

Interlocked: The Overview

Preface

Imagine that it is a nice day and you pick up a novel to read. You settle down in a comfortable chair and have a cool drink beside you. Then you open the book to page 85 and you start reading several pages. After that, you flip to page 15 and read a few more pages. Then you turn to the end of the book and read the last page. Finally, you read the first few pages of the book. Just then, a friend walks by and asks what you are reading. Would you be able to explain what the book is about? Most of us would have difficulty explaining the story. In fact, most of us would not read a novel this way. We would end up with bits and pieces, some confused ideas, story parts that do not fit together and story fragments that contradict each other. Novels are not meant to be read this way.

Yet, many of us who grow up in church, read the Bible this way. Because it is such a thick book, we tend to skip around. We pick certain areas to read or study and often skip the ‘boring’ or more difficult parts. While there is value in going in-depth into different areas of the Bible, it is also immensely helpful if we understand the whole history of the Bible and how everything ties together from God’s perspective.

Why is this important? So that we will have a strong faith that can survive and even thrive despite the many different unbelieving worldviews we are exposed to daily.

Churchgoers today are bombarded by the non-biblical worldview in mass media, schools, at the workplace and in content we peruse. We are exposed to ideas like:

- “You have full control of your life. You can make yourself whole. You have what it takes inside you to be everything you want to be”.
- “We are all victims in this evil world. Evil will always be present. We just need to learn how to live with it.”
- “You have your truth and I have mine. There are many ways to get to the same place, heaven.”

Other churchgoers are ambushed and trapped in the accusations and challenges against our worldview. For example:

- “Institutions like marriage and family are just outdated and arbitrary ideas. They are random and made up, so people should be able to change them to suit their needs.”
- “How can you worship such an evil God? Haven’t you read in the Old Testament that your God ordered genocide and intolerance and rejected religious harmony?”
- “If your God is a God of love, how can he... (fill in the blank).”

As people who love and follow God, are we able to respond with reasonable answers? Or do we often find that our understanding of our faith fails us and we too start to question our beliefs?

Can we identify the biblical worldview and know when we are being exposed to non-biblical ones? Too often, we find that as believers, our understanding of the Bible is piecemeal.

A Common Observation

1. Mike learnt in church that God is love. This is one piece of truth he believes in.

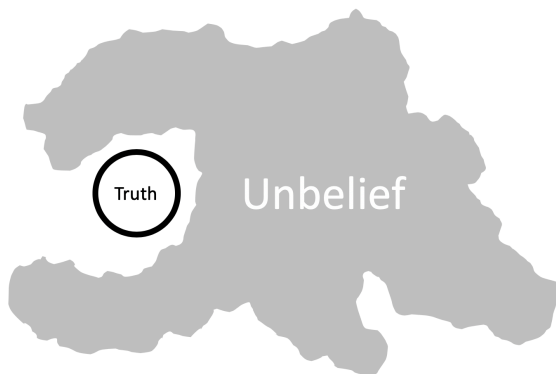


Here is his piece of truth.

2. However, Mike cannot really explain why he believes that God is love. He does not have concrete examples nor evidence to help himself or anyone else understand the reason for his belief. The media and his friends question and attack his belief. They say things like:
 - “If your God is a loving God, why is there such pain, suffering and evil in the world?”
 - “If your God is love, why did he allow my mother to die of cancer?”
 - “If you say your God is in control of the universe, then he must be evil. Look at the devastation caused by the earthquake! So many lives lost and millions of people displaced.”
 - “How can you say your God is a God of love when Christians are full of hate for people who are not like them?”

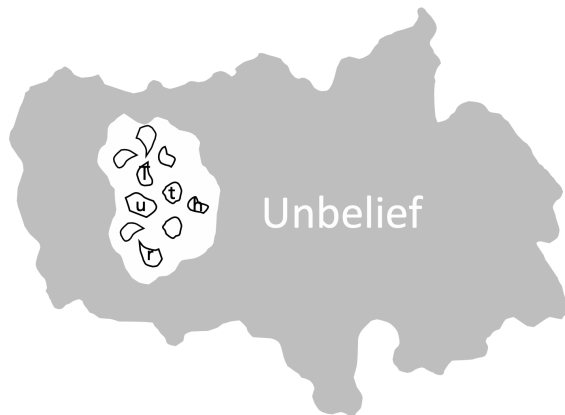


Mike's friends' unbelief is coming up against his one piece of truth.



On and on, Mike is faced with a barrage of attacks. Very soon, he is overwhelmed. He cannot answer any of his friends and he has no answer to anything he sees or reads in the media.

3. In a very short time, Mike starts to believe his friends and the media.



The small piece of truth that he believed in is swallowed up by the wave of unbelief.

Not only is he unable to answer any of the attacks, **he now stops believing that one piece of truth.**

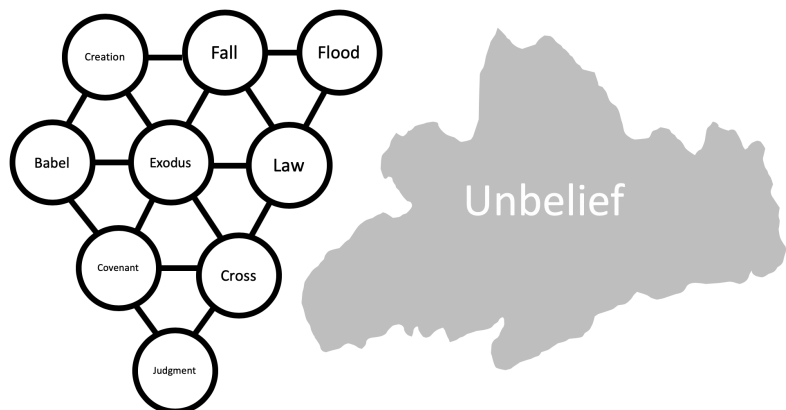
4. This is just the first step in Mike questioning the Bible and questioning God without finding any answers. Mike was trying to understand God from the world's perspective. This was the wrong approach. Ultimately, Mike left the church.

