was' and received more laws to make known to the people. These laws had to do with all kinds of practical areas of living, which filled out the requirements of the Ten Commandments for Israel as a nation. To keep these in the land they were to possess would mark them out as a holy people: different to all others and devoted entirely to the LORD.



Psalm 147:19–20a

He has revealed His word to Jacob, His laws and decrees to Israel. He has done this for no other nation.

Isaiah 42:21

It pleased the LORD for the sake of His righteousness to make His law great and glorious.

They were also to be told that the LORD would send an angel ahead of them on their journey. If they listened carefully to the angel and did not rebel then the LORD would progressively give them the whole land of Canaan—driving out the various idolatrous nations dwelling in it. They were not to make any agreements with these nations, because to do so would open them up to the corrupting influence of false worship.

Then Moses was instructed to bring up onto the mountain Aaron, Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel, to worship the LORD. They were to do this at a distance. Only Moses could go directly into the LORD'S presence.

With these instructions having been given for Israel to receive, the leaders needed to know that their own responsibility, above all else, was to be worshippers of the Holy One!

Exodus 24:3–4

When Moses went and told the people all the LORD'S words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the LORD has said we will do." Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said.

Here we have another example of the way God used the covenants of that time to express the outworking of His own. In those days a covenant was often set in place through a 'go-between' or 'mediator'. Moses was in a very real way the mediator of God's covenant with Israel.

### **the LORD consecrates Israel as His redeemed covenant people**

Early the next morning Moses built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Then burnt offerings and fellowship offerings were made to the LORD.

This momentous occasion was both a confirmation of the covenant God had made with Abraham and—in reality—the making of *another covenant of grace* with Israel as a redeemed nation.

Exodus 24:6–8

Moses took half the blood [of these offerings] and put it in bowls, and the other half he splashed against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey."

Moses then took the blood and sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

This 'blood of the covenant' sprinkled on Israel consecrated them as His redeemed people—those freely forgiven and brought into a bonded union of love with the LORD

their God. Their obedience would not maintain the covenant, but it would secure for them its blessings and keep them from its cursings.<sup>119</sup>

Then this covenant relationship between the LORD and Israel was celebrated in a most amazing way. Those who had previously gone up to worship on the mountain at a distance—Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the seventy elders—went up with Moses into the LORD’S presence. There they saw Him—at least a glorious vision of Him—and ate and drank as representatives of the whole nation. WHAT A BEAUTIFUL SIGN OF GOD’S DESIRE FOR FELLOWSHIP WITH HIS PEOPLE!!!

Later the LORD told Moses to come and stay with Him on the mountain so that he could be given tablets of stone with the Ten Words written on them. Here we have yet another example of how God used the imagery of human covenants of the day: When a stronger king made a covenant with a weaker one, the agreed obligations were inscribed in stone or clay. The LORD, Israel’s great King, was about to set before His kingly (royal) people the responsibilities that His covenant involved.

Moses was also to receive detailed instructions regarding Israel’s *worship*. Joshua went part of the way with him and waited there for his return. As Israel’s future leader, it was important for Joshua to have a part in this highly significant event. Moses remained in God’s glorious presence for forty days.

### **the worst thing imaginable—the tragedy of the golden calf!**

After all that Israel had seen and heard, what was now to take place among them during Moses’ time on the mountain was unthinkable. It was, however, tragically to be a continuing tendency among the LORD’S people over the centuries. The world, the flesh and the devil would always be conspiring to draw those called to be a holy nation into what was detestable: false worship.

With Moses’ forty-day absence, the people became unsettled.

Exodus 32:1b

They gathered around Aaron and said, “Come make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.”

How different these words are from the ones we last heard from this redeemed nation. At that time, they responded to all they’d experienced by saying, “We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.” But now, they wanted ‘gods’ to go before them!

Aaron had previously seen the threatening nature of the people’s demands. They were a vast multitude that had shown how easily they could be stirred to fierce anger. So, expressing shameful moral weakness, Aaron gave in to their wicked request, telling them all to bring their gold earrings to him. And from these he cast an idol in the shape of a calf.

Exodus 32:4b

Then they said, “These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.”

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<sup>119</sup> In the covenants of those days the sprinkling of blood also spoke of the judgment that would come upon any who violated the covenant’s requirements. However, within the LORD’S covenant with Israel, He would make provision for their forgiveness through the sacrificial offerings to be described later by Moses: that system which ultimately would be fulfilled by the Sacrifice of the One who was to come as the Saviour of the world!

In Egypt there were various bull gods that were worshipped. During Israel's many years spent within that idolatrous society they would have been very familiar with such signs of spiritual power. The calf would represent a strong young bull, up to three years old. Seeing the feverish excitement of the people, Aaron then appears to have tried to salvage the situation a little by turning their minds towards the LORD.

Exodus 32:5–6a

When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD." So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings.

These were the very offerings involved in their consecration as a holy people just weeks before! 'They sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry'. How very different this was to the meal their leaders had enjoyed with the LORD on the mountain, after their consecration.

