

## STUDY GUIDE

# The Bible's Big Story

The Bible is a book like no other - the #1 global bestseller, written over 1,500 years across 60 generations by around 40 different authors. Yet one central story weaves through this vast collection: a story about God's kingdom and its king, Jesus. This course takes you through the Bible's big story in 13 key moments. Grasp the story, see how it connects to Jesus, and how it changes everything.



The earth starts formless and empty. God forms it and fills it, establishing his kingdom on earth. God makes people in his image to act like him, to expand his kingdom. The earth is perfect but not finished. The plan is a worldwide kingdom, everywhere for everyone.

## Video Summary

God creates everything. The earth begins formless and empty. First, God forms it. He tames the wild and orders the chaos; he creates form, structure and beauty. Next, he fills it. He creates life, energy and potential. God is presented as a powerful king establishing his kingdom on earth.

God makes humans in his image, to reflect him, represent him and act like him. Our role is to form and fill the earth, to establish God's kingdom on earth. We form the world through activities like farming, building and manufacturing. We fill the world with families, communities and culture.

God plants a garden. It is a miniature version of God's kingdom, a miniature heaven on earth. There are two trees in the Garden which show what it means to live with God as king, in his kingdom, under his rule.

The Tree of Life symbolises enjoying the benefits of God's rule. They can eat from it. Connection and closeness to God brings wholeness, harmony and life as it's supposed to be. This flows into a healthy relationship with ourselves (how we think and feel about ourselves) and healthy relationships with others (how we relate to and interact with them).

The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil symbolises fulfilling the responsibilities of God's rule. They mustn't eat from it. This means accepting his definition of good and evil, living life in the way he's defined, and following his instruction and direction.

The earth is perfect but not finished. God wants people to expand and spread the Garden to the world. The plan is for a worldwide kingdom everywhere for everyone.

## **Discussion Questions**

- 1** God made humans in his image, to act like him by forming (e.g. farming, building and manufacturing) and filling (e.g. with families, communities and culture). In what other ways do people form the world and fill the world?
- 2** How could this understanding of the role God gives humans change the way you see yourself and your everyday life? How could it change the way you see others?
- 3** In the Garden the man and woman had life as it's supposed to be: wholeness and harmony. If this was the reality we lived in, what would there be more of and what would there be less of?
- 4** God could have created the earth as perfect and finished but he chose not to. What does that show you about God? What does that show you about the role he gives humans?
- 5** Expanding and spreading God's kingdom is a fundamentally human activity, not a merely religious activity. What happens when we reduce it to a merely religious activity? What happens when we grasp it is a fundamentally human activity?

## **Bible Passages for Further Study**

**Genesis 1** — God creates the world and humans in his image ★

**Genesis 2** — God plants a garden with two trees, a miniature kingdom



The man and woman reject God as king and refuse to live under his rule. Rejecting the responsibilities means losing the benefits. They are thrown out of God's kingdom which is a problem for them and a problem for God's plan for the world. People have a sin problem and continue to be snake-hearted, forming and filling the earth with chaos, death and darkness.

## Video Summary

God commands the man and woman not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. A snake tempts them and they eat, rejecting God as king. Rather than accepting God's definition of good and evil and trusting him, they're ignoring God's definition, asserting themselves over his rule and trusting themselves. This is sin.

God throws them out of the Garden, out of his kingdom. They can no longer eat from the Tree of Life. Rejecting the responsibilities of living in God's kingdom means losing the benefits.

When people are disconnected and distanced from God, they lose life as it's supposed to be. Everything becomes incomplete and fractured, including relationship with ourselves and relationships with others.

People no longer reflect and represent God, they no longer establish his kingdom. As a result, God's plan for a worldwide kingdom everywhere for everyone is in danger.

God says there will be ongoing tension between Team Human and Team Snake that will be ended by a future Snake Crusher — a human descendant who will once and for all destroy the Snake.

As generations unfold, people repeatedly side with Team Snake. The pattern is clear: instinctively we are snake-hearted and bring chaos, death and darkness into the world. We all have a sin problem.

## **Discussion Questions**

- 1** Sin is trusting ourselves rather than trusting God. How does this view of sin differ from other ways people define it? How does it shape your own thinking?
- 2** Why do you think people are so instinctively drawn to making their own definition of good and evil and choosing their own way?
- 3** Why does rejecting the responsibilities of living in God's kingdom mean losing the benefits? How are the two intrinsically connected?
- 4** The story shows that the root cause of problems in the world is disconnection and distance from God. What other causes do people put forward? How might they relate back to that disconnection and distance?

## **Bible Passages for Further Study**

Genesis 3 — The man and the woman reject God and are thrown out of the Garden ★



God promises Abraham's family will be his people, in his place, be blessed under his rule, and be a blessing to all people. Through this family, God guarantees his original plan for the world.

## Video Summary

God chooses a man called Abraham and makes a four-part promise to him about his family: They will be God's people — his descendants will grow into a great nation. They will live in God's place — God takes Abraham to the land of Canaan and says his descendants will one day live in and own the land. They will be blessed living under God's rule — they will enjoy the benefits and fulfil the responsibilities of God's rule. They will be a blessing — they will expand and spread God's rule to all people across the world.

This is not a new plan, it is the original plan. The first man and woman in the Garden were God's people in God's place. They were blessed under God's rule. They were to be a blessing to the world, joining in with what God was doing and establishing his kingdom on earth.

Through Abraham's family, God guarantees his original plan for the world — to bring about a worldwide kingdom, everywhere for everyone.

The question is how God can keep his promise given that people have a sin problem, given that we spiral towards self-destruction and reject God as king. How can a human family be the solution when humans are the problem?

## **Discussion Questions**

- 1** What are the four parts of the promise God made to Abraham and his family? How does each part link to the original plan?
- 2** Why do you think God didn't come up with a new plan?
- 3** Abraham's family were chosen because God hadn't given up on the world. What does that tell you about God and how he works? How does that shape the way you see God's people?
- 4** Which parts of the promise do you think Abraham would have found most challenging to believe? What makes it challenging for you to believe God's promises?

