

GOD'S STORY, MY STORY

Christ Church
Home Groups
Autumn 2006

CHRIST CHURCH, MORETON

2006

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

1 Peter 2:9

The programme for the term looks like this:-

Wednesday 14th Sept

Week beginning Mon 18th Sept

Week beginning Mon 25th Sept

Wednesday 4th Oct

Week beginning Mon 9th Oct

Week beginning Mon 16th Oct

Week beginning Mon 24th Oct

Wednesday 1st Nov

Week beginning Mon 6th Nov

Week beginning Mon 13th Nov

Week beginning Mon 20th Nov

Week beginning Mon 27th Nov

Wednesday 6th Dec

Home Groups Together

Informal Communion Service at 8 00pm)

Home Groups Together

Study 1

Study 2

Prayer Meeting (7.30 pm)

Study 3

Study 4

Free Week

Prayer Meeting (7.30 pm)

Study 5

Study 6

Study 7

Study 8

1. God's Story, my story

WELCOME

What is your earliest memory?

WORSHIP

Psalm 19 begins as a hymn of praise for the wonder of creation, and then goes on to say that actually God's word is even more wonderful, because it reveals God's ways to us.

Starting with Psalm 19, praise God for the things you most appreciate in creation, and then praise him for the things he has told you through his word.

WORD

When you meet someone for the first time, what sort of things do you want to find out about them, and how do you discover those things? How do you get to know someone? Or – when someone asks you 'tell me about yourself'; what do you do? Although the initial answer might be to give them some facts about yourself – job, hobbies, house etc, pretty soon you will need to get on to telling something of the story of your life. Because all the things that have happened in the past go to make up the person we are now.

How do you get to know someone? Through them telling you their story. And how do you get to know God? The answer has to be the same – through God telling you his story. And that is

what the Bible is – God’s story. Not the whole of God’s story – there wouldn’t be enough books in the universe to contain the whole story – but enough for us to know who he is.

But there is more to the Bible than just being God’s story. We could all probably tell each other a brief version of our life story, and make sure that we included the really important events which have shaped us. But our personal stories are set within a much bigger story – God’s story. We are who we are not only because of what has happened to us personally, but also because of what happened when God created the world, when Adam and Eve rebelled, when Abraham was chosen, when the Israelite slaves were freed, when Jesus came, died, and rose again. These aren’t just events from the distant past – they are part of our story.

So – the Bible is God’s story, and our story. Knowing God’s great story, and seeing how we fit into it, will help us to live as his people here and now.

Read Genesis 1:1-2:3

Christians sometimes seem to see this passage as a good excuse to have an argument about how the universe was formed, but I hope you’ll be able to leave that issue on one side.

Who is the main character in this passage – *who* (rather than *what*) is it telling us about? And what does it tell us about him?

What do you think it means for human beings to be created in the “image” and “likeness” of God?

What are some of the ways in which human beings may be “like” God? On the other hand, what major differences are there between God and human beings?

What role did God have for the man and woman he created? Does this role give permission to human beings to exploit the environment?

Read Colossians 1:15-20

Paul tells us that Jesus is the “image” of the invisible God. How does Jesus help us to understand what God is like?

Humans were created in the image of God, but, for reasons we will see next time, that image has been spoiled. But Jesus is the perfect image of God. What does Jesus show us about how human life was meant to be?

Read Genesis 2:4-25

This is not so much a different version of the creation story as a more detailed description of the place that the man and woman had within that creation.

What does this passage tell you about the relationships that the man and woman had:

with each other?

with the animal world?

with God?

Augustine wrote ‘Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.’

WORK

‘The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.’ (Genesis 2:15) God’s creation plan was for his people was never that they should live a life of idle ease, but that they should co-operate with him to make the creation flourish.

So work is an important part of Gods blueprint for life. Yet for many people work is full of problems and frustrations. (This applies whether it is paid employment, voluntary work, or work in the home.)

Can you encourage each other this term in any difficult work situations?

2. What’s gone wrong?

WELCOME

Would you like to be stranded on a desert island? Why, or why not?

WORSHIP

We were reminded last time that God created a perfect world, with everything that people needed. As we approach harvest, give thanks to God for all the good things he has given us, especially for our food, and pray for those in other parts of the world who constantly go hungry.

WORD

Last time we saw the beginning of our story – as God created man and woman and placed them in Eden. Everything was wonderful. It is clear from the first 2 chapters of Genesis that human beings are *good* as God creates them. At its beginning, creation was full of *shalom* – the Old Testament word for the rich, relational wholeness God intends for his creation. The life of Adam and Eve is the life of *shalom*. They walk with God, they have each other, the garden provides all they need as they work its fertile soil and prune the flourishing plants. They truly are God’s people living in God’s place under God’s rule. There was no cloud on the horizon. What could possibly go wrong?