Exodus 32:7–10

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.'

"I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave Me alone that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation."

In speaking this way the LORD was showing His rightful wrath and indignation at Israel's wickedness, and was *inciting* His servant to intercede on their behalf and on the basis of His covenant. Moses then responded as a true representative of his people: their covenant mediator. Jealous for the LORD'S honour in the eyes of the Egyptians who would be hoping to see Israel come to nothing, he reminded Him of His covenant promises. The Faithful One then mercifully relented, and that entire generation was not wiped out.

### **Moses' return—& a fiery response**

Moses went back down the mountain with the covenant law in his hands, which God Himself had engraved front and back on two stone tablets. As he and Joshua made their way towards the camp they heard the noise of the people's revelry. It was so frantic that Joshua thought they'd been attacked and were at war. This however, was not the sound of a people battling for victory, but rather the riotous din of those who had plunged themselves into a horrible moral defeat.

Exodus 32:19

When Moses ... saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain.

For a covenant mediator in that day to smash the record of the covenant was for him to proclaim that the covenant had been *broken*. In this act Moses was declaring that Israel's situation was extremely serious—and they should to know it!

Exodus 32:20

And he took the calf they had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it.

There was to be nothing left of this detestable thing. The only remains would be in the urine of Israel!

Moses then called a desperately miserable Aaron to account for his unfaithfulness as a leader of the nation. Aaron pleaded with Moses to recall the nature of the people, and spoke of how things had got out of control. He lamented that before he knew it he had made the calf! He was without excuse, of course, but Satan was, clearly, only too ready to suggest to him in his panic, such a solution to the people's demand.

When he had seen Israel running wild, Moses—jealous for the LORD'S name—stood at the entrance of the camp and said, "Whoever is for the LORD, come to me." And all the Levites—those who were members of Aaron's tribe—rallied to him.

Exodus 32:27–29

Then he said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel says: 'Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbour.' " The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died. Then Moses said, "You have been set apart to the LORD today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and He has blessed you this day."

Israel needed to understand that false worship is worthy of the severest judgment. They had themselves tasted what the idolatrous nations around them deserved. Because of the Levites' God-inspired faithfulness on that day, however, their tribe was set apart for a special task among His holy people—as we will soon see.

### **Moses before the LORD on Israel's behalf —this time without success**

The next day Moses told Israel that although they had committed a great sin, he would go up to the LORD and seek forgiveness for them.

Exodus 32:31a–32

So Moses went back to the LORD and said, "Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! ... But now, please forgive their sin—but if not blot me out of the book You have written."

How Moses had come to love his people! But this was not to be a time for unbridled mercy. The LORD replied to him, "Whoever has sinned against Me I will blot out of My book." He then told Moses that the people *would* be punished for their sin—and, at His chosen moment, He struck them with a plague.

The LORD'S people had to know that forgiveness was never lightly gained.

### **provision of a mobile sanctuary: a holy *place* where God's special presence would dwell—the ongoing reality of Mount Sinai for a people on the move**

Israel was given two gifts at Mount Sinai, which were to be at the heart of their life together as God's chosen and set apart nation. The first, as we have already seen, was the *law*—clear and detailed instruction of what His will and way for them was, as a holy people.

The second was very much linked with the law—the *tabernacle*, or mobile sanctuary of the LORD and the *worship* it provided. It was in the tabernacle that God's *special presence* would dwell with His people, just as it did in the Garden of Eden in the beginning, symbolically at Bethel through Jacob's vision, and at that present time on Mount Sinai.

Israel had itself been made a priestly nation. But—as alluded to already—within the wider community there was one tribe that was set apart as a particular, priestly community: the tribe of Levi. Through the function of this priesthood, the people would always be able to enjoy a wonderful system of sacrificial worship. And it was the provision of the tabernacle that made all this possible.

### **the sacrificial offerings**

Within the tabernacle the priests were to sacrifice burnt offerings for the forgiveness of sins, and fellowship, guilt and peace offerings as different expressions of Israel's covenant relationship with the LORD.

Then, once a year, Aaron—who was consecrated as High Priest—went into the Most Holy Place, the innermost part of the tabernacle. This was where the LORD had promised to be especially present to His people. It was there that Aaron would make atonement—a covering—for the sins of the whole nation throughout the previous year. The sacrifices for sin were so significant for Israel. Apart from these their conscience could never be cleansed, nor their spirit made free to truly worship the LORD. The blood of these sacrifices was His gracious provision for them. He said:

Leviticus 17:11

The life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.

The blood signified that sin and death were inseparable. The sinner's hand was placed upon the head of the animal to be sacrificed—as a statement of their rightful sense of personal identification with the beast. Of course, none of these sacrifices actually *dealt* with sin. This was later made very clear in the New Testament:

Hebrews 10:4

For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

These sacrifices were a sign that pointed forward to THE ONE TRUE SACRIFICE FOR SIN TO COME. It was the people's faith in the sign of this wonderful future reality that brought them forgiveness.