## **Bible Passages for Further Study**

Genesis 11:1-8 — People reject God by building the Tower of Babel

Genesis 12:1-6 — God's promise to Abraham's family ★



# Rescue

Genesis 13–50 · Exodus 1–18

The promise passes from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob, who is renamed Israel. They move to Egypt where they end up as slaves. God's people, the Israelites, cry out to God for freedom. God rescues his people through Moses.

## Video Summary

God repeats the promise he made to Abraham about his family first to his son Isaac and then to his grandson Jacob. Jacob is renamed Israel and has twelve sons whose descendants later become the twelve tribes of the nation Israel.

Israel's family move to Egypt. There they grow into a large nation, the Israelites. A new Pharaoh takes over and feels threatened by them. He enslaves them. They remain trapped there for 400 years.

Although Abraham's family have grown into a great nation, the other parts of God's promise remain unfulfilled. They're not in their own land, they're in Egypt. They're not blessed under God's rule, they're suffering under Pharaoh's rule. They're not being a blessing — instead they're enslaved and building a kingdom for Pharaoh.

The Israelites cry out to God. God raises up a leader to rescue them — Moses. There is a face-off between Moses representing God and Pharaoh who thinks he is God. God proves he's a more powerful king and liberates the Israelites out of Egypt. They travel through the desert and arrive at Mount Sinai.

## **Discussion Questions**

- 1** What would it have been like for the Israelites during their 400 years of slavery? How would they feel about the promises? What would their prayer life be like?
- 2** Everybody lives for something. What sort of things do people today invest their lives to build, even non-religious people?
- 3** In what ways might we find ourselves investing our lives in building things that don't align with God's kingdom?
- 4** God proves he's a more powerful king. How can this encourage us when we face seemingly unbeatable challenges or oppressive systems today?
- 5** How is the way we pray changed by the fact that God acts on the basis of his promises?

## **Bible Passages for Further Study**

**Genesis 46:1-4** — Abraham's descendants (the Israelites) go to Egypt

**Exodus 1** — Israel's family grows despite Pharaoh's attempt to stop them ★

**Exodus 2:23-24** — God hears his people's cry for help

**Exodus 3** — God initiates a rescue

**Exodus 14** — God defeats Pharaoh and liberates the Israelites from Egypt



# Law

Exodus 19–40 · Leviticus · Numbers · Deuteronomy

After their rescue, God gives his people the law. The people realise they are sinful and can't be close to a holy God. They need a representative and must approach God in his way. God provides the Tabernacle, priests and sacrifices and moves into it so he can be connected and close to them.

## Video Summary

God appears on Mount Sinai in fire, smoke and lightning. He gives the Israelites the law — the key responsibilities for them to fulfil as they live with him as their king, under his rule, in his kingdom. It includes the Ten Commandments and detailed national laws covering everything from property rights, to contracts, to criminal justice, to health and safety.

The law is given after their rescue. It is how to live because they have been saved, not how to live in order to be saved. This is the same for Christians — we are not saved by obedience but we are saved for obedience. The New Testament word for this is 'grace'.

The people recognise that they are incompatible with being close to God. Just like light overwhelms darkness, when a holy God full of beauty, life and light meets sinful people full of chaos, death and darkness, we're overwhelmed and our existence is threatened.

God allows Moses to act as a mediator between God and the people. He goes close for them. He represents the people to God and represents God to the people.

The people attempt to make their own way to get close to God by building a golden cow. It doesn't make them closer to him — it actually distances them further. God gives the people designs for a large tent called the Tabernacle. They accept God's way to get close to him and carefully follow his designs. God moves into the tent.

Laws and rituals related to the Tabernacle show how people can be connected and close to God again. Priests show that we need a mediator between us and God. Sacrifices show that we need our sin to be covered, our chaos, death and darkness to be removed, and something or someone to be overwhelmed instead of us.

The Israelites wander around the desert for 40 years. Moses gives a series of farewell speeches, reminding the new generation of God's promises and describing the benefits they can enjoy and the responsibilities they must fulfil as they live in God's place.

## **Discussion Questions**

- 1** We are not saved by obedience but we are saved for obedience. How does this understanding of grace and law shape your approach to living the Christian life? What happens when we forget that we are not saved by obedience? What happens when we forget that we are saved for obedience?
- 2** The people realised their sinfulness made them incompatible with a holy God. Why are the two incompatible — why can God just ignore sin? How does an understanding of God's holiness impact your own self-awareness and your approach to God?
- 3** Why do you think the people built a golden cow to get close to God, even after all they'd seen God do? What are some ways people today might try to approach or define God on their own terms rather than God's?
- 4** The Tabernacle, priests, and sacrifices pointed to the need for a mediator and for sin to be covered. How do these symbolic rituals help you appreciate what Jesus later accomplished?

## **Bible Passages for Further Study**

**Exodus 19–20:21** — God appears dramatically on Mount Sinai, Moses acts as representative and God gives the Ten Commandments ★

**Exodus 40** — The building of the Tabernacle is completed

**Deuteronomy 34** — Moses sees the promised land but dies before entering; leadership passes to Joshua



God gives the Israelites the promised land through Joshua's leadership. Over the following years the people repeatedly reject God, falling into a self-destructive spiral. They need a leader.

## **Video Summary**

Moses dies and Joshua becomes the new leader. He leads the Israelites into the land of Canaan, the promised land, fighting battles and overcoming the resistance they face.

The land is shared out between all of Israel's tribes and clans. It's their land now, it's the land of Israel. God keeps his promise, giving the people rest in a land that is their own. God's people have become a great nation in God's place.

Joshua and other leaders die. As years pass, Israel enters a repeating cycle: they reject God; God allows enemies to attack and oppress them; they cry out to God for help; God raises up a hero called a judge to rescue and lead them. Every time the leader dies, the people fall back into the same downwards spiral.

The pattern is clear: people need a leader, a champion from Team Human who won't side with Team Snake but who will crush the head of the Snake. We need someone who can save us from our enemies and save us from ourselves — from the chaos, death and darkness in the world and in our hearts.