Read Genesis 3

The Bible doesn't always tell us everything we would like to know. And here, the Bible doesn't tell us where the talking serpent comes from, or how it is possible for something God had created to spoil the perfection of his creation. 'There will always be an element of mystery surrounding the origin of evil in the creation.

However, if the Bible doesn't tell us everything we would like to know, it does tell us everything God wants us to know. So – what essentially was it that Adam and Eve did wrong?

Look at Genesis 2:15-17.

What does God tell Adam he can do, and what does he say Adam can't do?

What do you think is meant by the "knowledge of good and evil?"

In Genesis 3:1-5, how does the serpent try to undermine Eve's trust in God?

What was it about the fruit that made it desirable to Eve?

What were the immediate results of Eve taking the fruit?

In v.14-19, God pronounces a series of judgments against the serpent, the woman and the man. What are these judgments?

How do they show that the relationships between humans and God, humans with each other, with themselves, and with the world around have been damaged?

Strangely, at first, the serpent seems to be right: Adam and Eve do *not* immediately die. Or do they? One of the things this story should do is to make us reflect long and hard on just what

"death" means. The physical life of Adam and Eve does not stop the instant they taste the fruit: this isn't the poison apple of the fairy tale. But something in them and between them *does* die.'

Read Romans 1:18-32

What does everyone know about God, according to verses 19-20?

How do they know these things?

How do people respond to the knowledge they possess about God (v.18, 21)

How does this passage show the long-term consequences of Adam and Eve's sin?

And so the man and the woman are thrown out of Eden. And the way to it is barred. And, as descendants of Adam and Eve, we are born outside Eden. We are born into a world that has rejected God's rule, and so is banished from God's place. But there is hope. In the middle of judgment, God promises that someday a descendent of the woman will crush the serpent's head.

How do the stories of *creation* and *fall* help you to make sense of the human story throughout history? How do they help you make sense of your own *personal* story?

WORK

We began by remembering all that God has given us, especially at harvest time. But the fall means that while some are well fed, many are constantly hungry.

Is there anything your group could do to help those who go hungry? Could you agree to all give up something (a cup of coffee a day? Maybe lunch one day?) for the next couple of weeks, then give the money to TEAR fund or some similar organisation.

3. A fresh start

WELCOME

Tell everyone about a hobby you have. What made you first start it?

WORSHIP

Psalm 130 reminds us that with the Lord there is forgiveness, which is one of the reasons we worship him.

Starting with Psalm 130, praise God for his love, his mercy, and his forgiveness. Take some time to remember that no matter what we might have done, with him is unfailing love and full redemption

WORD

And so paradise had been lost. Under God's rule, the man and the woman had everything. But they grasped for the one thing forbidden to them – freedom to make their own choices rather than obeying God. They chose to rely on themselves as the source for determining what is right and wrong, rather than relying on God's word for direction. And over the countless generations since, that has been the human story. That is our story.

And from that seemingly simple beginning, the direction of humanity was downhill. Because the breakdown in

relationships which we saw immediately after Adam and Eve took the fruit, escalated.

Read Genesis 4:1-26

What aspects of the original goodness of creation and of people are still evident in the story of humanity after the expulsion from Eden?

At the same time, how is the pollution of sin very evident during this time?

By the time of Noah, the situation hopeless. '*The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time*' (Genesis 6:5) God floods the world, saving only Noah and his family. Noah is described as 'a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God,' but even he cannot return to Eden, and after the flood things once again get worse.

Read Genesis 11:1-9

What was wrong with the people's desire to build the tower?

What was God's punishment?

The breakdown in relationships that we saw beginning in Genesis 3 now moves on to include breakdown between groups. How does what happened at Babel contribute to our story today?

Read Genesis 12:1-8

Until this point, the Bible has given us the story of the whole of humanity. But now the focus changes. Instead of wiping out humanity and starting again with one man (as with Noah), God chooses one man from among humanity, and makes a fresh start with him.

How are the blessings promised to Abram reversals of the curses in Genesis 3 – 11?

Read Genesis 15:1-16

God's promise is here expressed in terms of a covenant – a binding commitment. What was Abraham's side of the covenant? (v.6)

What was God's side?

How does the promise to Abraham become part of our story? (see Galatians 3:6-9)

Read Hebrews 11:8-12

Even in the Promised Land, Abraham was still 'like a stranger in a foreign country.' God's promise did not ultimately relate to a land in the Middle East, but something greater.

