

GOD'S MILESTONES

WEEK 1: COMMENCEMENT

There are many different ways of telling the Bible story and one recurring theme is that of journeys. The overarching journey in the Bible story is the title given in T.D Alexander's book, "From Eden to the New Jerusalem." Likewise, there is no dispute that the concept of covenant is a major theme in the Bible. And those covenants are the key milestones giving direction to that journey. But, unfortunately, perhaps because there is no precise definition of a covenant, there are many ways to interpret them and that is why in order to be able to trust them, we must be careful to see them in the way God intended them to be seen. That means they have to be taken in the context of the whole Bible journey, not just one part of it. For example, those who hold to Dispensationalist theology have used covenants to develop a Biblical timetable of world existence and that can become very complicated.

According to one timescale Adam spent 33 years in Eden - where are we told that in the Bible? Then, according to that time frame, earth will survive for a total of 7000 years. As far as I am aware, the Bible doesn't tell us that either. End time events should have already started if there is only 2000 years between Christ's 1st coming and the Tribulation. Those years have now passed and Christ is not yet reigning on earth as King. When we compare the actual Biblical covenants to this scheme, it becomes strikingly obvious that, while varied in nature, this interpretation of God's milestones directs us down the wrong road.

It is true that God revealed Himself in different ways at different periods and sometimes these periods can be correctly called dispensations. It is also true that other kinds of covenantal arrangements were common in the ancient world. These few Biblical examples show the covenants that can be made between individuals at a social level, others at a political level. Regardless of the parties involved, all covenants mentioned in the Bible refer to an arrangement made between two parties, specific to the circumstances of the time they were made. In each of these texts a common denominator is that a bond was established between the parties involved. And it is that bond that makes Old Testament covenants between God and the people of the time distinctive. We can see that in Ezekiel 20, because God Himself united the two terms in that way when, through the prophet, He promised the Babylonian exiles a continuation of the covenants made with their ancestors; in this case, with Moses.

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So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the Lord call David's enemies to account." (1 Samuel 20:16 NIV)

When all the elders of Israel had come to King David at Hebron, the king made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel (2 Samuel 5:3 NIV)

Jehoiada then made a covenant between the Lord and the king and people that they would be the Lord's people. He also made a covenant between the king and the people. (2 Kings 11:17 NIV)

As I judged your ancestors in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will judge you, declares the Sovereign Lord. I will take note of you as you pass under my rod, and I will bring you into the BOND OF THE COVENANT. (Ezekiel 20:36-37 NIV)

It is that bond - that binding together of divine and human promises, stipulations, privileges and responsibilities - that makes Biblical covenants so important in showing the right direction for Christians. That is because scholars agree that covenants, initiated by God, shaped the identity and nature of the nation of Israel as a covenant people - a mantle that has been passed down to the church of today through the New Covenant in Christ.

In stark contrast to the Dispensationalist chart, which in effect, obscures and distorts the covenantal relationship, we see both the simplicity and the truth of the personal element of covenants in this one. All six of the covenants I'll look at were arranged between God and one other person. And through those individual arrangements, the whole world has been brought into the orbit of God's progressive plans for humanity. According to this chart there are 8 covenants because it includes Creation and Eternity. The Baptist view is even more simple reducing the number to 5, where the covenants with Adam and Noah are included in the one era. So, it seems that it is only by looking at covenants as they evolved through a relationship between God and the individuals concerned, that we can follow the revelation that God means us to have regarding His dealings with us from the time of the Creation to our final destiny in a restored Eden.

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Finally, the chart that gave me the clearest summary of covenants and the main revelations in them was this one. Six covenants, starting with Adam, simply called the covenant of commencement. The other five are the themes for the rest of the talks. Each one takes us unto the next stage of the journey from 'Eden to the New Jerusalem.' It has to be admitted that the word 'covenant' is not actually mentioned in connection to Adam. But scholars agree that the mutual agreement reached between God and Adam had all the hallmarks of the kinds of covenants that existed in the Ancient Near East. As already mentioned,, a covenant was more than a contract because it created a relationship bond between the parties involved. The covenant relationship with Adam is viewed as similar to those made between kings/rulers and their subjects in those times, but it had much wider scope and the consequences of the breaking of it had worldwide impact. This was recognised by later prophets Hosea and Jeremiah.

For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings. As at Adam, they have broken the covenant; they were unfaithful to me there (Hosea 6:6-7 NIV)

The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: "This is what the Lord says:'If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night no longer come at their appointed time, then my covenant with David my servant—can be broken and David will no longer have a descendant to reign on his throne. (Jeremiah 33:19-21 NIV)

"As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease." (Genesis 8:22 NIV)

By Hosea's time, the covenant that had been broken was that of Moses and the law. In Jeremiah's time, the Babylonian conquest was in progress and these words were an assurance that God would not break His covenant with David, by reference to His covenant with Noah. It was also an example that the natural creation was itself was the commencement of the story that would be progressively revealed through future covenants at crucial points in God's future dealings with both the world He had created and the people He would use to take His plans forward to their ultimate fulfilment in the New Jerusalem. And we've seen that the New Jerusalem bears all the hallmarks of a

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recreated Garden of Eden. So, I think it is safe to say that although the word 'covenant' is not mentioned in the first chapters of Genesis, there is no doubt that when God saw that everything He had made was "very good", it was all intended to begin a covenantal process leading to its final creation of a new heaven and a new earth.

I've got to admit that I haven't really taken much notice of the period between Adam and Noah. Apart from the first chapters of Genesis describing the Creation and Fall and the Cain and Abel episode, I've largely passed over the rest. But when I started to see the period from the perspective of God's first covenant with His world, the basic elements of the story took on added importance. To begin with, we find God is the author and initiator of covenants. Unasked and of His own accord, He decided to create a natural world populated by humans He decided to make in His own image. Then, unasked and of His own accord, He presented this natural world to our first human ancestor. That is a staggering thought, given that He knew Adam would fail to keep his end of the arrangement. That arrangement consisted of an agreement between God as the Creator of and Sovereign over of His creation, and Adam, who was created a free moral agent and representative of all his natural descendants.

The Lord God 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 took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." (Genesis 2:9 &15-17 NIV)

What was on offer was the promise of life. The tree of life was the outward sign and seal of that covenant promise. In return, Adam agreed to obey God's command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This was the test of Adam's commitment and the penalty for failure was death. Scholars call this a covenant of works since it required Adam to obey a command. In this sense, too, it was a conditional, legal covenant because it demanded perfect obedience to the one law God had stipulated regarding abstaining from eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Others regard the arrangement as

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a covenant of nature because it was made with a perfect man which, from God's perspective, is the natural state of the human beings He had made. And because He did not want humankind to experience death, life was the promise attached to obedience. It is also recognised that God's command to Adam established that their relationship was one of a Sovereign King delegating to Adam and Eve the authority to rule under Him. In other words, as His vice-regents on earth.

God was handing over a perfect creation to a beings He knew would fail Him. Surely, in terms of human covenants, the breaking of the arrangements made with Adam would void the covenant and it would cease to exist, never mind be perpetuated. Yet, God took that risk by entrusting Adam with free will, which gave him the option of whether or not to abide by the terms of the covenant God made with him. It has to be emphasised that the covenant was not imposed on Adam. Neither was it a covenant that imposed an impossible obligation on him.

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning —the sixth day.

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done

**That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.
(Genesis 2:24 NIV)**

What happened in Eden taken from Genesis 2 illustrates for us the elements of the very first Biblical covenant. In the first place, being made in God's image immediately created a bond between God and Adam, in terms of Adam's role to represent God on earth. On His part, God blessed both Adam and Eve and provided for their every physical need. Because God and Adam were in direct communication, the

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relationship implied by that was that this too would continue if an intimate and obedient fellowship with God was maintained. Imitating the Sabbath rest would also be an example of how the image-bearing nature of Adam would be a representation of God in the natural world. There is no mention of the 7th day having an evening, indicating that God's act of creation out of chaos would have enduring effect and would provide the pattern of work and rest for humanity as well. In fact, the Sabbath day was sanctified and blessed and that day and marriage are the only social institutions that precede the Fall of Adam. The first covenant therefore was arranged as a result of a perfectly defined relationship between a man, a woman and their Creator in a perfectly designed earthly environment. That, in itself, is a picture of where God's covenants will eventually take His human creation

In return for all that God had given them, Adam agreed to God's practical terms for this idyllic existence. Adam agreed to the terms of caring for the creation. In other words, tend to its cultivation. and what may develop from it. It would also entail not doing anything that would harm the environment or negate to the divine laws that governed all of nature. Then Adam had to take care of the other living creatures in it. We can see this in God bringing the animals to Adam so that He could give them their names. In addition, the social element of the arrangement was to populate the earth, which would bring families into being. Those families would expand into clans, tribes and eventually nations. If, Adam and Eve had maintained their part of the agreement, God's perfect creation would still be in place today with all the God directed development and growth that would still retain all the harmony and peace of Eden.

But we know that the only stipulation God had made to enable this to happen was breached by disobedience. Eating from the Tree of Knowledge changed the whole nature of the original covenant. We are not told exactly what was entailed in looking after the natural world. We are only told that Adam named the animals. After the Fall, however, you can see what he didn't have to do.

To Adam he said.....“Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from 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

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dust you are and to dust you will return.”
19 NIV)

(Genesis 3:16-

Only after the Fall was the ground cursed to the extent that it would produce thorns and thistles. Adam's body would ache and his brow would sweat in working it to produce the plants for the food he would eat. In other words, there had been no weeds in the Garden of Eden and care of it did not entail back-breaking or hard work! But in spite of Adam's disobedience and the taint of that that he would pass on to his posterity, God allowed His creation to continue in it's fallen state. That state saw the first murder when Cain killed Abel. Genesis also records that society grew and developed through Cain's line. The only problem with all of this was that it came through one who no longer enjoyed the Lord's presence and hence what developed also contributed to the taint of sin and death that had been introduced by Adam's disobedience. It had unleashed an unstoppable trend of increasing wickedness which would eventually lead God to initiate further covenants to mitigate the damage the breach of His original covenant with Adam had caused.

So Cain went out from the Lord 's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch
(Genesis 4:16-17 NIV)

Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. 21 His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play stringed instruments and pipes. Zillah also had a son, Tubal- Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. Tubal- Cain's sister was Naamah
(Genesis 4:20-22 NIV)

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. 2 As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there
(Genesis 11:1-2 NIV)

But the continuation of God's covenant was not to come via this route. The addresses, first to Eve and then the serpent defined a different way forward, for the foundation of future covenants would come through Eve, her name meaning 'life' the promise of the first covenant God made with humankind. Although Eve was was not completely exonerated from her sin, God gave an amazing unconditional promise.