## Discussion Questions

- 1** God fully keeps all his promises in detail. What does that show us about God? How can we cultivate awareness of that truth?
- 2** Why do people often fall into negative cycles or repeating past mistakes? What helps to stop that from happening?
- 3** Israel entered a cycle: rejecting God, facing consequences, crying out for help, being rescued, and then rejecting God again. Do you see patterns like this in your own life?
- 4** The people needed someone to save them from their enemies and from themselves. In what ways are each of these relevant for people today?

## Bible Passages for Further Study

Joshua 1:1-9 — The Israelites enter the promised land

Joshua 21:43-45 — God gives the Israelites rest in the promised land

Joshua 23 — Joshua's dying speech reminding the people of God's promises and their responsibilities ★

Judges 2:6-23 — The people fall into a repeating downward spiral



The Israelites reject God as their king. God chooses King David and promises that through his family, he will establish his kingdom forever. David's son will build the Temple and be the kind of king God is, reflecting and representing his rule. God's promises are significantly fulfilled through King Solomon.

## **Video Summary**

The Israelites demand a king. Although they do need a leader, their request is effectively a rejection of God as their king. Saul is Israel's first king. He has the same problems as the people — he doesn't live life in the way God defines, doesn't submit to and trust God. He spirals downward towards self-destruction. The people need a king who will reflect and represent God.

God gives the people the king they need. He chooses David to be Israel's second king. David is a man after God's own heart. He wants his rule to mirror God's because he recognises this kingdom is God's kingdom. He accepts God's definition of how to live. He obeys and enforces the law God gave Israel at Mount Sinai.

King David wants to upgrade the Tabernacle where God lives and build a temple. God says instead, he will build David a dynasty. God promises David that he will have a successor, a son. This son will do what humans are meant to do — join in with what God is doing, reflect and represent God. This son will build God a place to live. God will permanently establish this son's kingdom and it will stand forever.

The reign of King Solomon, David's son, is a high point in Israel's history. He builds the Temple for God to live in. Israel sees peace and prosperity like never before. This is the most God's promises have seen fulfilment — God's people have become a great nation in God's place, blessed under God's rule, with God living with his people.

## **Discussion Questions**

- 1** The Israelites wanted a human king partly because they wanted to be like other nations. In what areas are we tempted to act and think like the people around us, instead of trusting God?
- 2** What does God promise King David's son will be like and what will he do?
- 3** How does the promise to David connect to the promise to Abraham? How does it connect to the original plan for the world?

## **Bible Passages for Further Study**

**1 Samuel 8** — The people request a human king, rejecting God as their king

**1 Samuel 16:1-13** — God chooses David as king

**2 Samuel 7:1-17** — God's promise to David in response to David planning to build God a house ★

**1 Kings 8:1-21** — The building of the Temple is completed



# Split

1 Kings 11–22 · 2 Kings

The kingdom divides into Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Most kings are bad and the good kings eventually die. They need God to raise up the promised king and establish his eternal kingdom.

## Video Summary

Immediately after King Solomon, civil war tears Israel in two. The kingdom divides into ten northern tribes and two southern tribes. The north continues to be called 'Israel'. The south is called 'Judah', taking its name from one of its tribes — the tribe King David's family belongs to.

There is a king problem. All kings of Israel and most kings of Judah are bad — they don't reflect and represent God's rule well. A few kings are good but good kings still die.

The people need God to keep his promise that through David's family he will raise up a good king and establish his kingdom permanently.

## Discussion Questions

- 1** How do the successes and failures of leaders impact those they are responsible for? Can you think of examples today where leadership has divided people instead of uniting them?
- 2** How do you think the people felt watching king after king fail to be the kind of king God is? How might it impact their view of God? How might it impact their belief in his promise?
- 3** Have you experienced the fallout of failed leadership? How has your experience of leaders influenced your view of God?

- 4 God commits to keeping his promise even after the kingdom splits apart. What does this show us about God's character and how he responds to human failure?

### **Bible Passages for Further Study**

1 Kings 11:1-13 — Solomon's heart turns from God

1 Kings 11:26-40 — God says his promises will stand even though the kingdom will split ★

1 Kings 12:16-24 — The kingdom splits



Israel is exiled by Assyria and Judah is exiled by Babylon. The population is shredded to pieces, the capital city and its temple are destroyed. God's kingdom lies in ruin.

## Video Summary

The northern tribes, Israel, are invaded and taken into captivity by Assyria in 722BC. They disappear from history. The southern tribes, Judah, are invaded and taken into captivity by Babylon in 587BC. The population is shredded to pieces. Jerusalem, the capital city, and the Temple in it are destroyed.

This is a major problem for God's plan. Any hint of fulfilment of his promises seems far from reality. God's people are no longer a great nation — they have been torn in two by civil war and shredded to pieces by foreign armies. They are no longer in God's place — they are imprisoned away from their homeland. They are clearly not blessed and are unable to be a blessing. They cannot spread God's kingdom to the world when God's kingdom lies in rubble and dust.

## Discussion Questions

- 1** Imagine being forcibly removed from your home and country. What would be the hardest things about that experience?
- 2** In what ways does the exile parallel the fall? What does it show us about people? What does it show us about sin?
- 3** Have you ever felt like your faith, or God's work in a particular area, was in ruins? What makes hope hard in devastating circumstances?

## **Bible Passages for Further Study**

2 Kings 17:1-23 — Israel exiled to Assyria ★

2 Kings 25:1-21 — Judah exiled to Babylon



# Return

Ezra · Nehemiah · 1 & 2 Chronicles

The people return to the promised land. They rebuild the Temple and the city walls. The restoration is incomplete. They need the promised king to fulfil God's plan and rebuild God's kingdom into a worldwide kingdom.

## Video Summary

The Babylonian Empire gives way to the Persian Empire. King Cyrus the Great decrees the Israelites can return to their land in 536 BC.

The people rebuild the Temple. The project is led by Ezra who also taught the people God's law. The people also rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, the capital city where the Temple is located. This project is led by Nehemiah.

This is where the Old Testament ends. There is a lingering sense that this isn't the true ending of the story. The story of Israel's history — the story of human history — is still waiting for the promised king who will build God's house so God can live with his people in his place.