What do you think the 'city with foundations whose architect and builder is God' refers to?

WORK

Despite the sin of the people he had created, God didn't wipe them out completely. His new start with Abraham was to be a blessing for all peoples on earth.

The fulfilment of that promise finally came in the birth of the Lord Jesus. As we begin to look forward to Christmas (yes, the decorations are already in some shops!), start to plan as a group what you could do to share the good news of Jesus with others this Christmas.

4. The Promised Land

WELCOME

What is the best gift you have ever received? What made it so special?

WORSHIP

The Bible is full of promises which God has given to his people. Take some time to remember those promises, and to thank God for them.

WORD

God's promises to Abraham could be summed up as the promise of God's people living under God's rule in God's land – just as had been the case for Adam and Eve. But by the beginning of the book of Exodus, while Abraham's descendants had grown into a great people, they were not in their own land. Genesis ends with the Children of Israel moving to Egypt, where Joseph had become an important person, in order to escape famine in Canaan. But with the passing of time, they moved from being welcome guests to being slaves of the Egyptians. But it was out of this unpromising situation that God acted to establish Israel as his people.

Read Exodus 3:1-22

Three times God refers to himself as ‘The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.’ Why do you think this was so important for Moses and for the Israelites?

God said that he was going to free his people. What were they to do once he had brought them out of Egypt (v.12)?

In this episode we are introduced to the most common and distinctive name for God used in the Old Testament – *Yahweh* – which is translated in most English versions as “LORD”, and which occurs around 6,800 times in the Old Testament. It isn’t just a title – it is a personal name, and like most Bible names, it has a meaning. Although there is some debate about exactly what *Yahweh* does mean, it does refer to God’s absolute power and changelessness – something like ‘I will be who I am’

Read Exodus 12:1-13

Why did the Israelites need to kill a lamb like this?

Why do you think God didn’t just spare the Israelite firstborn sons without them having to kill a lamb?

In 1 Corinthians 5:7, Paul says that ‘Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed for us.’ How does what happened at the Passover help us to understand what Jesus did for us?

Read Exodus 19:1-8

What was God’s purpose in rescuing the Israelites from Egypt?

The Israelites did nothing to deserve being rescued by God, but once they had been rescued, and made God’s chosen people, what did the Israelites have to do?

It all sounds so positive. But soon after, the people make a Golden Calf, and start to worship it (Exodus 32). Why was this so catastrophic?

What does the incident of the Golden calf tell you about human ability to follow God?

Read Numbers 13:1-2, 26-14:12

Why did the people refuse to enter the Promised Land?

Why was God so angry with them?

Have there ever been times when you have turned your back on something you believed God wanted you to do because it seemed too hard?

From there on, the story leads from the refusal of the people to trust God, into their 40 years of wandering in the desert. It was to be a long time before they were God’s people in God’s place living under God’s rule.

What does the Exodus tell you about God?

And do you see anything in the Exodus that reflects your own life?

WORK

God's plan was to set his people free so that they could worship him. Today, thousands of Christians across the world live in situations where they are not free to worship. In some Islamic countries converts from Islam to Christianity face imprisonment or execution – recently it was only concerted pressure from the international community that prevented the execution of a Christian convert in Afghanistan.

Find out more about Christians facing persecution from The Barnabas Fund (www.barnabasfund.org) or Christian Solidarity Worldwide (www.csw.org.uk) What could you do to support them?

5. Triumph and Disaster

WELCOME

What was your ambition when you were a child? Did you achieve it? If not, what stopped you?

WORSHIP

Psalm 23 is the best loved of the psalms. It talks about God's presence with us in good times and in bad as we journey through life.

Use Psalm 23 to help you praise God for times in your life when you have been aware of his presence, either good times or bad times.

WORD

Over the last few weeks we have seen God's story of the world following a depressing pattern:

In the beginning – God's people (Adam and Eve) in God's Place (Eden) living under God's rule. But then – temptation and sin, with the result that they refused God's rule, were expelled from God's place, and were no longer his people.

After the flood, the story started again, but again it soon broke down, and by Genesis 11 once again people had rejected God's rule (at Babel), and were scattered across the world; no longer God's people.

God chose Abram, and gave him the promise that he would be the ancestor of God's people, living in God's land. Finally, at the exodus, it looked as though this was about to be fulfilled, but last time we left the Children of Israel wandering in the desert, having failed to trust that God could take them into the Promised Land.

Read Joshua 1:1-8

What promise does God give to Joshua?

What must Joshua do?