For many, when they encounter such situations, they find that they lack clarity, understanding and answers from the Bible. As a result, their faith falters.

Interlocked Network of Truth

This Bible study aims to build an interlocked network of truth in the minds of believers and churchgoers. Using Mike as an example again, we will see how he might respond if he had this network of truth as his foundation.

1. Mike is learning about God and the Bible in his small group. They are covering the main events from Genesis to Revelation. With each and every major event, they learn about God's history and truth from God's own perspective. However, they also study the world's perspective of these events and discuss the biblical response to these pagan worldviews. Mike starts to build up evidence and understanding on what the statement "God is love" is anchored upon.
2. God's truths work together. As Mike studies the Bible further, he builds up a network of truth made up of interlocking Bible truths that stand together. Now, when the media and his friends start attacking isolated Bible verses or truths, Mike has a biblical framework and an understanding as to why he believes that God is love.

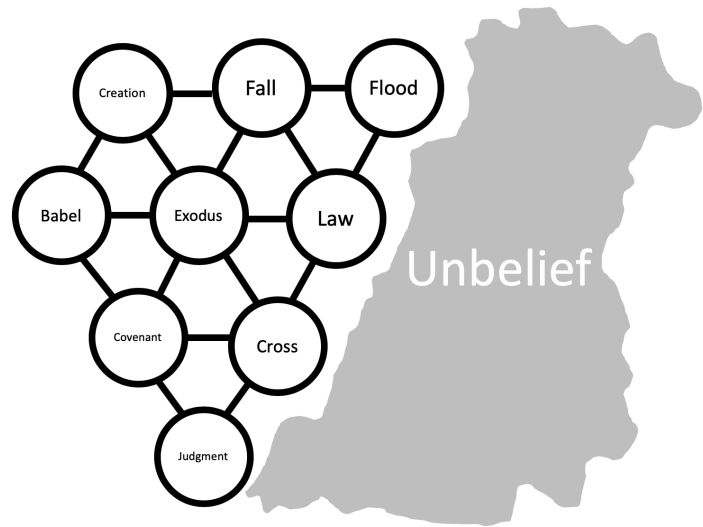


Importantly, Mike does not buy into the deceptions that are promoted by popular culture and the media.

He continues to believe the one true God, the God of the Bible.

Mike uses the network of interlocking truths to untangle the deceptions being forced upon him by the world.

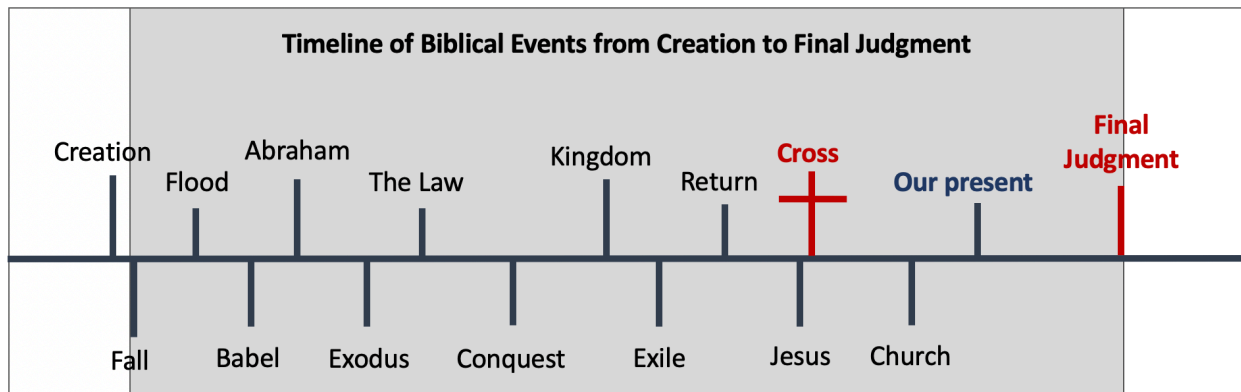
In this Bible study, when we learn Scripture, we do not want to have these pieces of truth as isolated stories in our heads. We want to build a network of truth that will give us a solid appreciation of God and the world around us, so that we can guard ourselves against unbelief and deception.



The hope is that this will give us stability and assurance in our lives. It will enlarge our appreciation of God, His sovereignty and His Glory. And it will give stronger foundations to our faith.

The “10 Cent” Tour

How will we build our interlocked network of truth? By going through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. To give you an idea of what we will cover in the next 55 lessons, we will take a 10 cent tour of the entire series. Why “10 cents”? In a regular lesson, there will be a lot of Bible verses. About a quarter of each lesson is made up of Scripture. However, in this lesson we will zip through the entire 55 lessons like a high-speed train to give the overall flavour without going into Bible passages. But please know that we will go at a much more reasonable pace and much greater depth with every lesson.





Creation

In Creation, we are introduced to God and His character. There is a very clear Creator-creature distinction. God is not just a “super-human”. He is infinitely good and holy. Some people like to ambush believers by saying “If your God can do anything, then it means your God can lie”. But can He? It makes a difference if we think that the God of the Universe can lie. Think about this and we will discuss this in the next lesson.

When God created man, He designed them in a very precise way physically, psychologically and spiritually. In other words, God designed man to live in a specific way. What are these ways? First, man was specifically designed for responsible dominion. God said man’s job was to take care of the earth as an under-lord, reporting to Him. Work was to be easy and enjoyable. Second, man was specifically designed for marriage. God purposefully designed woman to complement and complete man. Third, man was specifically designed to have families. God gave man and woman together the ability to procreate, have families and to care for them.

Responsible dominion, marriage and families are God’s divine institutions. This is how God designed man to live. This is God’s definition of what normal man would be like. When God finished creation, he turned off all the processes He used to create. And everything was perfect. There was no evil anywhere. In God’s eyes, this was “normal”.