The promised king will fulfil the responsibilities of living in God's kingdom and enable the people to do so too, so they can enjoy the benefits. He will be a champion who will: interrupt the spiral towards self-destruction; crush the Snake; remove sin; re-establish connection and closeness to God; and enable us to have life as it's supposed to be. He will bring God's kingdom from heaven to earth — a kingdom God himself will establish — a worldwide kingdom, everywhere for everyone, forever.

## **Discussion Questions**

- 1** God moves the heart of King Cyrus to begin rebuilding the Temple. What does that show you about God and the way he works? Have you seen times when God worked through unexpected people or situations in your life?
- 2** Ezra taught the people God's law as part of the work rebuilding God's kingdom. Why is a return to kingdom responsibilities essential for meaningful restoration? What would it look like for you to structure your life around God's definition of how to live?
- 3** Even though they return, why is there a lingering sense that the story is unfinished? What is missing? Why doesn't it feel like a full restoration?

## **Bible Passages for Further Study**

**Ezra 1:1-6** — The rebuilding of the Temple is authorised

**Nehemiah 2:1-6** — The rebuilding of the city walls is authorised

**2 Chronicles 36:15-23** — The final words of the Hebrew Bible — a king chosen by God to build God's house ★



Jesus fulfils the promise God made to Abraham and to David. He is the promised king, uniquely blessed under God's rule and spreading it to the world. Through him, God establishes his kingdom. Jesus publicly announces the kingdom and powerfully brings it from heaven to earth. He teaches a surprising message about what the kingdom is like. He is a surprising king who suffers, dies and rises again. Jesus re-invites us to join in with the original plan for the world by joining in with him.

## **Video Summary**

Jesus fulfils the promise made to Abraham's family. He is blessed under God's rule, enjoying the benefits and fulfilling the responsibilities in a way that no-one else has. He is a human like no other. He will be a blessing and spread God's rule to the world.

Jesus fulfils the promise made to David's family. He will do what humans are meant to do — join in with what God is doing, reflect and represent God. He will be the kind of king that God is and rule in the way that God rules. He is a king like no other. He will build God a place to live. He will bring about God's kingdom, a kingdom God himself will permanently establish.

During his public life, Jesus announces the arrival of God's kingdom and brings it from heaven to earth. He knows who he is and what he's doing. He preaches with authority and demonstrates supernatural power to bring beauty, life and light into the lives of the people around him.

The kingdom has a surprising message. The responsibilities are surprisingly heavy: total submission from the deepest part of who we are. The benefits are surprisingly high: a new level of connection and closeness to God is available, calling him 'our Father'. It is an upside-down kingdom, that looks small and weak but has disproportionate influence and value.

The kingdom has a surprising king. Jesus says he will suffer and die. Jesus bans the disciples from telling others that he is the promised king because their idea of victory is so different

from the apparent defeat Jesus predicts. The cross is how Jesus will establish God's kingdom.

Jesus dies on a cross. He allows the Snake to bite his heel, and in doing so he crushes the Snake's head. When a holy God meets sinful people, we're overwhelmed and our existence is threatened. Jesus chooses to be overwhelmed instead of us. He is our mediator — he puts himself between us and God. He sacrifices himself to take our sin, our snake-hearted instincts, our chaos, death and darkness. He takes the consequences of us rejecting God as king. He is disconnected and distanced from God for us.

Three days later, Jesus comes back to life. His resurrection is proof of victory. He has crushed the Snake in the world and the Snake in our hearts. He has saved us from our enemies and from ourselves. He has rescued us from powers we couldn't control, pulled us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light and brought us back home. He renews connection and closeness with God to give us life as it's supposed to be.

Jesus reinvites us to join in with the original plan for the world. He turns chaos into beauty, emptiness and death into life, and darkness into light. He announces the good news that God's kingdom has arrived. He invites us to be part of expanding and spreading God's kingdom to everyone everywhere.

## Discussion Questions

- 1** In what ways does Jesus fulfill the promise God made to Abraham? In what ways does Jesus fulfill the promise God made to David?
- 2** What stories can you think of where Jesus demonstrates supernatural power to bring beauty, life and light into the lives of the people around him?
- 3** What kind of king and what kind of victory were the disciples expecting? How does Jesus' victory in the upside-down kingdom challenge those expectations? In what ways might our own ideas of success and strength be out of line with his?
- 4** What aspects of Jesus' victory through his death and resurrection stand out to you? Which ways of understanding is more or less familiar to you? What is surprising? What aspects would you like to explore more?

- 5** Where in your world do you see chaos, emptiness, or darkness? How might Jesus be calling you to join in with his work there?

## **Bible Passages for Further Study**

**Matthew 1:1-17** — Jesus is introduced as a son of Abraham and a son of David

**Matthew 4:17-25** — Jesus begins his ministry by announcing the arrival of God's kingdom

**Matthew 13:1-52** — Teaching about the surprising nature of the kingdom

**Matthew 16:13-28** — The disciples recognise Jesus is the promised king but are shocked by his prediction of suffering and death ★

**Matthew 28:16-20** — Jesus reinvites his followers to join in with the original plan for the world



After Jesus ascends to heaven, on Pentecost, God pours his Spirit on his people. He now lives inside them. The Spirit empowers this community, the church, to spread God's kingdom to the world.

## **Video Summary**

After his resurrection and just before ascending to heaven, Jesus tells his followers to wait in Jerusalem to receive the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, God pours out his Spirit on his people.

God who lived with his people in the Garden, the Tabernacle and the Temple now lives in his people. We can now be connected and close to God, having our lives transformed by his beauty, life and light from the inside out.

This community of people brought into God's kingdom by King Jesus and his Spirit is the church.

God's kingdom is no longer restricted to the nation of Israel but is open to all nations as God originally intended. The kingdom is for everyone. The church begins to spread God's kingdom across language barriers, borders and cultures. The kingdom is for everywhere.

The Spirit empowers the church to witness about Jesus. The church is blessed under God's rule and is a blessing as they expand and spread God's kingdom to the ends of the world. This is the part of the story we are living in.