That one, true Sacrifice to come was, in fact, a glorious fulfillment of all the various sacrifices prescribed in the Old Testament. Our next study will proclaim the awesome nature of this coming Act and its *absolute finality* in regard to divine judgment upon sin: the supreme revelation of the Holy One's unfailing, covenant love and faithfulness toward humankind, His treasured image.

Also centred round the tabernacle and its sacrificial service were special days and seasons of celebration, during which the people could joyously remember all that the LORD had done for them.

### **some important distinctions: 'clean' or 'unclean', 'holy' or 'common'**

As Israel lived before God they needed to understand something that was central to their worship: Everything had to be seen as being ceremonially 'clean' or 'unclean', 'holy' or 'common'.

Whatever was *holy*—that is, set apart for worship—also had to be *clean*. Nothing could be used in the worship of the LORD unless it was both clean and holy.

This was, of course, true also for Israel. They too had to be 'ceremonially clean' in order to worship the LORD as His holy people.

What was not holy—set apart for worship—was *common*. Common things could be either clean or unclean. If something was clean and common then it could be used for anything that didn't involve worship.

But whatever was *unclean* and common would have to be completely avoided. Personal contact with anything declared in God's law to be ceremonially unclean would make the person touching it unclean—and immediately disqualify them from worship. That is, until an appropriate offering was made on their behalf by a priest to restore them to ceremonial cleanness.

However, just because something was said to be 'unclean' didn't mean that it was necessarily evil. For example, some *animals* were pronounced unclean. But these were all creatures declared in Genesis 1:31 to be 'good'. Other things, such as mildew, were unclean because they were a symbol of the spreading influence of *corruption*, which had to be avoided by Israel at all costs.

These distinctions were built into every area of the nation's daily life—teaching them what it meant to be a people of true worship in the midst of the false worship of the nations around them.<sup>120</sup>

It was the responsibility of the priests to teach the people these things.

Ezekiel 44:23

They are to teach My people the difference between the holy and the common and show them how to distinguish between the clean and the unclean.

### **the LORD'S own people—holy and blessed**

The point of all the provisions made for Israel through the tabernacle was to enable them to be *like* the LORD Himself: holy.

Having been set apart to God as His *holy people*, they were to *live* in a holy way. That is, they were to *be* all they were called to be in *doing* all they were called to do; and in this, to be separate from, different to and other than anyone or anything that would make them *less* than that!

Leviticus 19:1

The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.'"

Only through the grace of God provided in the tabernacle worship would Israel be able to fulfill their holy calling. And as they joyously embraced this grace, they were assured of His blessing upon them as His covenant people. This blessing was, in fact, to be pronounced upon them verbally by the priests.

Numbers 6:22–26

The LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make

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<sup>120</sup> Although things designated 'unclean' were not necessarily evil, there *were* particularly serious violations of God's covenant such as illicit sexual and occult practices etc. that were, in fact, evil by nature. These were not only like other unclean and 'detestable' things that brought ceremonial uncleanness and disqualified a person from worship, but were also actions that incurred the death penalty (Leviticus 20). The surrounding nations acted in these ways, but such things could have no place among God's holy people. (The serious issue regarding illicit sexual practices was that they were a denial of the holy covenantal union of a man and a woman in marriage—which was spoken of within the key concept section of this study, and will, in principle, be understood more clearly as our Story continues in Study 6).

His face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn His face towards you and give you peace.” ’ ’ ”

### **Israel now ready to move on**

In Exodus 40:34–35, we are told that when Moses had finished directing the building of the tabernacle and everything was completed according to the divine pattern, it was then overshadowed by the cloud of God’s presence—and THE WHOLE PLACE WAS FILLED WITH THE GLORY OF THE LORD!!!

With the reality of Eden and Mount Sinai now having come to this mobile sanctuary, Israel set off on its journey to the land they had been promised. The LORD—their great King—was with them, directing their every move.

Exodus 40:36b–38

Whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the LORD was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of the house of Israel in all their travels.

The great nation that the LORD promised would come from Abraham had now been formed—a nation called and equipped by Him to be like no other.

It was a nation of Hebrews, the descendants of Shem. But by the end of our Story in Study 6, it will have become A GREAT, *INTERNATIONAL NATION* THAT, ULTIMATELY, LIVES FOREVER IN HUMAN FREEDOM AND FULLNESS UNDER THE LIFE-GIVING GOVERNMENT OF ITS MAKER—IN INTIMATE COVENANT UNION WITH HIM!!!

From here on the Old Testament part of our Redemption Story will be continued in more of a summary form—although future studies will pick up other elements of it.

### **Oh Israel!—rebellious, then wandering 40 years**

After such a glorious new beginning, Israel unfortunately didn’t rise up to its calling and privilege well at all. The Book of Numbers records what happened from the time of their leaving Mount Sinai to their entrance into the land. As far as Israel is concerned, it is not a particularly wonderful tale! The rebellion and ingratitude they showed earlier became a regular part of their response.