How are these things linked?

From here on, the story of the book of Joshua is a story of victory (at Jericho), of disobedience and defeat (at Ai), of crime and punishment (by Achan), of deception (by the Gibeonites), and finally of conquest and possession of the land. By the end of Joshua, it looks as though God's promise to Abraham has been fulfilled, God's people in God's place under God's rule.

Read Judges 2:6-19

What happened after Joshua died?

How did the Lord respond to this?

Did he abandon his people?

This passage summarises the whole of the book of Judges – the same pattern is repeated time and time.
Can you see this pattern in your own life?

Why do we find it easy to forget the Lord when things are going well?

Read 1 Samuel 8:1-9

With the failure of the judges to bring lasting security, the people demand a king to lead them.

Why did the people ask for a king?

Why did the Lord say that in asking for a king they were rejecting him?

In what ways can trying to be like the people around us bring us spiritual problems?

The Lord relents, and does give his people a king. Saul starts well, but as his story progresses he falls away, and in the end is rejected by the Lord. Instead, Samuel is sent to anoint David as king.

Read 2 Samuel 7:8-16

The Lord makes a covenant with David. What are the promises of this covenant, and why are they so significant?

Even David, the great king, falls into sin, and experiences serious family problems. He never abandons the Lord, but his story is not one of endless spiritual success.

From what you know of David's life, how does his life act as an encouragement to you?

David's son Solomon succeeded him, and in his time the temple was built in Jerusalem.

Read 2 Chronicles 7:1-3

It must have been a glorious experience! But despite all that, Solomon later turned away from the Lord.

The story of God's people from then on is a story of gradual decline. There were some good kings, but more worse ones.

How does God respond to what Israel have done?

Because of their sin, God's people ended up in exile. But God never stopped loving them, and never abandoned them.

Have there been times in your life when you have felt that you had moved away from the Lord? Do you think that God abandoned you?

WORK

So often God's people made a great start, but then fell away. That can sometimes be a picture of what happens in the lives of Christians today – they enthusiastically start following the Lord, but then for one reason or another they loose their passion for him, and gradually drift away. Israel's story is a reminder that God does not write people off. Are there people you know who have drifted away who you could do something to encourage back?

Read Hosea 11:1-11

What was God's criticism of Israel?

6. The Long Wait

WELCOME

Where in the world would you most like to go? Why?

WORSHIP

Psalm 107 reminds us that God's love endures for ever. It tells of times when God's people had been in trouble, and yet God rescued them. You might like to pick part of the psalm, or else think of times in your own life when God has acted to rescue you from difficult situations, and praise him for that.

WORD

Once again, God's people had turned from him. They refused to live under his rule, and as a result, they were driven out of his place – taken into exile. It was a disaster, not only because of their defeat, but also because the temple, God's house, had been destroyed. It must have seemed as if all hope had gone. Psalm 137 captures the mood of God's people in exile: '*By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!' How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?*

They were not only away from their home, they felt as if they had been torn away from the Lord. But God had not abandoned his people.

Read Isaiah 40:1-31

What words of hope does God have for his people?

Why would it be important for them to be reminded of how great God is?

Why might the people have thought that they had been forgotten by God (v.27)? How would these words reassure them?

Read Ezra 1:1-5

The exiles were freed to go back home. When the first party of exiles returned they made an enthusiastic start of rebuilding the temple. Once again, it looked as though God's people would be living in God's place under God's rule.

But after the initial burst of enthusiasm from the people, things once again began to go wrong.

Read Haggai 1:1-11

What were the people doing wrong?

What did the Lord challenge them to do?

Are there parallels with us today? Not in terms of actual buildings, after all, we no longer have a temple in that sense. But if in the New Testament sense, the temple has become ‘the body of Christ’, the church’, how might we fall into the same mistake as the people Haggai was writing to?

WORK

The big challenge from the prophets who wrote after the return from the exile was for God’s people to make sure their priorities were right. Specifically, there was a big challenge to rebuild the temple.

As I said above, we don’t have the same concern for buildings – the only temple that we have now is the body of Christ, the church. So the challenge for us must be to put effort into building up the church.

So – what can you do to help to build up the people of God at Christ Church?

Read Malachi 2:17-3:5

Again, these are words addressed to God’s people after they had returned from exile.

What were they doing wrong?

Can you see any parallels with how God’s people acted earlier?

As the Old Testament ends, is there any hope for God’s people?

7. The King has come

WELCOME

Who is the most interesting person you have met? What made them so interesting?