## **Discussion Questions**

- 1** God now lives in his people by his Spirit, transforming lives from the inside out. If you are a Christian, how have you experienced this inner transformation?
- 2** Are there groups of people you instinctively avoid or feel unconnected to? Where might God be calling you to cross a boundary to love someone different from you (e.g. social, cultural, generational)? How can you be intentional about crossing boundaries, welcoming outsiders and building friendships?
- 3** What is the difference between being empowered to witness about Jesus and spread God's kingdom, rather than simply being expected to? In what specific areas do you need to be empowered by the Spirit?
- 4** In what relationships, spaces, or situations could you witness about Jesus? What are some practical ways you and your group can do this together?

## **Bible Passages for Further Study**

**Acts 1:1-11** — Jesus tells his disciples to wait for the Spirit who will empower them to witness to the world

**Acts 2:1-41** — God pours out his Spirit on the day of Pentecost and Peter preaches, offering forgiveness and the Spirit to everyone who believes ★



When Jesus returns, there will be total renewal and God's plan will be complete. God's people will live in God's place, blessed fully under his rule by King Jesus who is the blessing to the world. There will be a worldwide kingdom, everywhere for everyone, forever.

## **Video Summary**

One of Jesus' followers, John, sees a symbol-filled vision of life in the new creation — a total renewal which will be completed when Jesus returns.

The new earth is totally formed and totally filled. God's original plan is successfully complete. The Garden has been expanded and upgraded into a world-covering city. The man and the woman have become countless people from all nations.

King Jesus sits on God's throne. A river flows from it, watering the Tree of Life which bursts with fruit. God's people enjoy the full and unending benefits of living in God's kingdom. Total connection and closeness to God brings life as it's supposed to be. There is no chaos, death and darkness. There is only beauty, life and light.

There is no Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Jesus has fulfilled the responsibilities of living in God's kingdom. He did what we couldn't do. He has succeeded so there is no possibility of failure.

Jesus reigns. He is the champion. He has saved his people from their enemies and from themselves. He has eliminated sin. He has crushed the Snake. He has permanently established God's kingdom on earth. God's people live in God's place, blessed under his rule by King Jesus who is the blessing to the world. There is a worldwide kingdom, everywhere for everyone, forever.

## **Discussion Questions**

- 1** The new creation is a city full of countless people from all nations. What does that show us about the kind of community God wants? What does that mean for how we live together now?
- 2** Life will be as it's supposed to be. There will only be beauty, life and light. What parts of the future hope are you most comforted or excited by? What do you long to see less of? What do you long to see more of?
- 3** How does the certainty of Jesus' ultimate victory in establishing his eternal kingdom impact how you face current struggles and uncertainties? How do you feel about a world where there is no possibility of failure?
- 4** The story ends with a worldwide kingdom, everywhere for everyone, forever. How does that inspire you to join in with spreading God's kingdom now?

## **Bible Passages for Further Study**

Revelation 21–22:5 — Vision of the new creation ★

# God's Kingdom

God's people living in God's place, blessed under God's rule - enjoying the benefits and fulfilling the responsibilities - and being a blessing to the world

## **Blessed under God's rule**

**Enjoying the benefits:** life as it's supposed to be; connection and closeness to God; wholeness; harmony; healthy relationship with ourselves (how we think and feel about ourselves); healthy relationships with others (how we relate to and interact with them); beauty, life and light.








**Fulfilling the responsibilities:** accepting his definition of good and evil; living life in the way he's defined; following his instruction and direction; submitting ourselves under his rule; trusting him.







## **Being a blessing to the world**

Means: joining in with what God is doing; reflecting him; representing him; acting like him; forming the formless earth; taming the wild; ordering the chaos; creating form, structure, beauty; filling the empty earth; creating life, energy and potential; establishing God's kingdom on earth; bringing it from heaven to earth; expanding and spreading his kingdom; a worldwide kingdom, everywhere for everyone.

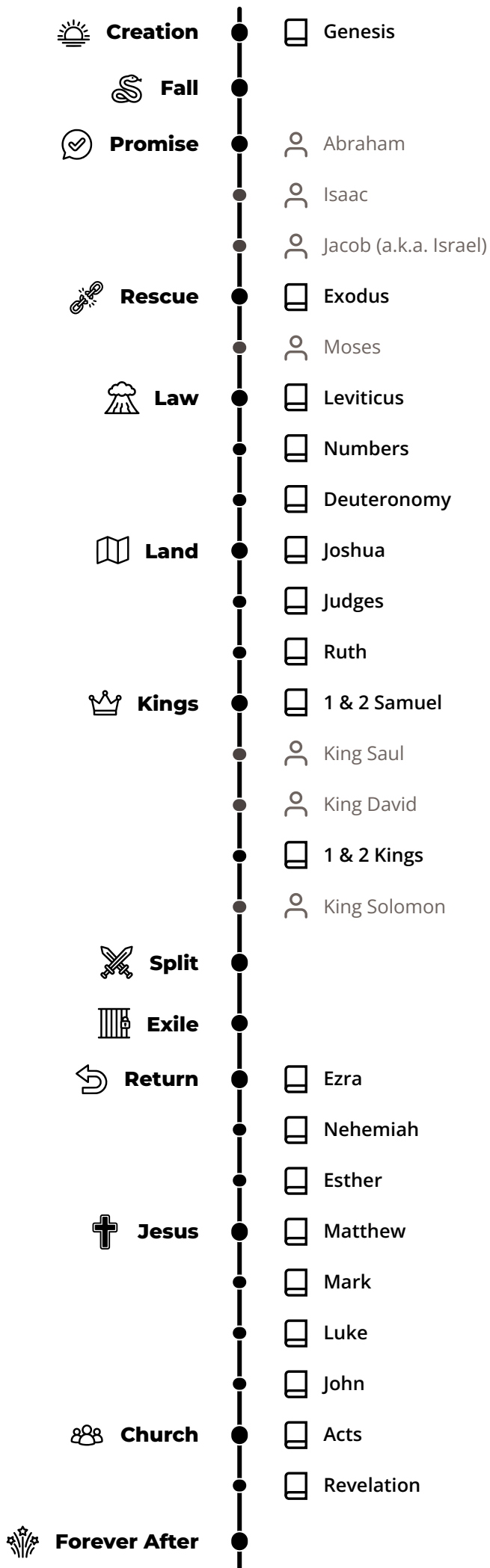
## **Our problem**

Is: rejecting God as king; refusing to live under his rule; rejecting the responsibilities; losing the benefits; ignoring God's definition of good and evil and making up our own; asserting ourselves over God's rule; trusting ourselves; having a sin problem; having snake-hearted instincts; forming and filling the earth with chaos, death and darkness; spiralling downwards towards self-destruction; becoming disconnected and distanced from God; needing saving from our enemies and saving from ourselves.