The First Three Divine Institutions

3 rd Institution:	Family
2 nd Institution:	Marriage
1 st Institution:	Responsible Dominion
MAN	



Fall

Today, there are many different non-Christian worldviews out there. But most of them share three common ideas. One of these ideas is called the “Continuity of Being”. This is the idea that gods, man, animals and nature are all essentially the same but on a scale. The lesser beings are on one end of the scale and as you moved along it, you find the higher beings. People can move up and down the scale to be promoted to be gods or demoted to animals.

But this is not how God said He had created and designed the world. God said He created each one to procreate after its own kind. A plant does not turn into an animal and a man does not become a god. So where did this idea of “continuity of being” come from? Does the Bible tell us? Yes.

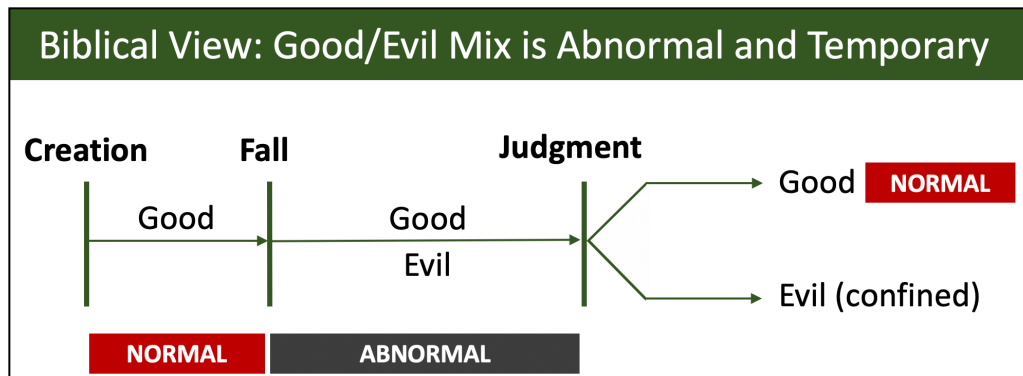
God had created spirit beings like angels before He created man. However, the most powerful angel, who was called Morning Star (or Shining Star), decided to rebel against God. Now known as Satan, his life goal turned to destroying everything that God created and foiling God’s plan. When Satan approached Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden with the intent of deceiving them, he told Eve that she could “level up” and be like God. She, a human, could become a god.

Today, people are still exposed to this same idea of the “continuity of being”, but with different or more updated names. Do you know one modern name for the idea of a creature changing or morphing to become a higher-level creature? Evolution. We will be identifying these pagan

ideas introduced by Satan in the garden of Eden and discussing the various forms we see in our world today.

Adam and Eve believed Satan, the enemy of God. They chose to believe his lies and reject God. They would now die physically and also be eternally cast into the lake of fire. Also, their bad choice had severe consequences on the three divine institutions of responsible dominion, marriage and family—they started perverting them. Things went from perfect and normal to abnormal. The world we now live in is abnormal. Nothing and no one is “normal”. Even the way we think has been perverted. People and nature are all damaged, the divine institutions are damaged and no one is truly happy.

Another idea that the unbelieving worldview has is that evil will go on forever and there is no way to escape evil, sin and suffering. This is not true. God in His mercy and love, immediately told Adam and Eve that He had a rescue plan for them. This plan would involve a man who would be specially born of a woman. He would battle Satan and defeat him! God would not leave the world in an evil, abnormal state forever. God had a time limit on evil. It would end. God would bring back the perfect, normal world He created.



His rescue plan would save man from eternal death. However, rescuing man and separating good and evil forever would come at a cost. What was it? God showed a picture of this by bringing about the first death in creation. God killed an animal, skinned it and covered Adam and Eve’s nakedness.

Flood

The period before the worldwide Flood was very interesting. Because people lived very long lives, up to 900 years or more, nine generations were alive at the same time! Adam and Eve could tell all their descendants about what happened at the Fall and how the world came to be full of pain and suffering. Despite having that knowledge, most of Adam and Eve’s descendants chose to reject God and live where they were their own god. They decided what was right and wrong for themselves and lived very wicked lives. This disgusted God so much that He decided to judge the world and renew the earth. He sent a global flood.

God taught some very important lessons through the Flood.

Five Lessons we can Learn from the Global Flood

Five Lessons	The Global Flood
1. Grace before judgment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God gave people time to turn from their wicked ways and turn to Him
2. Who to save, who to judge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saved: Those on the ark • Judged: Those outside the ark
3. Only one way of salvation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only one ark with one door that was designed by God will save them • There was no other way, no other ark
4. Man and nature impacted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The flood changed the whole world
5. How to be saved: by faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noah was saved because he trusted God

God used the Flood as a picture of how He would finally rescue mankind from eternal death. These same lessons that we learn from the Flood would be true of the way He planned to save mankind.

After the Flood, God reminded people of the three divine institutions of responsible dominion, marriage and family. But now He introduced the fourth divine institution: civil government. Unlike the first three divine institutions which were given in a perfect world to build society, this fourth one was given in a post-Fall world to restrain and limit the spread of evil. God now gave people the “power of the sword”, the authority to impose capital punishment. While He worked to complete His rescue plan, God was providing society with the ability to provide just enough justice to give man hope that one day, good will indeed overcome evil.

Then God did something very interesting. He made a legal contract, or a covenant with people and animals. The God of the Bible is the only God in all the world who makes contracts with man! We will find this in no other religion. God promised that He would never flood the earth again. This was an unconditional covenant, meaning that God would keep His promise no matter what. Man did not need to do anything and regardless of whether mankind is good or wicked, God would still keep this covenant.