When the time came for them to enter Canaan, representatives from each tribe were sent to explore the land. Their report forty days later was at first glowing—it was a place of incredible abundance! But then they insisted that although the land was splendid, the inhabitants were too powerful for Israel to overcome. The people were all stirred up by these men and refused to go in. Only two of the explorers, Joshua and Caleb, insisted that the LORD could be trusted to fulfill His promise—and they were almost stoned!

Because of their rebellion and unbelief the LORD declared that this present generation would not enter the land. For each of the forty days Canaan had been explored they would wander in the desert for one year. Only Joshua and Caleb and those twenty years old and younger would finally enter.

Even Moses and Aaron eventually were disqualified from entering Canaan, because later—when exasperated by Israel’s rebellion—they acted in a way that dishonoured the LORD (Numbers 20:1–13). The great privilege of being leaders in Israel was not to be taken lightly.

Throughout this time of wandering Israel continued to rebel and rightly tasted the LORD'S judgments. But, in the midst of it all, they still were partakers of His goodness, mercy and grace. Although the Book of Numbers brings a sad account of Israel's sinfulness, it is, nevertheless, a grand record of the LORD'S unfailing covenant love and faithfulness towards them.

### **now to enter—at last!**

Forty years having passed, it was time for the new generation to receive their inheritance in the land. And in preparation for this, Moses took Israel on a journey of remembrance from their time at Mount Sinai to the present, and then into the future. All this is recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy: the 'Second Law'.

To begin with, Moses reminded them of two things: the judgments they tasted through unbelief and the blessings they enjoyed when they had obeyed (chapters 1–4).

Then he spelt out for them again the law they had received (5–26). First, the *testimonies*—their moral duties: restating and expanding the Ten Commandments, and urging them not to forget how God had freed them from slavery in Egypt. Second, the *statutes*—their ceremonial duties: outlining the various sacrifices, tithes and feasts. Third, the *ordinances*—their civil and social duties: prescribing how they were to live truly and justly as God's people.

And finally, he told them how the future would hold for them either blessing or cursing, depending on whether or not they would trust and obey their Covenant-King (27–30). At this time the LORD also renewed His covenant with them (29).

In particular, Moses reminded them of the place they had in the heart of the LORD, saying:

Deuteronomy 14:1a–2

You are the children of the LORD your God ... [You] are a people holy to the LORD your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the LORD has chosen you to be His treasured possession.

All that was left for Moses to do before his death was to lay his hands on Joshua and appoint him as his successor. This he did and Joshua was 'filled with the Spirit of wisdom' (Deuteronomy 34:9).

At last the land was theirs to receive!

the LORD'S covenant faithfulness in working out

His 'place-centred, holy purpose' during the time of:

### **- the Entry, Conquest & Rest—*Joshua leads into blessing*** (eventual possession of the land promised to Abraham)

It was time now for Israel to enter Canaan and drive out its godless and idolatrous inhabitants. Every trace of idolatry was to be eliminated from this land, which was the LORD'S own possession and which He was giving to Israel. Canaan could never be a place of true worship and rest until it had been cleansed from the vile worship that dominated its peoples—with its corrupt and cruel practices.

During the time of Abraham we saw that the sin of the Amorites had 'not yet reached its full measure'. But now it had. They and others who were hostile to God and His grand covenant purpose were to finally taste the judgment that had long awaited them.

This conquest of the land of Canaan was not embarked upon at the initiative of Israel. It was in obedience to the LORD'S specific command for that time—solely for the



fulfillment of His great promise to Abraham and His redemptive plan for the nations. It cannot be seen as a blanket command for all time to ‘physically go to war’ against those who offer false worship.

Moses had led the people out of *bondage* in Egypt, but it was for Joshua to lead them into *blessing* in Canaan. They had been saved out of dreadful slavery, but their salvation would not be complete until they had finally come into their inheritance. The LORD told them that wherever they went He would give them the land (Joshua 1:2).

Like their exit from Egypt, Israel’s entrance into Canaan was miraculous. Again, the waters were parted and they passed through the River Jordan on dry ground. Israel had to know that their conquest would be achieved by dependence upon the LORD from first to last.

They weren’t to just sneak quietly into the land either, but to boldly enter it. The place where they crossed the Jordan brought them in immediately opposite the great fortress city of Jericho. What a first assignment! But God did this to show them that it would not be by their own might that the land was gained. In fact, their first great conquest was won not by *fighting* but by a *shout of faith* in the promised victory of the LORD—at which the city’s walls collapsed (Joshua 6)!

But their next attempt—the conquest of Ai, a small city nearby—was at first a failure because there was ‘sin in the camp’. The lesson was learnt. So they continued on in faith and obedience for seven years—and, in spite of some complexities, were given great success.

Joshua 21:44

The LORD gave them rest on every side, just as He had sworn to their ancestors. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hands.