	<b>God's People</b>	<b>God's Place</b>	<b>Blessed Under His Rule</b>	<b>Being a Blessing</b>
 <b>Creation</b>	Humans (the man and the woman, Adam and Eve).	<p>The Garden of Eden.</p> <p>People live in the garden. God lives in the garden too. They are connected and close to him.</p>	They enjoy the benefits: they are free to eat from the Tree of Life. They must fulfil the responsibilities: they must not eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.	People are made in God's image to represent and reflect him. He invites them to form and fill the earth, to expand the garden. The plan is for a worldwide kingdom everywhere for everyone.
 <b>Fall</b>	Humans (the man and the woman, Adam and Eve).	<p>The Garden of Eden.</p> <p>People are thrown out of the garden. They are disconnected and distanced from God.</p>	They eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, so lose access to the Tree of Life. Rejecting the responsibilities means losing the benefits. People are instinctively snake-hearted and have a sin problem.	They are unable to expand God's kingdom and often do the opposite. God's plan is in danger. God promises a future snake crusher.
 <b>Promise</b>	<p>Abraham's family, the Israelites.</p> <p>They are chosen by God who says they will become a great nation.</p>	<p>The Promised Land.</p> <p>God says one day they will live in a land of their own. It's not their land yet, it's the land of Canaan.</p>	God says he will bless them. The question is how God can keep this promise when people instinctively reject God as king.	God says they will be a blessing to all people. God guarantees his original plan for the world through Abraham's family.
 <b>Rescue</b>	<p>The Israelites.</p> <p>They become a great nation but are enslaved by Pharaoh.</p>	<p>The Promised Land.</p> <p>God liberates them from Egypt and they begin their journey there.</p>	God frees them from suffering under Pharaoh's rule so they can be blessed under his rule.	God frees them from being trapped building Pharaoh's kingdom so they can establish God's kingdom.
 <b>Law</b>	The Israelites.	<p>The Promised Land.</p> <p>They wander in the desert, they have not yet arrived at the land. God lives with them in the Tabernacle, a tent designed by him.</p>	The law lays out the responsibilities for them to fulfil as they live with God as king. They recognise their sinfulness and incompatibility with a holy God. Laws related to the Tabernacle, priests and sacrifices show how to be connected and close to God again.	
 <b>Land</b>	The Israelites.	<p>Israel.</p> <p>God gives them the promised land. They arrive, overcome the resistance, share it out. It is now the land of Israel.</p>	They repeatedly reject God, falling into a self-destructive spiral. They need a leader to save them from their enemies and from themselves.	
 <b>Kings</b>	The Israelites.	<p>Israel.</p> <p>They live in the land. God lives with them in the newly built Temple.</p>	God chooses King David's family to give them the kind of leadership they need. God's promises are significantly fulfilled through his son, King Solomon.	God promises a future king from David's family — a son who will build the Temple and reflect and represent God. God will establish his kingdom forever through this family.

	<b>God's People</b>	<b>God's Place</b>	<b>Blessed Under His Rule</b>	<b>Being a Blessing</b>
 <b>Split</b>	<p>The Israelites.</p> <p>The nation is torn in two.</p>	<p>Israel.</p> <p>Civil war divides the kingdom into Israel in the north and Judah in the south.</p>	<p>Most kings are bad and have the same sin problem as the people. Some kings are good but eventually die. Kings fail to lead the people in fulfilling the responsibilities and so in enjoying the benefits.</p>	<p>The question is how God can keep his promise of an eternal kingdom when most kings are bad and when the good kings die.</p>
 <b>Exile</b>	<p>The Israelites.</p> <p>The nation is reduced and scattered.</p>	<p>Israel.</p> <p>They are invaded and deported to foreign lands — Israel to Assyria, Judah to Babylon. The capital city and the Temple are destroyed.</p>	<p>The people have rejected the responsibilities and so lost the benefits. God's kingdom lies in ruin.</p>	<p>They are trapped. They are unable to spread and establish God's kingdom.</p>
 <b>Return</b>	<p>The Israelites.</p>	<p>Israel.</p> <p>A small population returns to the land. The capital city and the Temple are rebuilt.</p>	<p>There is partial restoration but things are not as good as they used to be. There is a lingering sense that this isn't the true ending of the story.</p>	
 <b>Jesus</b>	<p>Jesus.</p>	<p>God lives fully in Jesus. He is God. He is God with us.</p>	<p>Jesus fulfils the promises made to Abraham and David. He is uniquely blessed under God's rule, enjoying the benefits and fulfilling the responsibilities like no-one else has. He dies and rises again: crushing the snake; saving us from our enemies and ourselves; taking our sin; and renewing connection and closeness with God.</p>	<p>Jesus is the promised king who perfectly represents and reflects God. He spreads God's rule to the world. Through him, God establishes his kingdom. Jesus reinvites us to join in with the original plan, to join him as he expands God's kingdom to everyone everywhere.</p>
 <b>Church</b>	<p>The Church.</p> <p>A community of people from all nations brought into God's kingdom by Jesus and his Spirit.</p>	<p>God lives in his people by his Spirit. He is not just with them, he is in them. They are connected and close to him in a new way.</p>	<p>The Spirit transforms people from inside out, reforming their instincts. They are changed to enjoy the benefits like Jesus does and to fulfil the responsibilities like Jesus does.</p>	<p>The Spirit empowers the church to witness about Jesus. They expand God's kingdom to the ends of the world.</p>
 <b>Forever After</b>	<p>The Church.</p> <p>They become countless people from all nations.</p>	<p>The New Creation.</p> <p>The new earth is totally formed and filled. The garden has been expanded and upgraded into a world-covering city. People live there. God lives there too. He is with them and in them. They are permanently connected and close to him.</p>	<p>People are blessed under the rule of King Jesus. The Tree of Life continually flourishes: people enjoy full and unending kingdom benefits, life as it's supposed to be. No Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil exists: Jesus has fulfilled all kingdom responsibilities, so there is no possibility of failure.</p>	<p>Jesus returns. The plan is complete. Jesus is a blessing to all people. He permanently establishes God's kingdom. There is a worldwide kingdom everywhere for everyone, forever.</p>