Babel

In the period after the Flood, at least 11 generations were living at the same time! Noah lived 950 years and his son, Shem lived 600 years. However, people’s lifespans decreased significantly. In just a few generations after Shem, the lifespan shortened to just over one hundred years. The longer lifespans of Noah and Shem meant they were around to tell many generations of their descendants about the Flood and how God judged the whole world. This means everyone at that time had full access to the history and truth about the Creator-God of the universe.

Because everyone on earth descended from Noah, who loved God, the post-Flood people had such great potential to live well and in obedience to God. But again, most people rejected God.

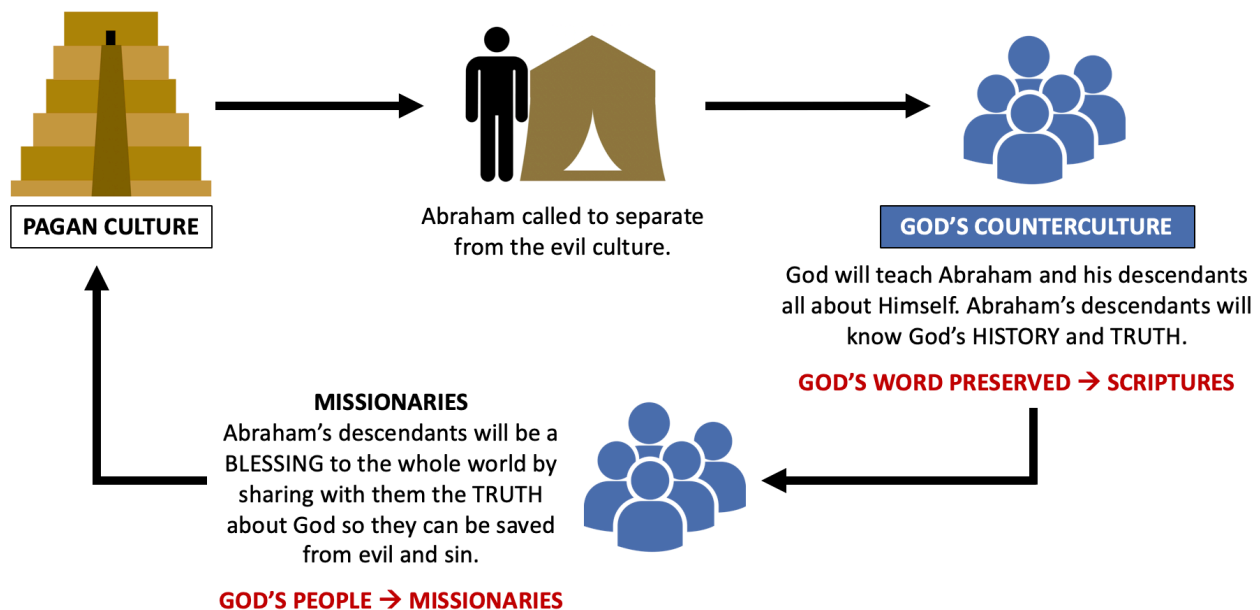
Like their ancestors, they decided they wanted to be their own god, define their own truth and live life without God interfering. They decided to build a waterproof tower that would reach the heavens, to make themselves famous. In a sense, they were beginning a man-centred pagan kingdom opposed to God. Instead of using the God-given fourth Divine Institution of civil government to limit evil, they perverted it. They used civil government to promote anti-God beliefs and actions on all society.



Abraham

If God left all mankind to do whatever they wanted, everyone would end up separated from Him for eternity in the Lake of Fire. But because He is merciful, God interrupted history. Previously, God would communicate with everyone in the world as a whole. But because they chose to ignore Him, God changed the details of His rescue programme. He called one man, Abraham, so that He could build an entire nation from Him. God had a very important job for this nation. They were to:

1. Preserve His history and truth in the form of the written Scriptures.
2. Share His truth with all people.



When God approached Abraham, He promised him three things:

1. **Land:** God would give him physical land as a possession forever.
2. **Descendants:** God promised that he would have many descendants and they would always survive as a people group.
3. **Worldwide blessing:** God promised Abraham that he and his family would be a blessing to the whole world.

Abraham believed all of God's promises.

After that, God made another unconditional contract. This time, the contract was just between Abraham, his descendants and God alone. God guaranteed He would keep His promise of land, descendants and worldwide blessing. God was so serious about this promise that He performed a signing ceremony involving halved animals. God put a curse on Himself, saying He would be like the halved animals if He did not keep the promises He made to Abraham. Abraham could do nothing good or bad, right or wrong to cause God to break His promise.