Eventually they had conquered much of the territory promised to them. But Joshua was growing old and was told by the LORD to now divide the land among the tribes of Israel. After his death they were to continue their conquest by faith (which they didn’t go on to accomplish as they should have—with the ongoing frustration and temptation this created).

The land which the LORD had brought them into was the physical *place* He had freely given them according to His promise—where, through the worship He had provided, they could know the blessing of His presence and purpose for them as His people. But their ongoing enjoyment of this would be dependent upon their faithfulness to that amazing covenant of love He had established with them.

Joshua 23:14b–16

[Joshua said to them,] “You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed. But just as all the good things the LORD your God has promised you have come to you, so He will bring on you all the evil things He has threatened, until the LORD your God has destroyed you from this land He has given you. If you violate the covenant of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, the LORD’S anger will burn against you, and you will quickly perish from the good land He has given you.”

Then Joshua assembled all the tribes at Shechem—where the LORD had renewed His promise of the land to Abraham—and he led Israel in a heart-felt ceremony of covenant

renewal. There, they all strongly affirmed their desire and intention to worship the LORD alone.

Joshua's name is the Hebrew version of the name 'Jesus' meaning 'the LORD is salvation'. He was certainly a type of the Messiah to come, who was to bring His people into a glorious, eternal inheritance *in Himself*—that *Place* we will begin to hear about in Study 6!

But for now, our Story must continue.

the LORD'S covenant faithfulness in working out  
His 'place-centred, holy purpose' during the time of:

**- the Judges**—*sad cycles, & then God's gift of Samuel*  
(rest, covenant violation, judgment & deliverance—x7)

Although 'the entry and conquest' was generally a time of faith and faithfulness within Israel, things were to be very much different throughout the era of the 'Judges'. During this 350-year period Israel passed through a seven-fold cycle of rest, rebellious covenant violation, judgment and deliverance. Each deliverer whom God raised up was known as a judge.

This unfortunate period of spiritual decline was foretold by the LORD before Israel entered the land.

Deuteronomy 31:20

When I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey ... and when they eat their fill and thrive, they will turn to other gods and worship them, rejecting Me and breaking My covenant.

In their occupation of the land, Israel had failed to obey the LORD'S command to completely drive out the idolatrous nations of Canaan—and then began to reap the bitter fruits of their neglect.

Psalms 106:34–37, 39–46

They did not destroy the peoples as the LORD had commanded them, but they mingled with the nations and adopted their customs. They worshiped their idols, which became a snare to them. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons ... They defiled themselves by what they did; by their deeds they prostituted themselves.

Therefore the LORD was angry with His people and abhorred His inheritance. He gave them into the hands of the nations, and their foes ruled over them. Their enemies oppressed them and subjected them to their power.

Many times He delivered them, but they were bent on rebellion and they wasted away in their sin. But He took note of their distress when He heard their cry; for their sake He remembered His covenant and out of His great love He relented.

He caused all who held them captive to show them mercy.

It was during the time of the Judges that the lovely story of Ruth, the Moabite, is set (recorded in the book of Ruth). Although not a Hebrew, after the death of her husband she said to Naomi her mother-in-law, "Your people will be my people and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16). Having later married a man from the tribe of Judah, Ruth was, in the end, included in the genealogy of Christ (Matthew 1:5).

The last of Israel's judges was Samuel. He was not a deliverer but one who fulfilled the role of high priest in Israel and was also a mighty prophet. Although not strictly a king, he—unlike the other judges—ruled over all the tribes, virtually operating as king. In this

way he was a type of the Messiah, who would be the great Priest, Prophet and King over Israel and all the nations of the world.

the LORD'S covenant faithfulness in working out  
His 'place-centred, holy purpose' during the time of:

**- the Kingdom of Israel**—*Saul fails / the line of David begins*  
(David a man who knew the grace of God & whose throne  
was to be eternal; Solomon richly endowed with wisdom &  
building the temple, but then, a foolish oppressor of Israel)

The time came when Israel asked Samuel for a king. But both the LORD and Samuel knew that in *this* request what Israel really wanted was to have a king *like* the other nations: one who would secure them and make them a force to be contended with. They were, in fact, asking for a king in place of the LORD Himself! The LORD had prepared Israel for this eventuation by giving instruction through Moses (in Deuteronomy 17:14–20) as a guide for any king who was appointed—in order to restrict misrepresentation of His own Divine Kingship among them.

So the LORD appointed Saul, who was in outward appearance all a nation could wish for: a tall, handsome and powerful man. But although beginning well, he proved to be unfaithful to God and unfit for his task.

Samuel was later led to anoint a young shepherd, David, as king. This time the appointment was of 'a man after God's own heart'.

### **a covenant of grace with David**

David—who as Study 4 showed was himself, not immune to unfaithfulness (2 Samuel 12:1–9)—was the one with whom God made the next great covenant of grace. He was promised a throne that would last forever! This covenant promise, of course, was to find its fulfillment in the One who would later come from David's line: the Christ, who, among other things, would be called 'the Son of David'.