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Childbirth, henceforth would be a painful experience and, because death had been introduced into the world, it would not necessarily be a safe experience either for mother or child. Significantly, however, God unconditionally obligated Himself to give her an offspring who would crush the serpent, who was to become the inveterate adversary of humanity. The evidence for this assertion comes in God's address to the serpent which comes immediately after what He says to Eve. Her gender would be at enmity henceforth with the serpent because it would be through "her" seed that he would eventually be destroyed.

To the woman he said, "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children....."

**So 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
(Genesis 3:14-15 NIV)**

The means by which God determined to perpetuate the commencement of the covenant process which would further all He intended for this world was to destroy the deceiver by one of Eve's descendants. And just as childbirth would be painful, so that Descendant too would suffer, because the serpent would be able to 'strike His heel.' I mentioned in a previous talk that Genesis 3:15 is the only place in the Bible where 'her' offspring is mentioned. In all other references the text refers to 'his' offspring. The one who later became known as Satan had ruined God's first covenant by deceiving an unsuspecting woman. But by replacing the original conditional terms of covenant, in this text we find God already engaged in reasserting His control of future world events, by unilaterally issuing an unconditional covenantal promise. God's immediate reaction to the breaking of the covenant was declaring that Satan's eternal punishment would come through a final covenant, which would be inaugurated by a natural human birth. Even in human terms, there is a sense of justice in seeing that, since Satan deceived a woman to usher suffering and death into the world by ruining God's original designs for His creation, that his end should come from the punishment she incurred as the result of believing that deception. So, In spite of a terrible and tragic setback, God's plans and purposes would continue towards their ultimate goal.

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The first step in that direction was the birth of Seth. One reason for not paying much attention to the period from Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden is that a lot of the narrative is taken up by genealogy. Apart from the mention of particular people associated with how the different societies came into being and the talents that were discovered, the story of Cain's murder of Abel is the most prominent event. But it is through those genealogies that we can trace the thread of covenant promise. With the death of Abel who pleased God with his sacrifice, implying that God was already forming relationships with Adam's descendants, it would have been thought that God had withdrawn from such contact. It is through the birth of Adam and Eve's third son, Seth, that we find that is not the case.

Adam made love to his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, "God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him." Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to call on the name of the Lord.
Genesis 4:25-26

It is important to note that that Seth was a replacement for Abel, who had pleased God because his sacrifice involved the shedding of blood. This foreshadowed a practice that would only come to an end with the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross. A further indication that Seth was of Abel's nature was the fact that in was in the lifetime of Seth's first son that people came to call on the name of the Lord. Whatever concept of God Enosh had, it was enough to recognise the Person and nature of the God who had started to reveal Himself to Seth's line. And Seth had some remarkable descendants.

According to what we are told they had very long lives. Living for over 900 years may be on the scientific wish list these days, and in spite of it being the norm in the period between Adam and Noah, God appears to have only had a close personal interaction with 1 man - Enoch. Enoch was a sixth generation descendant of Seth. He was the father of Methuselah, who holds the record of having the longest lifespan - 969 years. Enoch, though, appears to have been more special, because he had such a close relationship with God that he did not go through the experience of death. Enoch was also the great-grandfather of Noah. And, Lamech, Methuselah's son and Noah's father made a very important statement about his new-born son.

And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took -- him

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(Genesis 5:24 CWSB)

**He named him Noah and said, "He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed."
Genesis 5:29**

Then considering that Noah was 500 years old before his three sons were born and he lived for 950 years, we can see that the line of Seth kept the knowledge of the existence of God alive. Apparently, it had also perpetuated the fact that the hardness of life was the result of the Lord cursing the ground. We cannot be dogmatic about it, but presumably, through Seth and Cain, Adam and Eve had passed on what had transpired in Eden. So by the time of Noah, there was consciousness of the existence of God and what was right and wrong behaviour. Bearing in mind that at this time in the world's history, societies were only in their formative stages, there was no common standard of right and wrong. It was a matter of conscience. We can only assume that God's standards were imprinted on the hearts and minds of certain individuals, who would be used by Him to mitigate the damage that had been caused in Eden. Little did anyone know that undoing the damage would be achieved by causing major destruction to the original creation.

Adam and Eve had failed completely to fulfil their roles as God's vice-agents. Yet even imposing these harsh conditions, signalled the fact that God had not forsaken His covenant. The cultural aspect of it would continue because Adam and Eve and their descendants would still have dominion over the natural world but it would entail hard, painful effort. And since the animal world was also cursed, they would find themselves at enmity with that part of creation as well. How cultural life developed would bring added stresses and burdens of sin to that already fallen world. The social aspect of covenant would remain through marriage, albeit with pain in childbirth. Sadly, although God's relationship with humanity would continue, it would no longer be one of close, personal, direct contact. From this breach of covenant arrangements, it would at first appear that Adam and Eve had ruined any chance of their descendants ever again experiencing the divine perfection of Eden. Thankfully, the God of the covenant had, what we might call a 'Plan B'. He had devised His covenant arrangements in eternity and He had made them for eternity. Despite the punishment and curse of expulsion from Eden, God was already in the process of making His covenants

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with humanity everlasting. The next significant milestone in that process was His covenant with Noah.

WEEK 2: PRESERVATION

Mr Noah built an ark; the people thought it such a lark.

Mr Noah pleaded so, but into the ark they would not go.

Down came the rain in torrents, down came the rain in torrents,

Down came the rain in torrents and only 8 were saved.

This milestone carries us forward, not on land but on water. At face value, we all know the story of Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives and the animals and birds being kept safe in the Ark when the world was destroyed by flood. We also know that the rainbow was given as the sign of the covenant God made with Noah. It's one of the first Bible stories we hear as children and very seldom do we ever have the need or desire to look any further into this Bible story. But, like the creation record, putting the story of Noah's ark into the context of the covenant purposes of God, gives it more significance than a simple account of how God protects people who obey Him. It seems that it is only when you start placing these straightforward Bible stories into the context of God's covenant plans that they become deeply significant for the journey this world has followed in the past: a journey which is still ongoing, taking us towards an eternal future. Going beyond the simple story, the first issue we face is the fact that it is a paradox to talk about a covenant of preservation when God's arrangement with Noah involved the complete opposite. However, we get a hint that there was more to Noah than just being the man who built the ark. The hint that he had a special role to play, in spite of the destruction he will see as an adult, came at his birth.

**He named him Noah and said, "He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed."
(Genesis 5:29 NIV)**

Lamech's description of Noah when he was born was surely a giant leap of faith, given the fact that the earth, since the Fall, had remained cursed. Looking at things logically, the Flood God sent upon the earth was an act of de-creation, rather than one of preservation. So when we come to the covenant with Noah we face a bit of a conundrum. How is God preserving the world by destroying it? These Scriptures help to remind us that, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, God knows what He is doing and everything is working out to a pre-determined plan.

"Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens above—what can you do?"

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They are deeper than the depths below —what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea.

Job 11:7-9

“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Isaiah 55:9

God's wisdom is something mysterious that goes deep into the interior of his purposes. You don't find it lying around on the surface. It's not the latest message, but more like the oldest—what God determined as the way to bring out his best in us, long before we ever arrived on the scene 1 Corinthians 2:7 Message

Job and Isaiah had the insight and revelation to see no one could probe and know the mind of God. Paul reminds us that His plans originate in the mists of eternity, but at the same time are progressing towards His ultimate goal. Much of our confusion stems from the fact that we cannot see this world as God sees it because our vision is linked to time. I read a fantasy novel with a bit of a complicated story. To cut a long story short, the dilemma facing humanity in the book could only be averted by what the author called the force of the “Eternal Now” who existed outside the realms of both the living and the dead. It struck me that that is a way of seeing the divine Alpha and Omega, for to God, past, present and future is always ‘now’. And we can almost see how this is so as we consider God’s verdict on the state of the world at the time of Noah. The verses move from what had been going on in the distant past, which could go back to just two or three generations after Adam. I couldn’t find any positive identification of who exactly is being referred to in these verses, but whoever they were, they contributed to wickedness of the world by the time of Noah. Mention of the 120 years also does not seem to indicate how long people will live; Noah and his sons lived longer than this. Plausibly, if God was not going to strive with man much longer, then this time could be all that He was giving the earth before He took decisive action against it. Past, present and future would therefore converge in these verses.

When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, 2 the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. 3 Then the Lord said, “My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal; their days will be a hundred and twenty years. The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown. The Lord saw how

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great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. Genesis 6:1-5

The description of wickedness starts in the first 5 verses of chapter 6. Scholars have suggested that the wickedness was the consequence of intermarriage between the descendants of Seth and those of Cain, resulting in God increasingly being rejected in society. This seems plausible because throughout the Old Testament about the Israelites; and Paul in the New Testament about Christians, there are warnings about intermarriage between the people of God and others. Whatever the explanation for the wickedness, it had become intolerable for God. When we look around our world today, it is very hard to believe that it was ever in a worse state. Yet, if you didn't know the descriptions of wickedness in Noah's time came from the Bible, you would probably agree they match what we are experiencing today. But, because of God's covenant with Noah, we are fortunate that He is still preserving the world giving people time to repent. Some of the most quoted poetic lines of the 20th century come from T.S.Eliot's poem "The Hollow Men". These lines and the story of Noah reminds us that the preservation of the world, in spite of its de-creation, is in God's hands, regardless of what humankind does to it.

This is the way the world ends.....Not with a bang, but a whimper.

In Noah's time, however, God decided to destroy His human and natural creation. It is true that we cannot deny that this action was a judgement on the sin of the world. On the one hand we could see the destruction as an act of God's wrath. But when you examine the wording in the text, something different emerges. It is very clear from verse 6 that God was not angry. He was distressed. We could go as far as saying that what humanity was doing to His creation was breaking His heart. Here we see a God who is not detached and uncaring about what happens to us, but who is deeply moved by the tragedy He witnesses. The creation He had declared to be good and very good, He now sees as corrupt and beyond saving. Scholars agree that God's regret comes, not from creating the world, but from the the inescapable fact that, in order to preserve the world, He has to destroy His original creation.

**And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. 7 So the Lord said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them
Genesis 6:6-7 ESV**

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The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. 7 So the Lord said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them.” Genesis 6:6-7 NIV

And the Flood literally is a de-creation. Genesis 1:2 tells us that creation came when the “Spirit was hovering over the waters”. We know the darkness that accompanies heavy rain and we have seen in our own country, as well as other parts of the world, how the dry land disappears under flood waters. We have seen the destructive power of tidal waves caused by tsunamis. Even in these relatively limited flood waters, death comes to plant life and to human beings and animals. The Flood returned the cosmos to its primeval state described in Genesis 1:2.