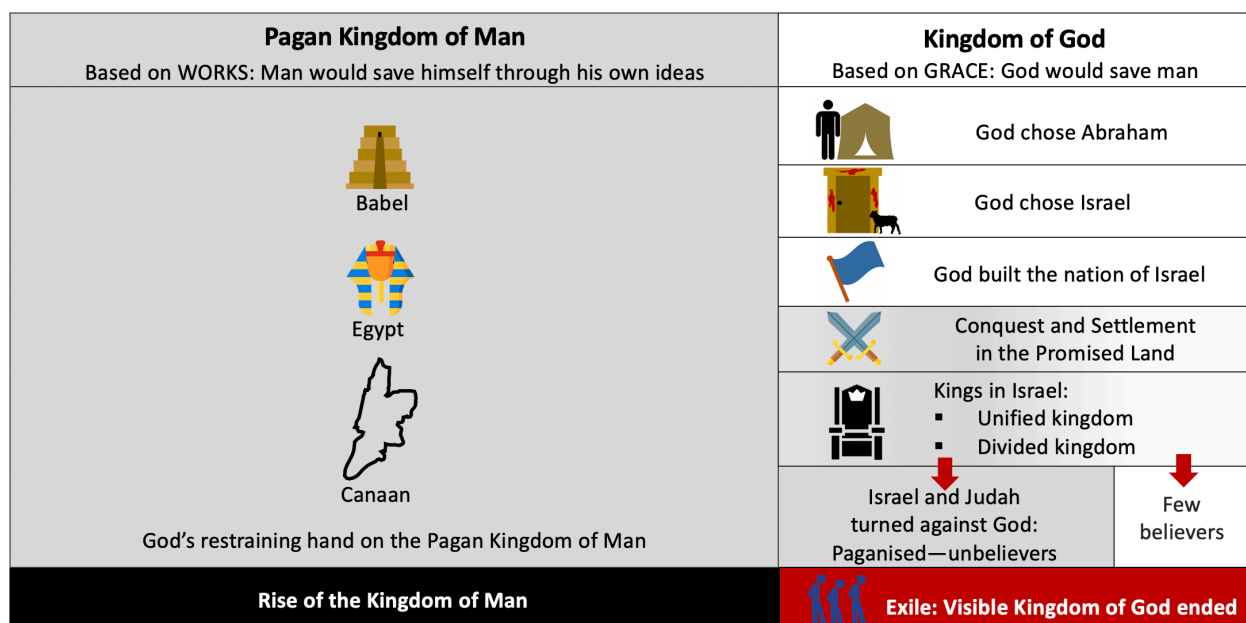


At this stage, some critics would accuse God of being unfair. How could God choose one person and not offer this promise to everyone in the whole world? They believe in their idea of equality, and what God was doing with Abraham went against their human definition of what they believe was “fair”.

However, God was not playing favourites. Humankind as a whole, had already twice outright rejected God: before the Flood and after the Flood. And there were no signs that they would change their minds. Speaking directly to them was not working. God’s plan in using Abraham and his family was therefore part of His rescue mission. It was to reach the world in another way so He could offer salvation to the whole world.

Abraham’s life was like an adventure story because he faced so many situations that seemed to threaten the promises that God had made. At one point in time, there came a great famine in the Promised Land that God gave to Abraham. Everyone risked dying of starvation. To preserve the life of Abraham’s family, God led 70 of them out of the Promised Land and into Egypt where there was food. They lived well in Egypt for a while but after 400 years, the Egyptians abused them as slaves. Nevertheless, it was in Egypt that God grew Abraham’s family of 70 into an entire nation of 2.5 million: the nation of Israel.

In the next section of history covered by the Bible, we see God dealing with and working directly with Israel. Importantly, we also continue to see what the pagan kingdom of man is up to. This diagram summarises the next series of events.





Exodus

Egypt was a very good example of how man perverted the fourth Divine Institution of civil authority and made the government all-powerful. The people depended on their god-like government for everything: they worshipped Pharaoh as god and he provided them with welfare, order and meaning in life. It was a nation run totally based on man's ideas.

When the Israelites cried out to God because of the immense suffering they were going through as slaves, God raised Moses to lead His people out. Through Moses, God gave Pharaoh information about Himself and opportunity to turn away from his anti-God life. However, Pharaoh continually rejected God. Through a series of 10 disastrous plagues that turned Egypt from a superpower to a devastated nation, God proved that He alone is God, not Pharaoh, not his magicians and not the false idols they worshipped.

God also used the tenth plague to teach people more about how He would save the world. In the tenth plague, every firstborn would die unless the family followed God's instructions to kill a lamb and daub the doorframe and lintel of their house with its blood. Only then would the firstborn who was hiding within the house live when the angel of death passed over. This reinforced the same lessons that God taught with the Flood: (1) there is a time of grace before judgment, (2) it was very clear who would be saved and who would be judged, (3) there was only one way to be saved (4) nature and the world of Egypt changed (even spirit beings were involved) and (5) a person could only be saved if they trusted in God.

But God also used the Exodus and particularly the Passover to teach about blood atonement (meaning blood covering). God showed how He was willing to accept the death of an innocent substitute who is not under the death penalty, in place of a person who is under the death curse. With the death of the substitute, the person deserving to die would live. Through the Passover, God was showing a picture of how the Promised Saviour, Jesus, would save mankind. His blood would atone, or cover, man's sin and reconcile man back to God. The Bible is full of pictures teaching and explaining how God was going to reconcile man to Himself.



The Law

God supernaturally and miraculously led the Israelites out of Egypt with His visible presence in the form of a tower of cloud leading them by day and a tower of fire by night. While in the desert, God started His programme of nation building. First, He told the Israelites that their relationship with Him was one of Father and son. He was their Father and they were His son. Then He gave them His law. His law showed them how they were to relate to Him and also how they were to treat each other.

God's law was very personal and taught them how they could live well. God told them that their motive for obeying His law should be gratitude for all He had done for them when He rescued them from Egypt and preserved their life. He did not want the Israelites to just coldly and mechanically follow a set of rules without any heart. He wanted obedience that came out of a heart of love and gratitude for Him. The people agreed that they would follow His law.

God then made another contract. This time the contract was between Israel and God. However, this contract was conditional. Unlike the Noahic and



Abrahamic covenants which were unconditional, meaning God would fulfil all His promises without man doing anything, this one was different. In this covenant, God and the Israelites both had responsibilities to fulfil.

- If the Israelites obeyed God's law, He would bless them with economic prosperity, good weather, cooperative nature, military success and peace, population growth and His continued presence with them.
- If the Israelites disobeyed God's law, God would discipline them just as a father would. There would be five levels of discipline, each one worse than the previous. The purpose of this discipline was to encourage them to turn from being wicked and live right in God's eyes. The five levels of discipline included physical and psychological illness and disease, military defeat, economic disaster, famine, death of children, livestock and population decrease, starvation, cannibalism, death, exile and God's visible presence removed from them.

As we will see, the discipline that God brought upon Israel involved other nations too. For example, if God declared Israel would suffer military defeat, this meant another country had to invade Israel. This showed that God was really in charge of not just Israel, but other nations too. And if God declared He would bless Israel with good weather because of their obedience, but would curse them with famine or sickness when they disobeyed, this showed God had to be in charge of the weather and nature too. Through His fine control of nature and human events, God demonstrates He didn't just create the world and then sit back to watch. God is actively controlling history. He is actively controlling what nations do. God is completely in charge of the world.