2 Samuel 7:8a,16

Tell My servant David, "This is what the LORD Almighty says, ... 'Your house and your kingdom shall endure for ever before Me; your throne shall be established forever.' "

During David's reign the LORD'S promise to give Israel the entire land was finally fulfilled. His reign was not a perfect example of the kingdom of God; but during his time as king the reality of the Faithful One's rule over His covenant people was certainly present. Israel always looked back longingly to the days of David. For them it was clearly the richest time of blessing they had known in the land they had been given.

### **the LORD'S sanctuary finally becomes a permanent structure**

David desired to build a permanent sanctuary, the 'temple of the LORD', in Jerusalem. But because he had been 'a person of blood'—setting up the murder of an innocent man in order to hide his own sin—it was given to his son Solomon to make this a reality. David, however, had the joy of gathering materials for its construction.

When Solomon became king the temple was eventually built. It was an incredibly glorious structure, one that was to be the pride of Israel—and it was certainly that.

However, at its dedication, the Spirit of God led Solomon to pray in a most amazing way. His prayer showed that this temple was to be more than just a place of significance for Israel. God—in keeping with His promise to Abraham—had a purpose for it that included the nations!

2 Chronicles 6:32–33a

[Solomon prayed,] “As for foreigners who do not belong to Your people Israel but have come from a distant land because of Your great name and Your mighty hand and Your outstretched arm—when they come and pray towards this temple ... do whatever the foreigner asks of You, so that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear You, as do Your own people Israel.”

But then (as we are told in 2 Chronicles 7:1) when Solomon finished praying, *fire* came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and—just as when the *tabernacle* was completed in Exodus 40—THE GLORY OF THE LORD FILLED THE TEMPLE!!!

Eden, Mount Sinai, the tabernacle—now the temple in Jerusalem!

Isaiah 56:7

[The LORD says,] “My house will be a house of prayer for all nations.”

The significance of this declaration will be seen as we continue to explore the vast dimensions of God’s fulfillment of His redemptive purpose—among all the peoples of the earth!

Solomon’s building of the temple was his great achievement. But although at the beginning of his reign he was given great *wisdom* he later abandoned this, and with an eye to *increasing political success* began to be foolish and unfaithful to his calling. Through his many marriages to the daughters of foreign kings—which the LORD had forbidden a king of Israel to do—false worship began to intrude into the life of the nation. Till in the end, obsessed with his relentlessly ongoing, grandiose building programs, Solomon in some ways became no better than Pharaoh: a harsh driver and taxer of his people.

the LORD’S covenant faithfulness in working out

His ‘place-centred, holy purpose’ during the time of:

**- the Divided Kingdom — *Israel & Judah***

(prophetic ministry to both: proclamation of righteousness,  
retribution [finally, eviction from the land] & restoration)

In reaction to Solomon’s failure, the next generation was determined to prevent the hardship he had caused from continuing.

**the kingdom divided through Rehoboam’s foolishness  
—and tragic decline among God’s people**

After Solomon’s death, his son Rehoboam was given wise counsel to not continue his father’s oppression of the people (1 Kings 12). But this young man—spurred on by foolish and ambitious friends of his own age—ignored the wisdom of the elders, promising to be even harsher than his father! The result was that the kingdom was divided. In the south there was *Judah* under Rehoboam, and in the north *Israel* under Jeroboam.

This period of the 'divided kingdom' was an unhappy one indeed. In the south, Judah had twenty kings—descendants of David reigning from Jerusalem—with only eight who 'did what was right in the eyes of the LORD'. But in the north, Israel had nineteen kings—constantly creating new dynasties—and every one of them 'did what was evil in the eyes of the LORD'. The great evil these kings committed, of course, was to lead their people into false ways of worship and living.

They often offered all the 'correct' sacrifices. But these were worthless, because—as with Cain—they were offered without regard for the LORD.

Isaiah 1:11a, 13a

"The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to Me?" says the LORD ... "Stop bringing meaningless offerings!"

They continually failed to 'guard' the true worship that God had provided and commanded, and gave way to idolatry—trying to find comfort, rest and prosperity in what was false. Although often holding to correct outward forms they were, nevertheless, taken in by 'false promises of life' held out by the 'gods' of their day—a temptation that the LORD'S people must diligently resist in any age!

### **the LORD raises up His prophets**

During this time God raised up prophets to proclaim His word to both Judah and Israel—people like Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah and Jeremiah etc. These prophets declared to the people three things: their obligation to return to the RIGHTEOUSNESS they had been called to through Moses; the certainty of RETRIBUTION if they persistently refused; and the promise of eventual RESTORATION when the painful judgment they deserved and the discipline it brought was complete.

#### **1) the obligation to return to *righteousness***

Israel had been shown so clearly at Mount Sinai what the LORD had called them to be and do. The task of the prophets was to faithfully call them back to that.