# Timeline



# Full Summary



## Creation

The earth starts formless and empty. God forms it and fills it, establishing his kingdom on earth. God makes people in his image to act like him, to also form and fill and establish his kingdom on earth. God plants a garden, a miniature version of the kingdom intended to be spread. In it, the Tree of Life represents enjoying the benefits of God's rule and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil represents fulfilling the responsibilities. The earth is perfect but not finished. The plan is a worldwide kingdom, everywhere for everyone.



## Fall

The man and woman are tempted by a snake. They disobey God and eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Rejecting the responsibilities of God's kingdom means losing the benefits. God throws them from the Garden and they lose access to the Tree of Life. They are disconnected and distanced from God. Life becomes incomplete and fractured. With no-one to spread it, God's plan for a worldwide kingdom is threatened. God says there will be generations of tension between Team Human and Team Snake, ended by a future Snake Crusher. People have a sin problem and continue to be snake-hearted, forming and filling the earth with chaos, death and darkness.



## Promise

God chooses a man called Abraham and promises that his family: will be God's people, growing into a great nation; will live in God's place, a land of their own; will be blessed under God's rule; and will be a blessing to all people. This is the original plan. Through Abraham's family, God guarantees his plan for a worldwide kingdom.

## **Rescue**

God repeats the promise made to Abraham about his family first to his son Isaac and next to his grandson Jacob, who is renamed Israel. The family move to Egypt where they grow into a large nation, the Israelites, but then become enslaved for 400 years. God raises up Moses as a leader and liberates his people.

## **Law**

After their rescue, God appears dramatically at Mount Sinai and gives the Israelites the law. It includes the Ten Commandments and national laws. The people realise they are sinful and so are incompatible with a holy God. Moses acts as a representative between them and God. The people fail to get close to God their own way by building a golden cow. God gives them designs for a tent, the Tabernacle. They accept God's way to get close to him by building it and God moves inside. Tabernacle laws and rituals show how to be connected and close to God: priests show the need for a representative and sacrifices show the need for sin to be covered. After 40 years wandering the desert, Moses delivers a dying speech reminding them of God's promise, and the benefits and responsibilities of living under God's rule.

## **Land**

Joshua leads the Israelites into the promised land. After overcoming the resistance, the land is shared out between all the people. God's people are now in God's place, their own land. Over the years, the people repeatedly fall into a downward cycle: rejecting God; being defeated by enemies; being rescued by a heroic judge who God provides; then rejecting God again. The people desperately need a leader.

## **Kings**

The people reject God as their king by demanding a human king. First is King Saul, who rejects God and spirals downwards like the people. Next is King David who reflects and represents God. He obeys and enforces God's law, recognising this kingdom is God's kingdom. God promises David's family will be a dynasty and he will have a son who will be the kind of king that God is. This son will build God a temple as a permanent place to live. Through him, God will establish his kingdom forever. King Solomon, David's son, builds a temple and his reign is a high point of unmatched peace and prosperity. This is the most God's promises have seen fulfilment.

## **Split**

After King Solomon, civil war divides the kingdom into ten northern tribes and two southern tribes, 'Israel' in the north and 'Judah' in the south. Most kings are bad and the good kings eventually die. They need God to keep his promise, raising up a good king from David's family and establishing an eternal kingdom.

## **Exile**

The northern tribes, Israel, are taken into captivity by Assyria and disappear from history. The southern tribes, Judah, are taken into captivity by Babylon. The population is shredded to pieces. The capital city and its temple are destroyed. God's people are no longer a great nation and are no longer in their own land. God's kingdom lies in ruin.

## **Return**

After decades in captivity, the Israelites are released and return to their land. Ezra leads the rebuilding of the Temple. Nehemiah leads the rebuilding of Jerusalem's city walls. This restoration feels incomplete. The story still waits for the promised king who will fulfil God's plan and rebuild God's kingdom into the worldwide kingdom it was intended to be.

## **Jesus**

Jesus fulfils the promise made to Abraham's family and David's family. He is uniquely blessed under God's rule, enjoying the benefits and fulfilling the responsibilities. He is a blessing — the promised king who spreads God's rule to the world. Through him, God establishes his kingdom. Jesus publicly announces the arrival of God's kingdom and demonstrates power to bring it from heaven to earth. He teaches a surprising message: of heavy responsibilities and high benefits; of the kingdom looking small and weak but having disproportionate influence and value. Jesus is a surprising king who chooses victory through apparent defeat by suffering and dying on a cross. Jesus dies on the cross. He lets the Snake bite his heel; acts as our representative and our sacrifice; is disconnected and distanced from God instead of us; and takes our sin, chaos, death and darkness. Jesus comes back to life. He crushes the Snake; saves us from our enemies and ourselves; renews connection and closeness with God; and gives us his beauty, life and light. Jesus reinvites us to join in with the original plan for the world, to join him as he expands God's kingdom to everyone everywhere.

## **Church**

Jesus ascends to heaven. Soon after, on the day of Pentecost, God pours out his Spirit on his people. He now lives inside them. The Spirit empowers this community, the church, to witness about Jesus and to spread his kingdom across languages and cultures to the ends of the world. This is where we live in the story.