How would we know if God kept His side of the Mosaic contract? How would we know if Israel kept their side of it? God made sure to keep a record reporting on both His and Israel's actions. It is called the Old Testament. The Old Testament can also be called the Old Contract, or the Old Covenant. Because He made a legal contract, there must be a way to verify what each party did with regards to the contract. This is why it is critical that the Bible contains no errors: because it officially records and reports on the behaviour of the parties to the contract.

Whenever there is a legal contract, there must be witnesses to the contract and a way for these witnesses to verify if the parties are keeping the terms of their contract. God put in place three witnesses. Two of them are:

1. **Heaven and earth:** The Bible uses this term in many places. They refer to spirit beings and humans. Spirit beings like angels can observe what is happening in history. Humans can read the record of the Bible and conclude if the parties are keeping their side of the contract.
2. **Israel's National Anthem:** As part of their nation building, God gave them their national anthem. It is unlike any anthem we have ever heard, because Israel's anthem contains prophecy of the future of how they would behave: God said they would break the contract. And despite God's warning, they did not take heed and indeed went on to continually break their contract by being rebellious and disobedient towards God.

How would the people know if the contract has been broken? Did God put in place policemen or lawyers to announce broken contracts? Yes. God put in place prosecuting attorneys or lawyers. They are called the prophets. There are more than 133 named prophets in the Bible, including 16 women. Their job was to write down biblical history as interpreted by God, teach people

about God, give people God's promises and prophecies about the future, and encourage the people to turn away from their sins.

But one critical role was that of a prosecuting attorney. They told the people how they have broken God's law and encouraged them to repent. They also announced the discipline that would come upon them if they did not repent.

During this time of nation building, aside from the law and national anthem, God also gave them instructions for temple worship, and their national holidays, feasts and festivals.



Conquest

After leading the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, God was going to lead them on a short route to take possession of the Promised Land. However, the people were ungrateful, rebellious and disobedient and they really didn't have an understanding of who God really is. So God caused them to wander in the desert for 40 years. During this period, God taught them more about Himself. When the 40-year period was over, God gave them instructions about moving into the Promised Land.

God had already given the land to them, but they were not in possession of it at that time. What does that mean? It's like if we owned a house, but our renters were living in it, we have ownership but they have possession of it. So God told the Israelites they needed to take possession of the land. He told them that the battles to clear the land were all His and He would win the battles for them. All they needed to do was obey His instructions carefully.

God also told them there were two categories of warfare.

1. For warfare with people who lived far away, they would start by offering them terms of peace.
2. However, the rules for warfare with the Canaanites who lived in the Promised Land was different. They were not to offer peace but they were to totally destroy them.

Regarding this point in Israel's history, critics of the Bible often accuse God of genocide, racial discrimination, intolerance and a rejection of peaceful coexistence. Even believers who read this part of the Bible often struggle, preferring to avoid the topic or they start thinking badly of God: that He must be evil, insane or a fanatic not to want peace.

But God was teaching some very sobering lessons through the Conquest period. First, God always gave a time of grace before judgment. The Canaanites were not good, innocent people. They were a brutal, wicked and aggressive people who worshipped all kinds of man-made idols and engaged with demons in witchcraft, child sacrifice, incest and bestiality. God gave them hundreds of years to repent but they did not. Their sins reached such a grotesque level that God ended their grace period. In God's judgment at the Flood and at Exodus, He used nature as a tool of judgment. This time, God used other people as His tool of judgment. But regardless of God's choice of how He judges, one truth is clear: God always gives a period of grace, but after that, grace will end and judgment will come.

Second, God is not racist. Have you ever wondered what the book of Ruth was doing in the Bible? It kind of sticks out among all the other history books. But it is a very important book.

The stories in the Bible of how God rescued Ruth and Rahab, both Gentiles who lived in the time of the Conquest, show that God rescues anyone who puts their faith in Him. Without their stories, we could accuse God of showing favouritism to Israel. With their stories, however, we see that God desires everyone to be saved, including Gentiles.

Third, the total destruction in the holy war is a warning picture of the final judgment. Is it frightening? Yes. As it is meant to be. It is a warning picture that should drive believers to share the news of salvation to as many people as possible. People like to say “If your God is a God of love, how can He allow so much evil, pain, injustice and suffering in the world today?” We need to remember that God will not allow it to go on. God is putting an end to evil, including evil people. But if He ended all evil now and final judgment came today, many would perish for eternity. Every day that we still see evil around us is another day of grace given for people to repent. It is because God is loving that He has given this grace period. But we should not take this grace period that we live in now for granted. It is given so people can repent and be saved. It will not go on forever.

God also used the period of the Conquest to teach the Israelites some very hard lessons about Himself. Just as God intends to eliminate evil from the world, He intends to eliminate evil in each believer. This process of sanctification or spiritual growth is where God works to eliminate evil in each believer and build loyalty to Him. Through winning and losing numerous battles, God taught the Israelites that loyalty and obedience to Him from the heart are more important than mere outward actions.

After the people were settled in the Promised Land, they got comfortable, prosperous and complacent. They ended up ignoring God. The Bible said they each did what was right in their own eyes.

In this period, we see how even Israel, God’s people, became paganised and very depraved, doing things that should never be done. They were no different in behaviour from unbelievers. Yet God was gracious to them. Whenever God punished them to drive them to repent, they would cry out to Him for help.

God would raise a political leader or a “judge” to rescue them from their enemies. Nevertheless, despite God sending 15 Judges like Deborah, Samson and Gideon, this did not prevent the people as a whole from spiralling downwards spiritually.



Kingdom

Finally, the people demanded to have a human king. Even though God Himself was their King, they rejected Him outright. They wanted a human king to lead them into war, just like the other nations around them. God did not want them to be like the neighbouring nations. They were supposed to be different and point people towards God! Nevertheless, God conceded and gave them a king even though He warned them that having a king would significantly diminish their freedom because they would owe taxes and would have to serve the king. The people still insisted.