Jeremiah 7:1–2, 22–26, 28a

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ... "Proclaim this message: ... 'When I brought your ancestors out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not just give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices, but I gave them this command: Obey Me, and I will be your God and you will be My people. Walk in obedience to all I command you, that it may go well with you. But they did not listen or pay attention; instead they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts. They went backward and not forward. From the time your ancestors left Egypt until now, day after day, again and again I sent you My servants the prophets. But they did not listen to Me or pay attention' ... Say to them, 'This is the nation that has not obeyed the LORD its God or responded to correction.' "

Jeremiah 13:11

"As a belt is bound round someone's waist, so I bound the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah to Me," declares the LORD, "to be My people for My renown and praise and honour. But they have not listened."

Micah 6:8

[The LORD] has shown all you people what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

## **2) the certainty of *retribution* if they refused to return to the LORD in righteousness**

The LORD would always be faithful to His covenant with Israel. That is, He would be faithful to fulfill His promised *blessings* if they kept the way of His covenant, and He would be faithful to fulfill His promised *cursings* if they persisted in rebellion.

Jeremiah 9:7

This is what the LORD Almighty says: “See I will refine and test them, for what else can I do because of the sin of My people?”

Jeremiah 16:12b–13

[This is what the LORD says,] “See how all of you are following the stubbornness of your evil hearts instead of obeying Me. So I will throw you out of this land into a land neither you nor your ancestors have known, and there you will serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favour.”

Before Israel had entered the land the LORD had told them that if they gave themselves to false worship and living, disregarding His word, they would for a time lose their inheritance. Just as Adam and Eve were evicted from the holy place the LORD had provided, so Israel would be evicted from the land in which the LORD had promised to be, specially, present to them. Moses said:

Deuteronomy 4:25b–28

“After [you] have lived in the land a long time—if you then become corrupt and make any kind of idol, doing evil in the eyes of the LORD your God and provoking Him to anger ... the LORD will scatter you among the peoples ... There you will worship gods of wood and stone made by human hands.”

If they persisted in perverting His gift of true worship it would be taken from them!

Jeremiah 36:1b–3

This word came to Jeremiah from the LORD: “Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you ... Perhaps, when the people of Judah hear about every disaster I plan to inflict upon them, they will each turn from their wicked ways; then I will forgive their wickedness and their sin.”

Through His prophets there was always the word of the Holy One who loved them, urging them to return to righteousness and escape the judgment that would come if they didn’t.

## **3) the promise of *restoration* when the discipline was complete**

Although this judgment was a dreadful prospect, the LORD would, nevertheless, be faithful to His covenant. He would not cast off His people forever! He had said to them through Moses:

Deuteronomy 4:30–31a

“When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in later days you will return to the LORD your God and obey Him. For the LORD your God is a merciful God; He will not abandon or destroy you or forget [His] covenant.”

Psalms 89:30–33

—*faithfulness to the covenant with David*

[The LORD said,] “If [David's] sons forsake My law ... and fail to keep My commands, I will punish their sin with the rod, their iniquity with flogging; but I will not take My [unfailing covenant] love from him, nor will I ever betray My faithfulness.”

Jeremiah 16:14–15

—*this restoration will be a ‘new exodus’!*

The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when people will no longer say, ‘As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,’ but they will say, ‘As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where He had banished them.’ For I will restore them to the land I gave their ancestors.”

Ezekiel 36:22–23a, c, 24–29a, 31–32

—*it is not all about Israel, but the name of the LORD among the nations!*

[Say] to the house of Israel, “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: it is not for your sake, house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of My holy Name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. I will show the holiness of My great Name ... Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, when I am proved holy through you before their eyes.”

“For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit in you and move you to follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be My people, and I will be your God. I will save you from all your uncleanness ... Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices. I want you to know that I’m not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign LORD. Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, house of Israel!”

Ezekiel 37:27–28

—*the Holy One among His people once more*

My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be My people. Then the nations will know that I the LORD make Israel holy, when My sanctuary is among them forever.”

the LORD’S covenant faithfulness in working out

His ‘place-centred, holy purpose’ during the time of:

**- the two Exiles & Judah’s Return —the Faithful One**  
(after 70 long years the redemptive word fulfilled—& yet !!!)

Both Israel and Judah continued in their rebellion and wickedness, and, finally the LORD acted according to His word.

In 722 BC Israel—the northern kingdom—was taken into exile in Assyria, never to return. Then in 586 BC Judah—the southern kingdom—was overrun by the Babylonians, the glorious temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and the people taken into exile in Babylonia.<sup>121</sup>

But the LORD was faithful to His promise, and after seventy years the people of Judah were eventually restored to the land. For it was from the tribe of Judah that the Messiah would come—as Jacob had prophesied:

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<sup>121</sup> It was in exile that the people of Judah began to call themselves ‘Jews’.

Genesis 49:10

The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until [the coming of the Rest-Giver to whom tribute belongs] and the obedience of the nations is His.