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. Genesis 1:2

Judgement had come, but it was tempered by mercy and grace for we are told in Genesis 6:8 that Noah had found favour in the sight of the Lord. Not for the last time would the fate of the world hinge on one man's obedience.

But Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord. This is the account of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. Genesis 6:8-9

We saw last week how Noah was descended from Seth, who headed the God-recognising line of descendants from Adam. That Noah is described as ‘righteous’ and blameless’ is evidence God was still in the hearts and minds of Seth's posterity. Those descriptions do not mean that Noah was without sin. There was no law to identify what constituted sin against God in his time. What it means is that Noah had an integrity that set him apart from the people of his time. His conscience, guided by God, led him to behaviour and attitudes that pleased God. We are told that he ‘walked with God’ just as his ancestor Enoch had done. An expression denoting a close relationship with God. It was that closeness that enabled God to reveal the actions He was going to take against the world. And it was that revelation that brought a covenant into being.

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. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. 14 So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out

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Genesis 6:13-14

I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. 18 But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark —you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you
Genesis 6:17-18

In return for being saved from destruction by flood, Noah had to carry out God's instructions for building the ark and then for bringing in the animals, birds and provisions needed to sustain everything and everyone in it. The Bible does not tell us how many years it took Noah to build the ark, but this amount of preparation must have taken many years. From the ages given of Noah and his sons, scholars estimate it could have been anything from 55 to 100 years, with a general consensus of around 75. You can just imagine the derision Noah faced throughout this time, building a ship on land and far from the sea. Throughout this time Noah remained faithful to God's instructions and when the time came, God fulfilled His part of the covenant by giving Noah 7 days notice of the start of the rain and then sealing Noah and his family together with the animals and provisions into the ark.

The Lord then said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation. Take with you seven pairs of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and one pair of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, and also seven pairs of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth. Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made." AND NOAH DID ALL THAT THE LORD COMMANDED HIM..... And after the seven days the floodwaters came on the earth. The animals going in were male and female of every living thing, as God had commanded Noah. THEN THE LORD SHUT HIM IN
(Genesis 7:1-16 NIV)

It is interesting to see that it was God who saw to the security of all in the ark. Grace and mercy were at work. It was not left to Noah to make sure everything was watertight. Once again we have the reminder that this is God's world and ultimately He will decide its fate.

Having secured the future of His world, we can now look at how preservation emerged from the devastation of the flood waters. We cannot escape the fact that the world was re-created, with scholars noting the parallels with God's original creation. The symbolism of the dove is significant because, unlike

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the raven, it is known for its fastidious habits. Today, we recognise a dove as the symbol of the Holy Spirit because that is the form the Spirit took at Jesus' baptism.

Original Genesis 1-2
Waters of chaos cover the earth
Spirit of God hovers over the waters

Dry land and vegetation created

Old world finished: God rests

Recreation Genesis 7-8
The Flood
The dove 'hovers upon the face of the waters'
Olive leaf evidence of emergence of dry land
New world finished: God receives sacrifice of rest

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. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, 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."
Genesis 8:20-22

God's covenant with Noah established the natural laws that govern our universe. These are the foundational laws which make science possible, because they are the only static forces in the cosmos. The ground was freed from its curse, fulfilling Lamech's prediction of Noah bringing comfort. Noah, in 9:20 is actually called "a man of the soil (or ground)". God's covenant included the promise never again to destroy the natural world and the living creatures upon it by flood.

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: "I now establish 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 establish 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."

This was an unconditional undertaking promised by God and the rest of what was promised went beyond what had been given to Adam. This unconditional covenant was 'established'. It included Noah and his descendants. We could describe being established as being permanent and unshakeable. A rock of Gibraltar as it were. Including Noah's descendants in it also points to a continuing line of people whom God will choose to

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perpetuate His covenantal arrangements. Genesis 9:1-7 lay out the terms of the covenant. Two parallel Adam's commission. Two go beyond it.

1. Like Adam, Noah was given control over the creatures of land, sea and air.
2. Like Adam, Noah and his family were instructed to populate the earth.
3. Unlike Adam, who could only eat from plants, Noah could eat meat, as long as it was drained of its blood. In OT times it was believed life was in the blood, not the flesh.
4. An unprecedented addition to all this was the stipulation of capital punishment for murder.

The third and fourth points are of crucial importance. We saw last week how Abel's blood sacrifice was pleasing to God. Noah also made a sacrifice of burnt offerings in gratitude for his preservation. In both these cases the shedding of blood was a mark of their commitment to God. I think you are probably all starting to make connections here! The fourth point takes us even further along that path.

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. 6 "Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind Genesis 9:5-6

The reference back to the human creation being made in the image of God means men and women are extremely important to God. So much so that killing anyone means that he/she too should lose their life. The shedding of blood, as explained by the belief that life was in the blood, literally means the taking of life itself. The implication is that shedding the blood of a human being is an attack on God Himself because human beings are made in His image. I won't say anything more about that thought now, but it is probably becoming clear that the covenant with Noah is more than just about a rainbow. In fact, the rainbow was not part of the covenant, but the sign of it. We see in verse 16 that it was the sign of the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth. We might say it was God's signature on what He had undertaken in the covenant with Noah.

And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making 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 the 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

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**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 established between me and all life on the earth
Genesis 9:8-17**

We really don't have to ask if God kept His promise to preserve the earth. We wouldn't be here if He hadn't. More importantly, is the question of how He continued to do that after Noah. That comes through an episode that kind of spoils the record of Noah, given to us in Genesis 9:19-25. He had planted a vineyard and got drunk on its produce. In doing so he exposed himself and public nakedness from the time of the Garden of Eden was associated with great shame. Instead of limiting the shame, Ham told his two brothers and they remedied the situation. As a result of not taking appropriate action and publicising his father's shame, Ham was cursed by Noah. Shem and Japheth received Noah's blessing for their action and this blessing and curse set the scene for society until the coming of Abraham.

When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, 25 he said, “Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers.” Genesis 9:24-25

**“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Shem! May Canaan be the slave of Shem.²⁷ May God extend Japheth's territory; may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be the slave of Japheth
Genesis 9:26-27**

The blessing and the curse also put in place a clear demarkation of which of the sons would follow in the line of Abel and Seth and the one who would not. We are told from chapter 10 of Genesis that Noah's sons were the progenitors of the nations of earth. Ham was cursed and therefore could be said to follow the line of Cain. He is the father of the nations of Canaan, who became the bitter enemies of the Israelites. Ham's descendants also founded the cities of Nineveh and Babylon, the capitals of the empires that would one day destroy the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. We are not told much about Japheth except that his descendants became a maritime people. But Shem is said to be the father of the Semite people, the people whom one day God would choose as His witnesses to the world. It is Shem's descendants who will share a special relationship with God. Because of that, it is through Shem's descendants that God progresses to the next stage of His covenantal journey for in Genesis 11:10 26 we have the generations of Shem's line. Abraham was came in the 10th generation from Shem and his father was Terah.

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So many things can be taken from the story of Noah's ark. There are the comparisons and contrasts between Adam and Noah; and those between the original and re-created cosmos. There is the theme of judgement of sin and the salvation and redemption of humanity. Underlying all these things, however, is what God can achieve through the obedience of one man. Apart from his one drunken episode, we see Noah obeying God in both letter and spirit, for we do not hear one word of complaint about the hardship and anxieties that must have hit him at times when he was either building the ark or was cooped up in it. I could take a guess and say that having to stay indoors, even in comfort of our homes, during 40 days and nights of relentless torrential rain, would have us climbing the walls. Noah showed himself throughout what must have been a traumatic time for him and all his family, to be blameless and righteous and still walking with God. For that reason he is placed 3rd in the Hebrews hall of fame, following on from Abel and Enoch, his ancestors who also pleased God.

1 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for..... And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith.
Hebrews 11:1-7

God was able to work through Noah's obedient faith to preserve of our cosmos in a re-creation after destruction. The covenant that He made with Noah to preserve this world henceforth is the one that underscores God's commitment to His redemptive purpose for humanity. This milestone stands as a testimony that the world and humanity has a guaranteed existence until the end of the journey is reached in an an eternal, glorious re-creation of the cosmos with the New Jerusalem, the dwelling place of God at its centre.

WEEK 3: PROMISE

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Arising from discussion last week, I thought a bit of background might be helpful to perhaps give us a bit more confidence about the Biblical account of how God's covenants followed the course of history. When we come to Abraham, we come to a covenantal family, for the covenants made with Abraham were renewed with his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob. Also, when we come to Abraham, we come to the dawn of recorded history. Mainly archeological research shows that semite peoples lived in the Akkadian and Sumerian region. They spoke a similar language, but the Akkadian version eventually superseded the Sumerian language. Abraham's family were Sumerians, because the Israelites did not exist until centuries later. Because there is archeological evidence of the existence of city states in this region, we have to assume that a lengthy period of time elapsed between Noah and Abraham to allow for that kind increase in population. There is also evidence that this area had been flooded in the distant past. There is little debate about that, but scholarship, known as higher criticism, assumes that although there is evidence of widespread flood, the story of Noah was invented to suit the religion of the people of the time. In other words, Noah did not exist. The problem with that is that those same scholars also question the existence of Abraham. Now, in ways, it is possible to admit the story of Noah's ark was to illustrate what one man's faithfulness to God could achieve. However, mention of Ur in the Bible gives us a verifiable time period and place. Archeologists have evidence that the city of Ur dates from around 3800BC. Although we have no exact date for Abraham's family's departure from that city we, know that it was, at least, 3-4000 years ago. You've got to admit that's an awful long time to believe what is said about someone whose existence the higher critics have questioned. If Abraham did not exist, why has this belief persisted to the present day? And, of course, logically, if Abraham existed, then his ancestors did too. This is the kind of dilemma facing the ordinary Christian today. Without the same kind of theological education, how do you challenge scholarly theories? For me, the line is drawn at the point where you make the decision to choose God's word over man's theories, unless there is definite evidence to prove those theories are actual facts. So, until proved otherwise, the Bible record stands. And if that sounds dogmatic to you, you're right, it is!

Having said that, I can then go on to agree with Genesis 11:10-26 that Abraham was a 10th generation descendent of Shem. It was Abram's father, Terah, who moved his family out from the city of Ur of the Chaldees, a city which had also been built by Ham's descendants. They had intended to settle in Canaan among Ham's descendants. But as the record shows, they never went to Canaan.

Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter- in- law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set

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out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Harran, they settled there (Genesis 11:31 NIV)

According to that record, regardless of the time that elapsed between Adam and Abraham, the line of God-acknowledging families was preserved. Again, we have to admit we know nothing of how this was done, but at critical moments, when God spoke, there was someone to speak to and someone who could listen and move that line on to the next stage of redemptive history. When God spoke to Abraham it signalled a giant leap forward in covenantal history. Christianity is built on faith in the truth of God's word, and who do we first think of as being the inaugurator of the kind of faith God requires of us today? We immediately look back to God's covenants with Abraham which have determined not just the history, religion and culture of the Semitic and Arabic people to the present day, but also the very foundation upon which the Christian faith continues to rest and will do so until Christ comes again.

The Biblical record shows that Abraham's first encounter with God involved starting on a journey, for God gave the command to leave the relative safety and comfort of Ur and embark on the uncertainties and dangers of a nomadic lifestyle. But with that command came a promise of blessing.

The Lord had said to Abraham, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household 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."
Genesis 12:1-3

In return for obedience to leave all that he was familiar with, Abraham was promised blessing as the father of a great nation for which he would gain great renown. Given that he was already 75 years old when this call came and Sarai had already been deemed barren, these promises were quite astounding. God's protection for Abraham is also shown in His decision to curse those who curse him. In the last statement that all peoples on earth would be blessed through Abraham, that is the indication that God's blessing on his descendants would be mediated to all humanity by this means. As a result of Abraham's obedience to this call and reliance on these promises, a special relationship was established. All the future covenant promises find their origin in this initial encounter.

What, then, did God's blessings and promises consist of for Abraham and his descendants. In the immediate period, the first blessing was prosperity.

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Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold.....Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. Genesis 13:2 & 5-6

Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, 19 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." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. Genesis 14:18-20

The Lord has blessed my master abundantly, and he has become wealthy. He has given him sheep and cattle, silver and gold, male and female servants, and camels and donkeys. 36 My master's wife Sarah has borne him a son in her old age, and he has given him everything he owns. Genesis 24:35-36

Then the servant brought out gold and silver jewellery and articles of clothing and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave costly gifts to her brother and to her mother Genesis 24:53

Normally, we associate prosperity with material wealth and even in Jesus' time and beyond, Jews regarded wealth and health as evidence of God's blessing and favour. The Genesis account leaves us in no doubt that Abraham was materially wealthy. Livestock alone was so numerous that Abraham and Lot had to separate because the land could not support it. That wealth must have been very substantial for Abraham to give Melchizedek, the king of Salem one-tenth of what he had, and it is very unlikely that he would have offered such a person a paltry offering. The indications of great wealth is also notable when a wife is sought for Isaac.

Blessing was also associated with fertility. There was great stigma attached to a childless couple, which fell most severely on the wife. Although written centuries later, Psalm 128 depicts how material wealth and offspring were closely connected in estimating the man who had the Lord's favour.

Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in obedience to him. You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Yes, this will be the blessing for the man who fears the Lord. Psalms 128:1-4

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Both Adam and Noah were told to be fruitful and increase in number. Yet this was the one thing that, at the call of Abraham, was, humanly speaking, impossible, because of Sarah's advanced age and infertility. Twice Abraham tried to get around this problem. The first was by naming Eliezer of Damascus, a servant in his household, as his heir. The second was by fathering Ishmael by Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian handmaid, whom Sarah insisted he banished. Both were traditional and acceptable means of providing an heir by human standards. But they were not God's way. Three times God speaks to Abraham about descendants and each time, the covenant promises advances the importance of Abraham's response. The first mention comes in Genesis 15 when Abraham was 90 years old, after Eliezer is named as heir to Abraham's estate. In a vision, God tells him Eliezer will not inherit his estate but that a son of Abraham's own flesh and blood will be the heir.

He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you 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. He 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." But Abram said, "Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"
Genesis 15:8

On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates — the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, 20 Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, 21 Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."
Genesis 15:18-21

As many descendants as the stars in the sky, humanly speaking, is gross exaggeration, and given how small the world was in Abraham's day, an impossibility. Yet Abraham took God at His word. Knowing the heart of a person as God did, this must have been a wholehearted trust and confidence in God's promise. We may think taking God at His word is the natural result of being a Christian, but can we say that we have never doubted it, especially when God delays the answers to our prayers, prayed in accordance with Scripture? Given that God's word came in a vision, there must have been something extraordinary about Abraham's faith because there was no timeframe attached to the promise of land or an heir of Abraham's own flesh and blood. With the benefit of hindsight too, we know that the promise of possession of land was not to be in Abraham's lifetime or indeed those of his son and grandsons. Abraham's clan remained nomads for the whole of their lives. Two promises of innumerable descendants and possession of land to a ninety year old nomad to our minds seem inconceivable. Oddly, Abraham did

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not question God about descendants, but about land and as a result of that, the covenant made on this occasion related to the land.

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 Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.

Hebrews 11:8-9

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.

Romans 4:16

So also Abraham "believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham.

Galatians 3:6-7

So, in spite of what seemed to be promising the impossible, Abraham believed that God would fulfil those promises and because of that belief God reckoned him to be righteous. That is why New Testament writers show no hesitation in claiming Abraham to be the father of all those who have faith.

We can but wonder how Abraham maintained that faith in the following nine years when it was increasingly obvious that Sarah would remain childless. Fathering a child by Hagar would traditionally have made Ishmael Abraham's heir. But once more God intervened. Chapter 17 records how the covenant promises are further expanded nine years after the first ones were made. The name changes for both Abraham and Sarah reflect the fact that not only will the couple have numerous descendants, but that those descendants will become nations and will include kings. In the future all such descendants would look to Abraham as their most significant ancestor. The fulfilment of that promise is borne out today by the fact that Jews, Muslims and Christians all look back to Abraham as the historical father of the first two and the spiritual father of the third.

"As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. 6 I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.....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

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**mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her
Genesis 17:4-6 & 15-16**

Then the repetition of the promise of land.

I will establish 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.” Genesis 17:7-8

With hindsight we know that was a promise that would determine the future history of Abraham's descendants. Canaan was the son of Ham, who as we saw last week was cursed by Noah. The descendants of Shem, after the 400 years stipulated by God, would be told by God to destroy the people of the nations, descended from Ham's son Canaan, who had called the territory by that name. That is why the Israelites even after more than 400 years in Egypt regarded Canaan as the Promised Land, because it had been promised to Abraham and afterwards to both Isaac and Jacob.

Then the detail of what Abraham's son by Sarah was to be called. Another year would pass before Isaac would be born making Abraham 100 years old and Sarah ninety. So for 10 years Abraham's faith had been tested for endurance waiting for God to fulfil the promise of a son. In fact, when Abraham was told on this occasion, his response was to laugh. Paul confirms for us that this was not a derisory laugh, but one of delight and sense of vindication in persevering in his belief for 10 years that God's promise would one day become a reality. In that sense Abraham's reaction was the opposite to that of Sarah whose laugh was one of unbelief when she overheard the three men tell Abraham that she would have a son within a year.

Abraham fell facedown; 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?”

Genesis 17:17

Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.”

Romans 4:20-22

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Then one of them said, "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..... 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." Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh." But he said, "Yes, you did laugh

Genesis 18:10-15

What distinguishes these new covenantal promises to Abraham was not laughter. They were ratified by a sign, and that sign was circumcision, practised by the Jews to the present day.

This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep:Every male among you shall be circumcised. 11 You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.....On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, every male in his household, and circumcised them, as God told him. Abraham was ninety- nine years old when he was circumcised, and his son Ishmael was thirteen;

Genesis 17:10-11 & 23-25

On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived. Luke 2:21

It would have been thought that the promises given to Abraham already would have pointed to a time in the distant future. But one other event in his life was to have even more far-reaching consequences. I don't need to re-tell the story of God testing Abraham's faith by asking for the sacrifice of Isaac. That Abraham was prepared to do so resulted in God magnifying the great promises already made. Descendants would not just be as innumerable as the stars in the sky but as the sand grains on the seashore as well. There was the repetition too, that God's blessing would not just be confined to the nations that would ensue through Abraham's own line, but all the nations of the earth would be blessed through his faithful obedience. This was really an open-ended, infinite promise encompassing the whole of humanity, not just a nation.

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

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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.”
Genesis 22:15-18

When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, “I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.” And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised. People swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie.....(Hebrews 6:13-18 NIV)

And to emphasise the promises, God swore by Himself. We are used to the solemnity and the legal significance of an oath taken in law courts. In general life, however, an oath is almost another term for a derogatory or despicable swear word. In many ways, the weight of obligation carried by an oath in Biblical times, cannot be understood fully by modern minds. It was not just the obligation to carry out what was promised on oath. Failure to do so impacted irrevocably on the character and reputation of the person who swore that oath. That is why the writer to the Hebrews explicitly states God made His purposes and plans clear to Abraham. They were to stand forever as far as God was concerned. And the oath itself was a testimony to the fact that God cannot lie. The covenant promises to Abraham, confirmed by an oath, put the truth of God's omnipotence and omniscience on public display for the duration of humanity's future.

Both the Old and New Testaments give evidence to show that these promises to Abraham are still in operation in the present day. In what we would call the short term, although it took many centuries before it happened, descendants of Abraham did fulfil God's promises. To my knowledge, there is no genealogical link between Abraham and Moses, who became the next recipient of a covenant from God. But while we cannot trace the connection through a bloodline, it is still discernible through the story of the Patriarchs. In the first place, God renewed the covenants with Isaac and Jacob.

The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. Stay in this land for a while, and 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

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will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed me and did everything I required of him, keeping my commands, my decrees and my instructions.”
Genesis 26:2-5

God said to him, “Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel.” So he named him Israel.
And God said to him, “I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will be among your descendants. 12 The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you.”.....Jacob called the place where God had talked with him Bethel.
Genesis 35:10-12 &15

With Jacob's change of name comes the origin of why the tribes named after his twelve sons became known as the Israelites. And it was after Jacob's reconciliation with his brother Esau that is recorded in Genesis 36:6-8 that Abraham's descendants first settled in the land of Canaan.

But, as we all know from the story of Joseph and his brothers, this initial settlement by Israel and his family was not a permanent one. The famine that resulted in the whole clan moving to Egypt and there they stayed for over 400 years. This was something that God had foretold during His first covenantal encounter with Abraham. The people of the land of Canaan were being given a time of grace to mend their ways. And in the meantime, the Israelites, although in a foreign land and under the influence of an alien religion and culture, were forging their own identity as the people of Yahweh.