## **Forever After**

When Jesus returns, there will be cosmic renewal. God's plan will be complete: one man and woman in a small garden becomes countless people from all nations in a worldwide city. The Tree of Life continually flourishes, watered by a river flowing from God's throne. Connected and close to him, his people enjoy full kingdom benefits, life as it's supposed to be. No Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil exists — Jesus has fulfilled all kingdom responsibilities, so there is no possibility of failure. God's people live in God's place, blessed under his rule by King Jesus who is the blessing to the world. He will permanently establish God's kingdom, everywhere for everyone, forever.



# Recap Questions



## Creation

- 1 What does it mean to be made in God's image?
- 2 What two trees are in the garden and what do they represent?
- 3 What are the benefits the man and woman enjoy under God's rule?
- 4 What are the responsibilities the man and woman must fulfil under God's rule?
- 5 What is the status of God's kingdom after it is created?
- 6 What role does God give to the man and woman?
- 7 What is the plan for God's kingdom?



## Fall

- 1 What is sin?
- 2 What does God do to the man and woman when they sin?
- 3 How does being thrown out the garden impact the man and woman?
- 4 How does being thrown out the garden impact God's plan?
- 5 What does God say the future will look like?
- 6 What do the following generations show about people?



## Promise

- 1 Who does God make a promise to?
- 2 What are the four parts of the promise God made to him and his family?
- 3 How does each part of the promise connect to the original plan for the world?
- 4 Why does the promise introduce tension into the story?



## **Rescue**

- 1** Who are the key people the promise passes down to?
- 2** What is life like for the family in Egypt?
- 3** Which parts of God's promise are being fulfilled and which parts are not?
- 4** How does God liberate his people?



## **Law**

- 1** What is the significance of the law being given after their rescue?
- 2** What is it like when God appears at Mount Sinai?
- 3** How do the people feel about being close to God?
- 4** What role does Moses play?
- 5** How do the people attempt to get close to God and what is the result?
- 6** How does God provide a way for the people to get close to him and what is the result?
- 7** What do priests and sacrifices each show?



## **Land**

- 1** What role does Joshua play?
- 2** What happens to the land?
- 3** What is the repeating cycle that Israel fall into?
- 4** What does the pattern show about people?
- 5** To what extent are God's promises fulfilled?

## **Kings**

- 1 What is the problem with Saul, Israel's first king?
- 2 How is King David different?
- 3 What does David want to build for God and what does God promise to build for David instead?
- 4 What will David's promised son be like and what will he do?
- 5 How does King Solomon's reign represent a high point in the fulfillment of God's promises?

## **Split**

- 1 What happened to the kingdom of Israel after King Solomon?
- 2 What are the northern tribes and the southern tribes called?
- 3 Which part does King David's family belong to?
- 4 What problems do kings have in this period?

## **Exile**

- 1 Which empire takes Israel into captivity and what happened to them?
- 2 Which empire takes Judah into captivity?
- 3 What is the status of God's kingdom and God's promises at this point?

## **Return**

- 1 Which empire lets the Israelites return to their homeland?
- 2 What needs rebuilding?
- 3 Who leads each of the rebuilding projects?
- 4 Why is there a lingering sense that this isn't the end of the story?

## **Jesus**

- 1 In what ways does Jesus fulfill the promise God made to Abraham?
- 2 In what ways does Jesus fulfill the promise God made to David?
- 3 What does Jesus announce during his public life and how does he demonstrate it?
- 4 What is surprising about the kingdom message Jesus teaches?
- 5 What is surprising about Jesus as a king?
- 6 What does Jesus achieve through his death and resurrection?
- 7 What does Jesus invite us to do?

## **Church**

- 1 What happens on the day of Pentecost?
- 2 How is connection and closeness to God different than before?
- 3 What is the church?
- 4 How does the church relate to God's kingdom?
- 5 What does the Spirit empower the church to do?

## **Forever After**

- 1 When will John's vision become reality?
- 2 How is God's original plan shown to be successfully complete in the new creation?
- 3 What benefits do people enjoy under God's rule?
- 4 Why is the Tree of Life watered by a river flowing from God's throne?
- 5 Why is there no Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil?
- 6 How are all of God's promises ultimately fulfilled in King Jesus?

# Notes for Course Leaders

## Structuring the course

This course is designed to be run flexibly. The 13 sections can be grouped differently, depending on how many weeks you want the course to run for.

### 5 weeks

#### VIDEO HEAVY

1. Creation, Fall, Promise
2. Rescue, Law, Land
3. Kings, Split, Exile, Return
4. Jesus
5. Church, Forever After

### 7 weeks

#### BALANCED DISCUSSIONS

1. Creation, Fall
2. Promise, Rescue
3. Law
4. Land, Kings
5. Split, Exile, Return
6. Jesus
7. Church, Forever After

### 13 weeks

#### IN-DEPTH BIBLE STUDIES

1 section per week

## Structuring each week

### Recap

- Begin each week with a recap. As a group, recall the **key moments** you have covered so far in the course - the name of each section. Discuss what **God's kingdom** looks like at each moment using the four-part definition: God's people living in God's place, blessed under God's rule (enjoying the benefits and fulfilling the responsibilities), and being a blessing to the world.
- Use the **recap questions** to remind yourselves of the content you have covered so far. You could select questions from all sections, or just focus on the sections covered during the previous week.
- Watch the **recap video** connected to the first section you're looking at this week — it briefly summarises everything covered so far.

## Content

- Watch the **video** for the section.
- Have a short time of open discussion — share initial reactions or ask clarifying questions.
- Use the **discussion questions** for the section. Depending on how much time you have session and the depth of discussions, there may not be time for all of them.
- Repeat this pattern for each section being covered.

## Bible Study

- Each section includes **Bible passages** for further study — key passages directly referenced in the video or closely related to the content.
- If you are following the 13 week course (i.e. 1 section per week), use one of these passages as a Bible study during the session. This can be done either before or after the video. The suggested passage is marked with a ★. Focus on: what the story of the passage is, how it links to the overall Bible story, and how it links to the different dimensions of God's kingdom.
- As a group, you could commit to reading these passages between weeks, whatever length of course you are following.