God's people had known so much pain, having been cut off from the land they had been given. They longed for the LORD'S mercy towards them—and when He finally delivered them their joy knew no bounds!

Psalms 126:1–3

When the LORD brought back the captives to Zion, we were like those who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.

The LORD'S people knew again the wonder of His great covenant faithfulness.

Isaiah 41:8–9, 16

O Israel, My servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham My friend, I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, "You are My servant"; I have chosen you and have not rejected you ... You will rejoice in the LORD and glory in the Holy One of Israel.

Jeremiah 33:25–26a

This is what the LORD says: "If I have not established My covenant with the day and night and the fixed laws of heaven and earth, then I will reject the descendants of Jacob and David My servant and will not choose one of his sons to rule over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

The LORD was faithful not only to His covenant with Abraham but also to His covenant with David. It was as sure as His great covenant of love with all creation!

And, so, Judah was restored to the land. And through the faithful ministries of Ezra and Nehemiah, the people were strengthened again on the basis of the LORD'S covenant law, and—after much difficulty—rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. At the encouragement of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the temple that had been destroyed by their enemies was also finally rebuilt. God's holy nation was again able to enjoy the gift of worship. In principle, they were once more his *people* in the *place* he had provided, enjoying his *presence*, embracing his *proclamation*, and seeking to pursue his *purpose* for them—for his *pleasure*!

### **the prophet's redemptive word had been fulfilled—and yet ...**

Judah had come into a joyous new beginning. But they had no king and their life in the land was nothing like it had been during previous days of blessing under David. Nor was there the prosperity known in those earlier days of Solomon's reign.

They could only wait for fulfillment of the words of prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah who had spoken of incredibly glorious days to come—things that would be fulfilled with the coming of the Messiah and the new, eternal age He would finally usher in!

Isaiah 65:17a

"See, I will create a new heavens and a new earth."

Jeremiah 31:31–34

"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them



out of Egypt, because they broke My covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be My people. No longer will they teach their neighbours, or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

This new, powerfully transforming covenant of grace would be mediated through that Coming One who would be, Himself, an embodiment of the nation of Israel—the Servant of the LORD. Of Him the LORD said:

Isaiah 42:6–7

I will make You to be a covenant for the people and a light for the [nations], to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

Isaiah 49:6

It is too small a thing for you to be My Servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the [nations], that you may bring My salvation to the ends of the earth.

Within the new covenant to be established in Him there would be previously unknown light and liberty for Israel and all the nations of the world!

## CONCLUSION

After Judah’s restoration to the land and the rebuilding of the temple there were still to be 500 years until the Messiah appeared. During this time, in particular, within the 400 years of the ‘Inter-testamental Period’ (when there was no longer any old covenant prophetic proclamation) the people of Judah were engaged in different attempts to establish their sovereignty as a nation; but none of these were ultimately successful. It was, by and large, a time of strife and frustration. However, they remained a people of hope—awaiting the promised coming of the Christ, the Son of David.<sup>122</sup>

The four hundred years of prophetic silence was something that was painfully felt by so many: leading some to despairingly lament that now all they had was ‘an echo of the Voice’! And they longed for the day when the LORD would, once again, speak directly among them.

Of course, during this period of the Exile and what later, appeared to be, the LORD’S subsequent lack of zeal for His people, Satan, and the powers of darkness he commands, were not silent. They seized upon the situation of Israel’s undoing and the period of ‘wordlessness’ that followed, in order to sow seeds of ‘alternative truth’ that would impact the thinking of the world for the rest of history. Among the nations, these centuries saw the devising and establishment of various elaborate systems of philosophy and religion: the philosophies of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, as well as the teachings of the Buddha, Zoroaster and Confucius etc.: systems that contained

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<sup>122</sup> Daniel chapters 2 and 7 prophetically describe through vivid imagery the powers of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome, which were to successively exercise dominance during this time between the old and new covenants. Also, in our next study we will mention some of the movements that arose within Jewish religious life (‘Judaism’) during this time.

many ‘truths’ but could never bring the eternally liberating and life-giving *truth* of that One who was to come.<sup>123</sup>

And so, the Story of Redemption, thus far, had been told. Nothing more was to be said until that right moment arrived—when the Holy One would gloriously *Act*, to accomplish His great and awesome purpose of love for a restlessly, struggling humanity!

WE ARE READY NOW, THEN, TO FOLLOW OUR STORY THROUGH TO ITS GRAND AND GLORIOUS CONSUMMATION!!!

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<sup>123</sup> It is interesting to note that it was during the years leading up to the time when Israel was finally released from Egypt after 400 years of slavery—with the LORD’S promise of *blessing* that would extend redemptively to all the nations of the earth—that the powers of darkness enabled the philosophy of Hinduism to be developed to its present form. Again, a system that contained many ‘truths’, but not the eternally liberating and life-giving *truth* of that One who had been promised.