Then the Lord said to him, “Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward 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, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure
Genesis 15:13-16 NIV

God said to Abram, "Know this: your descendants will live as outsiders in a land not theirs; they'll be enslaved and beaten down for 400 years. 14 Then I'll punish their slave masters; your offspring will march out of there loaded with plunder
Genesis 15:13-14 (The Message)

Thus, this milestone has taken us from Ur to Egypt. The scene was then set for one of the most famous journeys in history. The journey started with

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Terah, Abraham and Sarah. By the time of Abraham's grandson, Jacob, that number had grown to the 70 who went down to Egypt. By the time of the Exodus, even by the most conservative estimate of one woman and one child to the 600,000 men mentioned in the texts, that number would have increased to one million, eight hundred thousand people. Some scholars would even posit up to three and a half million people left Egypt.

Seventy persons in all generated by Jacob's seed. Joseph was already in Egypt. Then Joseph died, and all his brothers—that whole generation. But the children of Israel kept on reproducing. They were very prolific—a population explosion in their own right—and the land was filled with them Exodus 1:5-7 The Message

The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Sukkoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children Exodus 12:37

But Moses said, "Here I am among six hundred thousand men on foot, and you say, 'I will give them meat to eat for a whole month Numbers 11:21

There can be no doubt that God's covenants with Abraham laid the foundation of the community of a people, under God, who would be blessed because of him. Their primary characteristic would be faith in God's word. In this, Abraham is our spiritual ancestor and the role model of our faith. That milestone points us to the time, when one day we will see God's promise of all the nations of the earth being blessed by this means.

So also Abraham "believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Galatians 3:6-7

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb Revelation 7:9

WEEK 4: LAW

Apart from its obvious meaning as a marker by the side of a road to mark the distance in miles to a particular place, the dictionary defines a milestone as "a significant stage or event in the development of something." You can see from the diagrams that even businesses use the milestone model to show that development in their processes or plans. That is why we can refer to the Biblical covenants as milestones in God's plans for humanity. What follows, I hope, will leave you in no doubt that the covenant of law was a very significant milestone in the development of God's dealing

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with His people. Last time I said that, to my knowledge, we cannot trace a bloodline between Abraham and Moses. But compared to the connection God made, even if we could, it would not be as important as how God provided a link between the two men. It is the connection that God makes that gives us the assurance that we have reached the next “significant stage of development” in our journey from Eden to the New Jerusalem.

On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates — the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.”

Genesis 15:18-21

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. ’” God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers —the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob —has sent me to you. “This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation. “Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob —appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey. ’ Exodus 3:14-17

That the milestone of the covenant promise to Abraham led directly to this covenant milestone of law through Moses’ leading of the children of Israel on the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land could not be clearer. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, mentioned twice, emphasises the connection between those who originally went to Egypt and their present descendants. The covenant promise of land to Abraham is now to become a reality for his posterity. The record makes it very explicit, too, that what the Exodus leads to is the result of God remembering His covenant with the Patriarchs for it led immediately to Moses’ encounter with God at the burning bush. Even in these texts the connection is clear. The people God had chosen were people of a covenant of promise evidenced by the very name God had given Jacob, and by which they were known at that time.

God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them
Exodus 2:24-25

After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him. God said to him, “Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel.” So he named him Israel Genesis 35:9-10

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We can see from this that from Adam's line, though Noah and Shem, to Abraham, his son and grandson, the three covenant milestones have given a clear line of progression in the journey from Eden to the New Jerusalem. What the covenant of law was to establish was the kind of people who would enter the New Jerusalem and what would distinguish them from all other peoples. In this, the Sinai covenant sets the precedents for what would characterise the people and the nature of the Kingdom of God. It was also the covenant that would eventually lead to all the nations of the world being blessed, because as Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well; a fact repeated by Paul in Romans 3:2.

You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.
John 4:22

Romans 3:2 (NIV) First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God.

Implicit in these words of Jesus is the acknowledgement of the fact that the religion of the Jews was not just one of mythic tales of gods and goddesses; or the rituals of trying to gain their favours through idol worship and sometimes, human sacrifice. The identity and religion of the Jews was solidly grounded in history. The release from the bondage of Egypt was the catalyst that merged the disparate clans of the Patriarchs into the chosen people of God.

But I said to you, "You will possess their land; I will give it to you as an inheritance, a land flowing with milk and honey." I am the Lord your God, who has set you apart from the nations..... You are to be holy to me because I, the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.

Leviticus 20:24 & 26

God's choice of the Israelites was a direct result of His promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. A further consequence was the promise of His Presence with them.

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."
Genesis 17:8

Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God.
Exodus 29:45-46

The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery,

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from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.

Deuteronomy 7:6-9

To Abraham He said that He would be the God of his descendants. This was repeated to Moses regarding the people rescued from Egypt; and the close bond between God and the Israelites is a recurring theme throughout the Old Testament. God dwelt with the children of Israel in the tabernacle in the desert and by the cloud by day and fire by night. He dwelt in the Temple of Jerusalem until it was destroyed by the Babylonians. That dwelling is still in place today for He dwells in the temple bodies of Christians today by the Holy Spirit. One thing that we can take comfort from in the verses of Deuteronomy is that the Israelites were few in number compared to other nations. Christians today are a minority in an increasingly secular age. Then, we have the assurance that a faithful God will fulfil every promise in every covenant He makes. That started with the promise of His presence.

The precedent of the presence of the Lord with His people was set at Sinai and God even spelled out just how precious those people were to Him. It is one that Peter, in the New Testament also had no hesitation in applying to Christians.

Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. ’ **Exodus 19:5-6**

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy **1 Peter 2:9-10**

This declaration to the Israelites resulted in what John Bright has called a ‘new society’.

“...a new society was founded where none had been before, a society based not in blood, but in historical experience and moral decision.”

He makes two important points about this society. The texts already mentioned point the Israelites back to their shared Patriarchal ancestors and the covenants God made with them. But, with the benefit of hindsight, we can see that their more immediate experience of rescue from Egypt and their arrival at Mount Sinai established another significant milestone. Throughout the Old Testament and to the present day the celebration of the Passover is a memorial of the release from bondage that shared historical event is engrained into the very psyche of Jews as a people.

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“These are the Lord’s appointed festivals, the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times: The Lord’s Passover begins at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month. Leviticus 23:4-5

The king gave this order to all the people:“Celebrate the Passover to the Lord your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant.” Neither in the days of the judges who led Israel nor in the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah had any such Passover been observed. But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, this Passover was celebrated to the Lord in Jerusalem. 2 Kings 23:21-23

The priests and Levites had purified themselves and were all ceremonially clean. The Levites slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the exiles, for their relatives the priests and for themselves. 21 So the Israelites who had returned from the exile ate it, together with all who had separated themselves from the unclean practices of their Gentile neighbours in order to seek the Lord, the God of Israel Ezra 6:20-21

Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. 1 Corinthians 5:7

Bearing in mind that the descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob were only what scholars describe as a ‘loose confederacy’ when they left Egypt and entered Canaan, why did they not all just go their separate ways when they were allocated their tribal territory in the Promised Land? There was no centralised authority and no machinery of government, so how did they maintain their distinctiveness. The answer lies in their shared historical memory of their freedom from Egyptian bondage, perpetuated by celebration of the Passover; and the acceptance of the covenant of law which bound them to a common ethos and culture centred on the worship of one supreme deity - Yahweh.

These are the same foundations that make Jews a distinctive people to the present day. It is one that Christians also share for we see Christ, the Passover Lamb, as our release from the bondage of sin. It was the Passover of the Jews that, as Ezra records, separated them from the unclean practices of the Gentile neighbours. It is belief in Jesus as the slain Lamb who takes away the sins of the world that separates us from the world that has rejected Him. The ‘new society’ that came into being at Sinai is thus a defining historical episode from which Christianity itself is derived. But while a shared historical ancestry and experience contributed to the Israelites becoming self-aware as different from the nations around them, this was not the main thing that made them different.

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The second plank mentioned by John Bright is the most important contribution, for it was a covenant which involved moral decisions that would characterise the nature of God's chosen people and would distinguish them from the moral and religious practices of the world around them.

As the Lord commanded Moses, Aaron put the manna with the tablets of the covenant law, so that it might be preserved **Exodus 16:34**

The Lord said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commandments I have written for their instruction **Exodus 24:12**

Then put in the ark the tablets of the covenant law, which I will give you..... Place the cover on top of the ark and put in the ark the tablets of the covenant law that I will give you **Exodus 25:16 & 21**

When the Lord finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the covenant law, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God.
Exodus 31:18

What truly set the Israelites apart from all the surrounding nations was the covenant of law. Although disastrously neglected, rejected or abandoned in succeeding centuries, what God had stipulated at Sinai was the means by which a people forged a distinctive identity, unlike every other nation of the time or since. Here we face a difficulty because Paul argues that we are no longer under law but under grace. Yet, no Christian today would deny the Ten Commandments stand as the practical model and standard for our relationship to God and to our neighbour. For the Israelites, and for us, the first 4, as we know, apply a person's relationship with God: the remaining six apply to a person's relationship within the family and with his/her neighbours. The Ten Commandments are unqualified; they represent the minimum and most religious and ethical principles of what is required from those in a covenant relationship with God. But what about all the other instructions given at the same time? We can understand them by recognising that the rest of the laws given in Exodus and repeated in other ways in the books of the Pentateuch are directives as to how the stipulations in the Ten Commandments should be applied when actual cases of breaches of them come before whoever sat in judgement of people at the time. But which of all of these actually constitute covenant law?

It took a while to figure out the difference between what was termed covenant law and all the other laws that God also gave. That was because the order of Exodus leads to some confusion and, in my practical mindset, I couldn't figure out how they all could have been inscribed on two tablets of stone, capable of being carried by one man up and down a mountain. But order eventually does come from the confusion. In chapter 16 we are told that the covenant law was on tablets, but Moses is not called

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to receive these tablets until Chapter 24. Not until chapter 25 are we told that the tablets are to go into the Ark on God's express instructions - but Moses does not actually receive the tablets until chapter 31. That is why since all the other laws are given in the intervening chapters it is difficult to be definite about what actually constitutes covenant law, from these records.

The picture becomes even more confusing because the golden calf incident in chapter 32 leads to Moses destroying the first two tablets.

Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.....When Moses approached the camp and 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 Exodus 32:15-16 & 19

The Lord said to Moses, "Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. Be ready in the morning, and then come up on Mount Sinai. Present yourself to me there on top of the mountain Exodus 34:1-2

Then the Lord said:"I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the Lord, will do for you Exodus 34:10

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." Moses was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments. Exodus 34:27-28

It is not until we come to chapter 34 that what constitutes covenant law becomes clear. Some of the laws given earlier are repeated in a briefer way, but the verse 28 tells us plainly that the words of the covenant were the Ten Commandments. While many of the stipulations in all the other laws, both religious and moral, would change as society moved increasingly away from their desert origin, the Ten Commandments stand as the permanent standard and model for the command in Deuteronomy, repeated by the Lord Jesus Christ, regarding our relationship to God and to our neighbour.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Deuteronomy 6:5-6

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Jesus replied:“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ’ This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it:‘Love your neighbour as yourself. ’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” **Matthew 22:37-40**

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.....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.” **Exodus 24:3-4 & 7**

But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.....But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” Then the people answered, “Far be it from us to forsake the Lord to serve other gods! It was the Lord our God himself who brought us and our parents up out of Egypt..... ...We too will serve the Lord, because he is our God.” **Joshua 24:15-18**

The following verses in this chapter of Joshua record the people agreeing twice to serve the Lord and obey Him and also agree that they are witnesses against themselves if they fail to do so. It was the failure of the children of Israel to maintain acceptance of and commitment to all the Sinai covenant had presented to them that led to all the subsequent problems that beset Israel as a nation. Prophetic denunciation of social injustice and religious sacrilege showed how far God’s people had fallen from the standards He had set them. Nevertheless, in spite of their punishment through the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests and exile, God did not change and neither did the fundamental principles of manifesting love for Him and because of the covenant promises He had made to them.

But now the covenant promises of numerous descendants and land were being seen to be fulfilled, the terms and conditions of this covenant of law may have seemed daunting to the Israelites, but in practice, they would have resulted in an equitable, just and secure society, united in the worship of a Supreme Being who had promised blessing to all who followed His commands and witnessed to His nature and character, through obedience and commitment to the covenant that had been made. Moreover, He had given them the choice of whether or not to accept those terms and conditions. A covenantal relationship with God was to be entered into voluntarily. Not once, but twice was the covenant presented to the Israelites by Moses and this choice was repeated when they entered the Promised Land.

God had set out His terms and conditions. The Israelites were a chosen people, a people special to God through the close relationship He had had with their ancestors. The last book of the Old Testament stands as testimony to God’s adherence to the

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covenant of promise made to the Patriarchs and the covenant of Law made with the Israelites. They were still the people He had set apart and whose destiny was pivotal in His plans for humanity, for Jesus by fulfilling the law, was to inaugurate the final covenant.

“I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the Lord Almighty.....“I the Lord do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the Lord Almighty
Malachi 3:1 & 6-7

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.
Matthew 5:17-18

So much more could be said about the covenant of Law because it embodied the historical consciousness of the people that would become a united nation and kingdom under David. It also put into their consciences all the principles that would make them to be the examples of God's love, justice and righteousness in the world. This is still what is expected of the people of God today. This milestone is a major reason why Christians cannot afford to dismiss the Old Testament as irrelevant to their faith and practice. We, too, trace our ancestry back to Abraham, albeit in a spiritual sense. There are people today who try to trace their ancestry back to one of the twelve tribes of Israel, but given the scattering of the ten tribes of the kingdom of Israel, any assertion of success would be highly suspect. On the other hand, as we saw last week, tracing our spiritual ancestry back to Abraham is perfectly legitimate.

Equally legitimate is tracing the history of Christianity, and our confidence that Christians now constitute the people of God in our age, back to the time when God chose the people from whom our Saviour would be born. And, as mentioned, our salvation rests on the fact that Jesus came not come to abolish the covenant law, but to fulfil it.

We can also be certain that, while the actual practical details of all the directives given at Sinai may not be practically possible nowadays, the underlying principles of the covenant law are worked out in every piece of advice given in the New Testament regarding our relationship to God and our treatment of our neighbour.

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self- control; and to self- control,

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perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. 2 Peter 1:5-7

You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.

James 2:20-22

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Galatians 5:22-23

James combines the faith of Abraham with the actions God would approve of. Peter says our efforts should aim at being like God and grow towards love for one another. The fruit of the Spirit, God's presence in us, is the result of doing things God's way. Paul adds that there is no law against these things because they come from the law written on the heart, not in outward conformity to a set of rules and regulations.

And, if all this is not enough to convince you of the permanence and enduring relevance of covenant law, perhaps this last text from Revelation will. Ultimately, it is the ten commandments that sum up for us the nature and the character of God, the 'godliness' that Peter tells us we should aspire to reach and are manifested by faith in action and the fruit of the Spirit. So significant, therefore, was the covenant of Law that it even reaches into the New Jerusalem, the dwelling place of God.

After this I looked, and I saw in heaven the temple —that is, the tabernacle of the covenant law —and it was opened. Revelation 15:5

“The temple is ‘the tabernacle of testimony’..the heavenly equivalent of the tabernacle that was with Israel in the wilderness...God’s dwelling place.....The ‘testimony’ referred to is the ten commandments, which Moses placed in the ark of the tabernacle. Therefore the Law of the Lord is his testimony which reveals his just will.” C.K. Beale Commentary on Revelation

WEEK 5: KINGDOM

Looking back it has been relatively easy to trace the journeys from one covenant milestone to the other. The generations between Adam, the covenant of commencements led us to Noah, the covenant of preservation, and from there to Abraham, to the covenant of promise. Although it took many centuries, the story of Jacobs' descendants led us from Joseph to Moses and to the covenant of law at Mount Sinai. When we come to this last covenant in the Old Testament, however, you are pre-warned, a complicated stretch of road. is

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ahead of us. A kingdom comprises of both people and territory, and these maps show us that David welded together the people of twelve tribes of Israel who had entered the Promised Land, and merged their individual territories into a united one under his rule. By doing this David fulfilled God's promise to Abraham about land and descendants. It was only when David had done so that Nathan, the prophet told David of the covenant of kingdom God was going to make with him. The covenant itself can be stated simply. David would be regarded as a great man by posterity and he would be the founder of a dynasty (house) that would establish a permanent dwelling place in an everlasting kingdom planned for it.

“Now then, tell my servant David, ‘This is what the Lord Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever. ”
Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation

2 Samuel 7:8-17

Compared to all the dramatic activity associated with the Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Noah and the Flood, Abraham and Isaac and Moses and the Exodus from Egypt and arrival at the borders of the Promised Land, the covenant with David comes with no major dramatic background introduction and its consequences have no immediate impact on the rest of David's reign or indeed for the rest of the Old Testament period. In fact, with the division of the kingdom after Solomon, it seemed as if an everlasting kingdom from David's dynasty was without foundation. So, with no apparent dramatic event leading up to the covenant and with no apparent fulfilment in the 1000 years or so after David's death, why is this such an important covenant milestone?

The answer comes when we see it from God's perspective. All the covenants of the past and the final one that God would make in the future converge in this Davidic covenant. Our record of the history of the Israelites after they entered

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the Promised land is so disjointed that it is difficult for us to see any connection between Moses and David. But what was happening in the course of that history was God working towards the day when this covenant would be made with him. We are all familiar with the dual carriageway that merges into a single road, and in order to reach David's Jerusalem we have to travel both lanes of the dual carriageway before we merge into the road that leads to the city of David and the establishment of his kingdom. And that carriageway takes us forward in terms of both people and land.

We go back first to Jacob. One verse in Genesis which lays the foundation of the covenant of kingdom. The past and the future converge in the tribe and territory of Judah, the son who saved Joseph from being killed by his brothers.

The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his.
Genesis 49:10

**For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah..... Hebrews
7:14**

Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals
Revelation 5:5

Jacob's blessing of his son Judah was the prophecy of an everlasting kingship. This meant that if this prophecy was to be fulfilled, the road to the next milestone would have to go via the tribe and the territory of Judah. And, in the background, that is exactly what God was arranging, especially concerning two towns and one city in the territory of Judah. We pick up the outcome of this prophecy when the Israelites are going into the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua. The tribe of Judah and the town of Hebron tell us we are heading in the right direction.

from the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh.....Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it
**Numbers
13:6 & 30**

Of the men who went to explore the land, only Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh survived.
Numbers 14:38

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Now the people of Judah approached Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, “You know what the Lord said to Moses the man of God at Kadesh Barnea about you and me.....Then Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave him Hebron as his inheritance. So Hebron has belonged to Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite ever since, because he followed the Lord, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly.

Joshua 14:6 & 13-14

13 In accordance with the Lord’s command to him, Joshua gave to Caleb son of Jephunneh a portion in Judah—Kiriath Arba, that is, Hebron. (Arba was the forefather of Anak.) 14 From Hebron Caleb drove out the three Anakites —Sheshai, Ahiman and Talmai, the sons of Anak. From there he marched against the people living in Debir (formerly called Kiriath Sepher). And Caleb said, “I will give my daughter Aksah in marriage to the man who attacks and captures Kiriath Sepher.” Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb’s brother, took it; so Caleb gave his daughter Aksah to him in marriage

Joshua 15:14-17

The books of Joshua, Judges and Samuel, tell us the difficulties the Israelites had in taking control of the land. Of the people who had left Egypt only Joshua and Caleb entered Canaan because, of the twelve spies sent by Moses, only they reported the land could be taken. Caleb, from the tribe of Judah is allocated land named after Jacob’s son; and his first priority was to conquer the town and territory around Kiriath-Arba. He promised the man who took the town the hand of his daughter in marriage. That man was Othniel, his nephew. This marriage thus kept both tribal and territorial assets within the tribe of Judah. We may well ask why this battle for this particular town so important that a marriage was the prize for success? And that takes us back even further to Abraham.

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.

Genesis 13:18

(Sarah) died at Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went to mourn for Sarah 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 by the Hittites as a burial site.

Genesis 23:2 & 19-20

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**His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, the field Abraham had bought from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried with his wife Sarah
(Genesis 25:9-10 NIV)**

The tribe of Judah was thus connected through ancestry to Jacob and territorially to Abraham. So where does David come into this? Well, as the clans of Judah expanded, the family of David was part of that expansion as I'll show shortly. The clans themselves became instrumental in helping him become king. Among those clans were the Simeonites, who had been absorbed into the territory of Judah, the Calebites, Othnielites, Jerahmeelites and Caleb's brother's clan the Kenites. Significantly it was through the support of these clans that David was acclaimed king at Hebron, the town first given to Caleb. Abraham's and Sarah's burial site became the capital of David as king for seven and a half years. Very significantly, he had gone there on the Lord's instructions.

In the course of time, David inquired of the Lord. "Shall I go up to one of the towns of Judah?" he asked. The Lord said, "Go up." David asked, "Where shall I go?" "To Hebron," the Lord answered.Then the men of Judah came to Hebron, and there they anointed David king over the tribe of Judah.....