So God reminded them of His rules for how the king can rule His kingdom successfully. The king was not the ultimate authority. The king had to obey Him and God’s representatives, the prophets and the priests. The king was commanded to make a copy of God’s laws and read it

daily. The king must not accumulate wives or wealth. The Bible holds King David up as a good king because He followed after God with his whole heart. Even when he sinned, he repented and clung to God. God promised that one of David's descendant would be the Messiah, the Promised Saviour and King. Aside from David however, overall the dynasty of kings was a disaster.

The first king, Saul was not concerned about God at all, but cared only for his own ambition and reputation. King Solomon introduced the worship of idols along with the worship of God. King Jeroboam invented a false religion worshipping idols but keeping a few aspects that looked like the worship of the real God. King Ahab changed the national religion of Israel to Baalism entirely, kicking the Creator-God out of Israel. Earlier, the pagan nations of Babel and Egypt had abused the fourth Divine Institution of civil government. Instead of limiting evil, they were power hungry and anti-God, leading their nations into great sin. However, Israel's leaders did not do better. God was showing that civil government in the hands of sinful man is often corrupted. While the way that David lived and ruled set an example and model for the coming Messianic King, God eventually ended the monarchy. He brought on the final stage of punishment and discipline that He promised in the Mosaic Covenant: exile.



Exile

Assyria and Babylon carted all Israel away. Israel no longer had land or freedom. They were now under the leadership of pagan nations. God had meant for an obedient Israel to be the superpower of the world, to demonstrate His character and the right way to live for all the world to see. But now, they were subjects to pagan governments.

God's visible presence (also known as the Shekinah Glory) that was with Israel since the Exodus and was in the Tabernacle and Temple left them entirely. The prophet Ezekiel saw God's presence depart from the Temple via the Mount of Olives. The visible presence of the Kingdom of God ended.

At the same time, God took His restraining hand off the pagan Kingdom of Man. It is interesting to note that during this period, the world saw the rise of seven new world religions and the rise of philosophy.

However, God did not leave His beaten-down people without hope.

1. God used the exiled Jew, Daniel, to teach principles about how believers are to live successfully under pagan governments and non-Christian laws. Even though the Babylonians tried to crush Daniel by changing his name and identity and forcing him to study subjects like astrology, divination and astro-deities, he did not fight them. In fact, he topped his class and became one of the nation's most-respected leaders, all the while worshipping, glorifying and honouring God. How did he do it? We will learn many principles from Daniel on living in the pagan world that apply to our lives today.
2. God started a new kind of writing in the Bible: the apocalyptic writings. These writings were about the future and how history would end. It was meant to give hope to the people because even though God reveals the string of pagan kingdoms that would rule, He then goes on to describe how He would get rid of evil completely and re-usher in the Kingdom of God. This information was to help the suffering Jews endure the hardship during the ages

when the pagan Kingdom of Man seemed to be winning. Every detail that was prophesied would show them and give them the assurance that the God of Israel was also the sovereign God of all history. Everything was in His control.

3. God spoke through the prophets to reveal that He would be making a New Covenant with the nation of Israel. This New Covenant was unlike any of the previous covenants. God would (i) forgive the people and (ii) give them a new Spirit that would cause them to obey Him from the heart!



Partial Return

After 70 years in exile, God caused the Persian government to allow some of the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple, city and city wall. However many Jews, like Esther, remained dispersed. During this time, God caused the Old Testament to be completed. At the close of the Old Testament period, these beaten-down Jews still had much to look forward to.

1. They were waiting for God to fulfil the promises He made in the **covenant** with Abraham of land, descendants and worldwide blessing. (By the way, when we read large chunks of the Bible where it details which land is given to which tribe, chapter after “boring” chapter of it and we wonder why God put it in the Bible, it is because the Bible records the land title deed to the real estate that God was promising to Abraham. These detailed boundaries are there for a reason!)
2. They were expecting God to send the Promised One, the **Messiah**, to save them.
3. They were expecting God to fulfil all the promises about the **Coming Kingdom** that God revealed through the prophets. They were waiting for a time when Israel would be a superpower. God would rule the Kingdom from Jerusalem, King David would be back on his throne, also ruling, and there would be worldwide peace and prosperity.

There was a lot that the Jews were looking forward to at the end of the Old Testament period.



Jesus

At the correct timing, God the Son came down to earth as a human baby. He was born as the son of a virgin, as God had prophesied, and He was named Jesus. His virgin birth was significant as it ensured that Jesus was born without inheriting Adam’s corrupted sin nature. Both his human mother Mary, and His adoptive father Joseph were from the family line of David. He was therefore from the line of King David and eligible to sit on David’s throne. Jesus was fully human but without sin. The Bible declares He is the second or last Adam. He came to accomplish what the first Adam failed to do: exercise responsible dominion over all the earth.

Jesus, as God the Son, was still fully God while on earth. Though He is God, He did not take advantage of His deity while living on earth. He humbled Himself and practised obedience to God the Father. The life He lived on earth He lived in perfect obedience to the Mosaic Law that God had given. He fulfilled all the requirements of the law.

As God's Anointed One, or Messiah, or Christ, Jesus was set apart by God for a special purpose. He came to be the full, final and satisfactory atonement for the sins of all mankind. Jesus also came to tell the Jews that God was offering them the opportunity to re-usher in the non-functioning Kingdom of God.

There were Jews who believed what Jesus was teaching and accepted that He was the Messiah that God had promised. But the majority of the Jews could not see how Jesus was the promised Messiah. They were expecting a conquering Messiah who would restore God's Kingdom by might. They could not accept a Messiah who repeatedly said He was going to be killed. So most of the Jews rejected Jesus.