**In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months.....
2 Samuel 2:1-4 & 5:5**

The road, so far has wound from Abraham through Jacob, Judah, Caleb and Othniel and territorially secured a sizeable portion of the land allocated to the tribe of Judah, including one of its most sacred and revered sites, the burial place of Abraham and Sarah. As I said earlier, the route between covenant of promise and covenant of kingdom ran along a dual carriageway, and running alongside the lane to Hebron was the lane to Bethlehem. As you've all guessed by now, another convergence between past and future. This time we only go as far back as Othniel, Caleb's son-in-law and the first Judge of Israel. Scholars place the story of Naomi and Ruth during Othniel's or his successor, Ehud's, period in that role. The story of Ruth accompanying Naomi back to her homeland is one of the loveliest stories in the Old Testament. Both returned to the town of Bethlehem. The change in their fortunes when Boaz agreed to marry Ruth set in motion a generational progression to the birth of David. The blessing on the marriage of Boaz and Ruth by the elders of Bethlehem not only takes the genealogical connection back to Judah, the son of Jacob, but, in a

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sense, was also a prophecy of the future greatness of their descendants, for Boaz and Ruth became the great-grandparents of David, who was born in the town. Thus, once more God had made the choice that would lead to the Davidic covenant. Of all the numerous clans of Judah, He chose one family and it was the family of Jesse.

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there

Ruth 1:1-2

So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them.....

Ruth 1:19

Then the elders and all the people at the gate said, "We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. Through the offspring the Lord gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah

Ruth 4:11-12

This, then, is the family line of Perez: Perez was the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, Boaz the father of Obed, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David.

God's covenant of kingdom included the greatness of David's name and the speech of the elders of the standing and fame in Ephrathah takes us to the very threshold of the the New Testament from the prophecy of Micah to the angel's words in Luke.

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

Micah 5:2

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So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of DavidToday in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. Luke 2:4

To the Jews, David was a messianic figure and Jewish hopes today, as we have mentioned many times before, centres on a king like David once more leading them to greatness. Since Messiah means 'Anointed One', there is some justification for this hope because David too was anointed with the Spirit of God when he was chosen as the future king. But what had happened in the past to David was to be fulfilled in the future in a different kind of Messiah.

So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David.

1 Samuel 16:13

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:1-2 NIV)

Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of.....the son of David, the son of Jesse Luke 3:23 & 31-32

It can be seen from these episodes in Israel's history that although God seems to be taking His time, and, we might say, 'going all round the world for a shortcut' one milestone does lead to another, regardless of how roundabout a way it took to get from the covenant of promise to the covenant of kingdom. But what about the covenant of law? Where does that fit in? The answer is Jerusalem, where David brought the Ark of the Covenant, the tangible symbol of the presence of God with His people and the resting place of the Ten Commandments, the holy Law that was the standard and model of His nature and character. It was called the 'city of David' because David had used his own private army to capture the city and none of the tribal clans were involved in the victory. God, through David, claimed Jerusalem as His holy city which will one day be the everlasting dwelling place of the citizens of His kingdom.

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The king and his men marched to Jerusalem to attack the Jebusites, who lived there. The Jebusites said to David, “You will not get in here; even the blind and the lame can ward you off.” They thought, “David cannot get in here.” Nevertheless, David captured the fortress of Zion —which is the City of David.

2 Samuel 5:6-7

In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty- three years.....David then took up residence in the fortress and called it the City of David. He built up the area around it, from the terraces inward..... 2 Samuel 5:5 & 9

How God was working to bring David to this moment took over 300 years. Working out the twists and turns in road to this milestone is not the easiest of tasks. Yet, the fact that it wasn't straightforward leads us two questions. Why did God need to arrange history to make David king and why David? Both are important for their answers take us not just forward to an earthly future, but into a divine eternity. Under the covenant of law, God had been acknowledged as King of the Israelites, their supreme ruler and God. Why then did God chose a human being to rule His chosen people. And, why was David chosen for this honour when God also had foreknowledge of the grievous sins he would commit and the mistakes he would make as king.

The answer to the first question takes us back to Israel's rejection of God as their king. While the covenant law had shaped the history and religion of the Israelites in the desert, when they entered Canaan, adherence to it was sporadic and apostasy was rife. Increasingly the Israelites moved away from the covenant relationship accepted at Sinai. Ironically it was this self-awareness of their difference that led to their demand for a king. They wanted to be just like all the other nations and hence could no longer be considered as citizens of the everlasting kingdom God had prepared for His people.

But when they said, “Give us a king to lead us,” this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. 7 And the Lord told him:“Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. 1 Samuel 8:6-7

We know how the people insisted and Saul was eventually chosen as king. We also know that Saul's reign ended in disaster. He failed God and so God decided on a successor.

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But now your (Saul) kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command **1 Samuel 13:14**

God, in a sense, had to re-establish His Kingship in order to bring in the Kingdom of God which would be ruled by the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. That David had a vision of this is reflected in the number of times Mount Zion is mentioned in the Psalms. The prophets all recognise God as dwelling in and ruling in Jerusalem and herald the One who will be King.

This is what the Lord says: "I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the Faithful City, and the mountain of the Lord Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain." **Zechariah 8:3**

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. **Zechariah 9:9**

It was a kingdom too that would manifest a different ethos from outward conformity to the law. That's where David becomes the standard bearer of that ethos. What the Lord desired from the people when the covenant of law was given was heart and soul commitment. The 23rd psalm is a measure of the depth of God-consciousness in David's mind and of the confidence he had in Him. We also know that David was endowed with the Holy Spirit when Samuel anointed him as the future king. Samuel was told to reject David's brothers even though they seemed ideal king material, because the Lord did not look on the outward appearance but on the heart - 1 Samuel 16:7

Just these few texts from the psalms attributed to David show the extent to which David's inner being was influenced by the God he served. That is why David is called a 'man after my own heart.'

But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me **Psalms 13:5-6**

The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous..... May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my

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heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Psalms 19:8-9 & 14

Test me, Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind; for I have always been mindful of your unfailing love and have lived in reliance on your faithfulness.

Psalms 26:2-3

I desire to do your will, my God; your law is within my heart.”

Psalms 40:8

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.....My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise

Psalms 51:10 & 17

Regardless of the imperfections of David as a man, David as king was to become the iconic and idealistic king of Israel. He followed in the line of men like Noah , Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses who had put their heartfelt trust and faith in the covenant promises God had made with them. Psalm 51 is a commentary on the apostle John's assertion that if we confess our sins and repent of them then God will forgive. David acknowledges his sin is against God's holy law, hence his heartfelt confession and repentance. David's inner being was right with God and he is the model of the future covenant that would determine who entered the Kingdom of God.

“This is the covenant I will make with the people 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.

Jeremiah

31:33

I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.....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.

Ezekiel

11:19 & 36:26

“The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people 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 people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will

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put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. Jeremiah 31:31-33

As time passed and the history of the Israelites hurtled from one disaster to another, it is clear that the knowledge of the creation God had commenced by covenant with Adam and had covenanted to preserve through Noah had faded from the Israelite consciousness. While God was acknowledged as Creator, ancestry traced back to Abraham and the Exodus from Egypt under the leadership of Moses dominated the collective psyche of the generations that led to the choice of David as their king. The one thing that had vastly changed was their failure to keep the covenant of law. That is why this last Old Testament covenant was the catalyst for the change God revealed to Jeremiah. Yes, aspects of all the previous covenants did contribute to the covenant of kingdom made with David. And, yes, aspects of those covenants would continue to contribute in the future to the Kingdom of God which God signalled by His choice of David. However, the Davidic covenant, in God's time, was to be ratified, by the restored kingship of God in the Person of His Son Jesus Christ. In Him, a decisive and ultimate covenant would fulfil those of the past, inaugurate the everlasting Kingdom of God in the present and would be the final covenant milestone directing humanity to its eternal future in the New Jerusalem.

WEEK 6: NEW

Generally speaking, Christians tend to see the Davidic covenant pointing to the future in the Person of Jesus Christ and the New Covenant which came into being because of His earthly and now heavenly ministry. But in many ways the New Covenant is, itself a milestone because it too is telling us there is still a road ahead of us that has to be travelled in order to reach the New Jerusalem. So far, this New Covenant milestone has taken Christianity along the longest and most winding road of all. And we have absolutely no idea of how long it is going to be or how many twists and turns it will follow until our destination is reached. In many ways, there is no point in letting that concern us. We will reach our destination in God's time, not ours! What we need to be much more concerned about is whether or not we are sure we are heading in the right direction. Unlike, the people of the Old Testament, we have been given a guide book containing all the information we need to make sure there will be a welcome for us in the New Jerusalem. Basically, what our guidebook gives us, is a confidence that God's plans and purposes are on-going and progressing towards their ultimate fulfilment.

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That confidence is based on His faithfulness to His covenants in the past. All the Old Testament covenants have already been fulfilled. Secondly, it gives us the assurance that this final milestone is not subject to the fallibilities of a human being, but is firmly grounded, through Christ, in the very Person, Character and Nature of God Himself. Why should we have such confidence and assurance, especially when the Old Testament covenants were made in the very distant past to people and in circumstances that bear no resemblance to our lives today? We can give several possible answers to that question, but perhaps the most important ones relate to how Jesus and the emerging church included mention of people connected to the Old Testament covenants.

Jesus, for example, mentioned Abraham many times in different contexts. Perhaps the most astounding one was Jesus' claim that He knew Abraham and was born before him. Then Jesus gave the people Abraham as their example of how they should be regarding Him. Abraham believed God's word and acted accordingly. Jesus was bringing the word of God in His own Person to them and they were refusing to accept Him. By doing so they were disbelieving and rejecting the very Word of God. This was something Jesus recognised when He told the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man is depicted as pleading with Abraham to save his brothers by sending them a message from beyond the grave.

YOUR FATHER ABRAHAM REJOICED AT THE THOUGHT OF SEEING MY DAY; he saw it and was glad.” “You are not yet fifty years old,” they said to him, “and you have seen Abraham!” “Very truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!”

John 8:56-58

“Abraham is our father,” they answered. “If you were Abraham’s children”, said Jesus “then you would do what Abraham did. As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things.”

“He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father; send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ “Abraham replied”, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’ “No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead. Luke 16: 29-31

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On a more positive note, Jesus also gave us indications that faith in Him made certain people the true children of Abraham. In particular, the woman who believed even touching the hem of His garment could heal her of her affliction. The man who climbed the tree and found salvation; and the faith of the gentile centurion that Jesus could heal his servant at a distance with just a word, stand out.

Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her. Luke 13:16

Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. Luke 19:9-10

When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, "Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 8:10-11

In just these few Scriptures, we can see that although the covenant of promise to Abraham is not expressed explicitly by Jesus, by each reference to him, Jesus is pointing to him as the father of a countless number of descendants who will be his heirs through faith in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, because even Abraham had rejoiced to see that day (John 8:56). This aspect of the New Covenant milestone thus gives us a concrete direction and focus for our faith.

YOUR FATHER ABRAHAM REJOICED AT THE THOUGHT OF SEEING MY DAY; HE SAW IT AND WAS GLAD JOHN 8:56

I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 8:11

We know that we are heading in the right direction to be at that feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, because these references about Abraham, which Jesus directly relates to His own ministry, are an infallible guide and guarantee

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of arrival in the New Jerusalem. We know this because the Church continued and explained what this meant for followers of Jesus.

Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

Galatians

3:7-8 & 14

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

Hebrews 11:17-19

Paul is in no doubt that the fundamental characteristic of the New Covenant finds its origin in Abraham's adherence to God's word. Jesus was the Word incarnate, so faith has to be built on the words He spoke about God the Father, His own Person and His role in God's plan of redemption; and of His future heavenly ministry leading to His coming again to make a reality the eternal destination the New Covenant milestone is leading us towards. The writer to the Hebrews maintains the proof of Abraham's faith was obedience to God's command to sacrifice his son Isaac, even though the covenant of promise was to be perpetuated through him. Here is the indication that the ultimate foundation of Christian faith is belief in the atoning sacrifice and subsequent resurrection and ascension of God's only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This whole talk could have been taken up with the connection between Abraham, Jesus' mentions of him, how this was understood and applied in the early church and which is still part of our Christian beliefs today. However, Jesus also mentioned two other recipients of God's covenants. He only mentions Noah once, but in a very significant context. Speaking about His second coming, Jesus states that the world will be in a desperately sinful state. I don't think anyone can blame us for thinking that, given the state of the world today, Jesus' return can't be too far away. Maybe it's simply because the population of the world is so much greater now than in the past, that there are a greater number of people who have no time for God. Hard as it is to accept, the Bible does not give us any assurance that the situations we face globally are

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going to get any better. In fact, it may take even worse times before God decides 'enough is enough'. Since Jesus tells us no-one can predict that time, our Christian duty is simply to be prepared in mind and body to meet their Lord, be it the very next minute, when death takes us or when He comes again.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

Matthew 24:35-39

As far as the Church was concerned, only the writer to the Hebrews and Peter mention Noah, most probably because they were writing to a Jewish audience where the Flood was part of a national consciousness. Both these texts could be taken as commentary on Jesus words in Matthew. I've already mentioned taking Jesus at His word was the basis of faith. Noah was an example of taking God at His word and He is contrasted to the rest of the world who had rejected God's warning of a coming disaster. An even worse disaster is going to come on this world one day and there will be no coming back from it. Jesus spoke of hell and Peter tells us, very bluntly, God's judgement is coming on a world that refuses to acknowledge Him and His ways, and He will not hesitate to destroy those who are not under the protection of the righteousness given to them by atonement for ungodliness in the New Covenant in Christ's sacrificial death.

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith. Hebrews 11:7

But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. Luke 12:5

if he 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; 2 Peter 2:5

After Noah comes Moses and he is mentioned by Jesus in different contexts. Going back to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Abraham is cited as

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saying people of Jesus' time had Moses and the prophets as their guides to Godly living. In other words, the authority given to these men in the past was still relevant in the present. This becomes clear when we look at Jesus' attitude to the law - the covenant given to Moses. There is no doubt that Jesus endorses and adheres to the Law given to Moses and continued to be broadcast by the prophets. When we looked at the covenant of Law, however, we saw that the Law which was housed in the Ark of the Covenant was the Ten Commandments written on the tablets of stone. To this day we regard obedience to the first 4 as manifesting our love for God; and obedience to the last 6 as manifesting our love to our neighbour. In obedience to God, Jesus fulfilled every tenet of that law and His warning to us is that those commandments will stand as our standard of Christian behaviour until the end of time. Jesus, in fact, added substance to that law in the Sermon on the Mount when He referred not just to the letter of the law, but to the spirit of it as well. Hatred was tantamount to murder: Lustful looks tantamount to adultery. And again we have endorsement of Jesus' words from Paul, which also implies his acceptance of the Ten Commandments as the tenets of covenant law.

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. FOR TRULY I TELL YOU, UNTIL HEAVEN AND EARTH DISAPPEAR, NOT THE SMALLEST LETTER, NOT THE LEAST STROKE OF A PEN, WILL BY ANY MEANS DISAPPEAR FROM THE LAW UNTIL EVERYTHING IS ACCOMPLISHED..... So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Matthew 5: 17-18 & 7:12

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied:“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ’ This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it:‘Love your neighbour as yourself. ’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Matthew 22:36-40

Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. Romans 10:4

The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command:“Love your neighbour as yourself.”

Romans 13:9

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Now some of you may be thinking that Paul also said some very negative things about the law, particularly to the Galatians. There are times, even in Romans where he appears to be regarding the law as of no consequence for Christians. The topic of Paul's attitude and statements about the law are a major area of study and mentions of the law need to be taken in the context in which they were written. Extremely briefly, all I can say with some certainty is that Paul never said the Ten Commandments were irrelevant. In the Galatian context, what he was condemning was adherence to the ceremonial law of circumcision, which the Judaisers were proclaiming was essential for salvation. No outward conformity to ritual or ceremonial laws could effect salvation and, for Paul, those who were led by the Spirit had the laws written on their hearts, according to what God had told the prophet Jeremiah. The new covenant, personified in Jesus, enabled God's law to become part of the very being of Christians through the indwelling power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. And, to Paul, because of influence of that presence, Christians will instinctively follow the precepts of the law and the prophets - and, just as importantly, if they are sensitive to the Spirit's leading, will know conviction when they haven't!

I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!".....Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because "the righteous will live by faith."
Galatians 2:21 & 3:11

"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah."This is the covenant I will make with the people 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.
Jeremiah 31:31-33

But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God. Romans 2:29

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.....the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self- control. Against such things there is no law..... Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit
Galatians 5:18-25

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The key point about all of all that is said about the covenant of law by both Jesus and the Church is that whatever way it is interpreted, it is subsumed by all that is represented by the New Covenant. Moses appeared with Jesus in the Transfiguration. After His resurrection Jesus emphasised to both the Emmaus Road disciples and His own disciples that this new milestone was the natural progression of those that had gone before. It was insight that Philip had been given from the very beginning of his discipleship for when he went to seek Nathanael, he based his appeal to him on the basis that Moses and the prophets had written of the coming of Jesus of Nazareth. That in turn led to Nathanael's declaration that Jesus was the Son of God and the King of Israel.

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.....He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Luke 24:27 & 44

Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote —Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."....Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel." John 1:45 & 49

And mention of King of Israel brings us back to David and the covenant of Kingdom. References to Jesus' descent from David, His acceptance as the immortal heir to David's everlasting kingdom permeate the New Testament from the genealogy of Matthew to the vision of Revelation. There are just too many texts pointing us to the direct connection between Jesus and David, but two in particular stand out. Firstly, Jesus' primary message of the coming of the kingdom of God. Again, you don't have to read very far in the New Testament before coming across a reference to the kingdom of God because the purpose of Jesus coming to earth was to be the means by which people could become citizens of it through the forgiveness of sin and gift of righteousness. It was Jesus primary message and the one He commanded those He sent out to preach too.

But he said, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea. Luke 4:43-44

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but the crowds learned about it and followed him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing
Luke 9:11

Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, 21 nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.”
Luke 17:20-21

“When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you
Luke 10:8-9

What was new in this message was that Jesus Himself was the expected Messiah, who would fulfil the covenant of kingdom God made with David. It was, in a sense, the declaration that a final milestone had been reached on the road to establishing that kingdom whose capital was to be the New Jerusalem. It cannot be denied that in the preaching and teaching about the kingdom of God in parables and in the various statements of Jesus, He was presenting a future reality for those who would accept and believe in all that His earthly ministry entailed. The Church took up the message of kingdom, with Paul even defining those who would not enter it. By contrast, the writer to the Hebrews and John point us in the right direction.

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.
Galatians 5:19-21

For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater —has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.
Ephesians 5:5

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our “God is a consuming fire.”
Hebrews 12:28-29

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father —to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.
Revelation 1:5-6

GOD'S MILESTONES

It could be supposed that the people who then addressed Jesus as the son of David could have done so as a result of hearing Him preaching about the kingdom of God, but that address implied divine insight into the Person and the role of Jesus for their salvation. It was an insight the Pharisees either failed to grasp or chose to ignore. We see this in the only two times Jesus actually mentioned David. Once it was in the context of a rebuke to the Pharisees and secondly, in a seemingly perplexing question to those who had been challenging Him. The attitude of the Pharisees on both these occasions show they have refused to accept that Jesus had authority for His ministry from God. On both occasions, Jesus' response implied His status was greater than that of David, as Lord of the Sabbath and the Son of Someone greater than David.

The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Matthew 1:1

At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath." He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests.

Matthew 12:1-4

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?" "The son of David," they replied. He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, "'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.'" If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Matthew 22:41-46

I cannot say anything about Adam because Jesus did not refer to him at all. It was Paul who made the connection between the first and second Adam. but although Jesus did not mention him, we can make a connection in the sense that Jesus was there at the covenant of commencement, which the believers in the New Covenant are ready to endorse.

GOD'S MILESTONES

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, 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. Genesis 1:26

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. John 1:1-3

For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together Colossians 1:16-17

You may wonder why I've chosen to talk about the New Covenant in terms of the four previous ones. I hope, by doing it this way, you have seen that the coming of Jesus gave a brand new perspective to those that had gone before. Creation was through Him. Preservation comes through Him, because as Alpha and Omega He can fulfil His promise to be with us till the end of the age. He is the focus of faith that results in the gift of the Holy Spirit, who will ensure the law is not just outward show but the essence of the new nature that will fit us for the kingdom of God in eternity.

Jesus is the embodiment of the Old Testament covenants and although our evangelical tradition is more inclined to see the New Covenant only in terms of Jesus shedding His blood on the cross, my personal opinion is that the New Covenant is summed up in by John 3:16-17 By any estimation, the newest and the last covenant milestone on our way to the New Jerusalem comes with a cast iron guarantee for it is grounded in what God has done for us in sending Christ as the Saviour of the world.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. John 3:16-17

GOD'S MILESTONES