Because of the Jews' rejection of Him, Jesus went on to prepare His disciples for a new coming age, one that God had not mentioned to the Old Testament prophets. Jesus warned that the return of the Kingdom of God would be delayed until Israel as a whole came to national belief in God's Messiah.

Cross

After all His teaching, Jesus willingly went to the cross and died for mankind. At the cross, we understand more clearly how God saves by drawing the lessons learnt at the global Flood and at the Exodus and applying them to the cross: (1) there is a time of grace before judgment, (2) it is clear who is saved and who will be judged, (3) there is only one way to be saved, (4) the invisible spirit world is forever changed when Jesus defeated Satan's power, including his power over death and (5) a person could only be saved if they trusted God.

Jesus' death is the full, final and complete payment for the sins of all mankind. His death satisfied God's justice and restitution requirements for the sins of the world. More significantly, His resurrection is physical proof of God's promise of forgiveness. In fact, Jesus' resurrection body is a piece of the Eternal State that God the Father took and planted into human history. It is the first sample of what we can expect of our resurrection life.

Church

Jesus then told His disciples what they needed to do and what to expect after He ascended to heaven to begin the final phase of human history. He told them to wait for the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit indwelt believers.

Because a majority of Jews had rejected their Messiah, the New Covenant that God promised to them would now cause unexpected blessings to Gentiles who were not parties to this covenant. God also gave the Gentiles a mini-Pentecost experience with Cornelius the centurion and his family. That was the moment when Jesus' Jewish disciples realised that God was offering Jesus' salvation work on the cross to non-Jews. The church age would include Jewish and Gentile believers together as one body!

This was an unexpected development as the Old Testament prophets were not told in advance about the nature of the church. But once the disciples understood and accepted it, they began moving out across the world to make disciples from every nation, as Jesus had instructed.

This is the age that we are in.



Final Judgment

History is working out according to God's plan and He has already planned the timing for the close of the church age. When the church is at last complete, He will recall the church to heaven. Both Gentile and Jewish church-age **believers** will be judged at the Bema, which is the Greek word for what is known as the Judgment Seat of Christ. There, believers will not be judged for salvation but will be judged for their good works (or lack of good works) they have done for Christ. Jesus, as the perfect Judge, will reward His people accordingly. We will be discussing how we can prepare ourselves for a good evaluation at the Bema.

And then, as He had promised thousands of years ago, He will end the grace period for all humanity. At that time, it will be like a second Exodus. God intends to rescue His believers from this fallen, evil Kingdom of Man. Jesus, as the rightful King, will begin a series of worldwide judgments that bear resemblance to the plagues that God poured out on Egypt. As at the Flood, and at the Exodus, God's judgment and salvation go together. The final series of judgments that will fall upon the Kingdom of Man will be so severe that a large percentage of evil humanity will perish. It will be like the Conquest period but on a global scale.

The Jews will finally come to national belief by acknowledging Messiah Jesus as their Saviour and Lord. At this point, Jesus will return physically to earth and re-usher in the Kingdom of God. As He promised in His covenants, Jerusalem will be the capital of God's global Kingdom.

And at the end of the period of God's Kingdom on earth, God will make one final judgment on all the earth. The Bible calls this the Great White Throne. There, all **unbelievers** from all throughout history will be resurrected and summoned before the perfect Judge Jesus. He will give all these people a guilty verdict. Because they had rejected His offer of salvation, there is no other way to escape from the condemnation they rightly deserve. All unbelieving sinners will then be confined to the lake of fire. God will restore "normal" by removing evil completely from the new heavens and earth.

After containing evil permanently, God will then usher in the Eternal State with the New Jerusalem descending from heaven to take its place at the centre of the earth. In this Eternal State, God's original purpose for creation will finally be fully fulfilled. Everyone there with Him at that time will understand God more fully than Adam and Eve ever did. Having seen and experienced all of human history, they would have seen God in action, directing, saving, judging and sustaining the whole universe. They will be able to worship God in a way that the first man and woman could never have.

That is the very quick 10-cent tour. Starting with the next lesson, we will go into detail and into the Bible to see God's history unfold from Eternity Past to Eternity Future. All the biblical events will be interlocked to form a framework that will help us through life.

Housekeeping Notes

A. Desired outcome

The purpose of this series is to show that God is all-loving, all-powerful, all-knowing, all-glorious, all-merciful, all-gracious and He is fully in control of everything so that we will grow **deeper in love and faith towards God**. He is the hero of the Bible.

When we understand the sovereignty of God, and that world history is a continuous unfolding of God's plan, we will not lose hope that the world is spinning out of control but is in the capable hands of our Creator. This confidence will give **hope and joy even in times of difficulty and confusion**.

By focusing on the difference between the biblical and pagan worldviews, we hope to be able to **discern the deceptions** that the pagan worldview promotes. Importantly, we hope to build enough biblical perspective that we will be able to have a decent understanding of the **Bible's answer to the issues of today's world**.

B. Lesson Format

- Each session is 120 minutes long.
- This is a 55-lesson series from Genesis to Revelation (56 if this overview is included).
- Most lessons are designed to be “standalone” in that there are no cliffhangers. A person can benefit from attending a single session. However, the lessons do build upon each other as we follow God's sequence of revelation.
- The greatest benefit will be for those who are able to participate in all the lessons. Each lesson will come with detailed lesson notes, so those who miss a class can stay up-to-date by reading the notes.
- There will be “Faith in Action” review exercises sprinkled through the series. These exercises will help us apply the truths learnt to the challenging and sometimes complex everyday situations of our lives.
- Homework will be reading selected portions of the Bible. This pre-reading for the following lesson will be given in the lesson notes at the end of each lesson. It would be helpful to also review the notes for the previous lesson. Aside from the review exercises, there is no written homework.
- Things to bring for each lesson: Bible and a pen for taking notes if desired. Lesson notes will be given out at the start of each lesson. We recommend that you file each lesson as we progress in the series.



Pre-reading for next lesson: Genesis 1–2