WORSHIP

Philippians 2:5-11 gives us a wonderful picture of the Lord Jesus. Allow the words of this passage to remind you of who Jesus is and what he has done, and then turn to praise.

WORD

The Old Testament period ends somewhere around 400 BC. It ends with Malachi's prophecy that God will send the prophet Elijah to be the forerunner of 'the day of the Lord.'

And then – silence. No more prophets. For over 400 years God's people waited. Israel was conquered again by Greece, then by Rome. But God remained silent.

And then, the angel Gabriel appeared to an elderly man named Zechariah, in the temple, and told him that he and his wife were to have a son. When that son, John, is finally born, Luke tells us that '*His father Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied*' – and the 400 year silence was at an end.

Read Luke 1:67-79

How does Zechariah's prophecy pick up on some of the Old Testament themes we have seen over the past few weeks?

Meanwhile, Gabriel had also appeared to a young woman named Mary.

Read Luke 1:26-38

Again, what Old Testament themes are picked up in Gabriel's announcement to Mary?

The child that Mary was to bear would bring in the fulfilment of God's great promises to his people.

Read Luke 4:14-30

What did Jesus say he had come to do? (verses 18-19)?

As Jesus had just won a battle over the devil, what do you think that ideas like 'freedom for the prisoners', and 'to release the captives' mean?

In verses 22-30, why were the people so angry with Jesus?

Read Luke 19:28-40

Are there ways today in which the message of Jesus produces anger

- a) in our society?
- b) In our own lives?

Why did the crowd think that Jesus was a king? (see, for example, Zechariah 9:9-13)

What had the crowd misunderstood about Jesus kingdom?

Read Luke 5:17-32

According to verse 32, why had Jesus come?

What does this mean?

The four men who brought their friend to Jesus knew what they wanted Jesus to do. But what did Jesus see as being the paralytic's greatest need?

WORK

As we think about Jesus, who is the rightful king of God's kingdom, and as we get nearer to Christmas (yes, it really is only a few weeks away!), how are your plans to do something to share the good news this Christmas (remember, you were thinking about it on week 3!) coming along? Remember not only to plan, but also to pray

Have there been situations where you know what you wanted God to do, but actually God gave you what you needed rather than what you wanted?

Do you think that being forgiven by God is really that important?

8. Living for the King

WELCOME

If you could spend a day doing exactly what you wanted, what would you do?

WORSHIP

The last thing that Jesus said to his disciples in Matthew's gospel is 'And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

Think back over situations you have been in over the past few weeks, and praise the Lord for his presence with you.

WORD

We have followed God's story from the creation of the world, through many ups and downs in the history of his people. We have seen that God's plan was always for his people living in his place under his rule. That was how it was in Eden, but very soon it was lost, and from then on it was only ever fulfilled in part.

In one way the coming of Jesus was the great climax of that story. And his coming, death and resurrection brought about a new way of being God's people in God's place under God's rule.

Read John 2:12-22

The temple had always symbolised for the Jews the place where God dwelt. They knew that God didn't literally live there, but it was there that the sacrifices were made, it was there that they could gather to meet with God.

But now, what did Jesus say would take the place of the temple?

What does that mean for us? Look at 1 Corinthians 3:16-17.

Paul is talking, not about individual Christians, but about the church.

So – what is the temple here?

So – what does that mean in terms of what the Old Testament says about the temple? Where should we be looking to see it fulfilled?

So – the coming of Jesus didn't make the Old Testament obsolete – far from it. But it did mean that so much that the Old Testament said now applies in a different way, because Jesus, and those who are 'in him' are now the focus of everything the Old Testament says – as Paul says, 'No matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ' (2 Corinthians 1:20)

Read Acts 1:1-11

Why was it important that after he rose Jesus showed himself to the apostles and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive?

In verse 6, how does the disciples' question show that they haven't understood the kingdom that Jesus had set up?

- What do you think that 'the kingdom of God' means?

The primary way that Jesus equipped the apostles was the promise of the Holy Spirit. What was going to be the result of the Holy Spirit coming on them?

- How does this promise apply to us today?

Read Galatians 5:16-26

What work does the Holy Spirit do in us?

What do you think Paul means by saying that 'if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law'?

Does that mean that the Old Testament law is not longer relevant for us?

The list of the fruit of the Spirit is famous – but why do you think each of these characteristics is included?

Finally –

Read Revelation 21:1-5, 22:27, Revelation 22:1-6

We still have this to look forward to! But in what ways does this show all the things that went wrong at the fall being put right?

God's plan was always for his people to live in his place under his rule. In the Old Testament, that was only ever partially fulfilled – sin was always the big problem.

Jesus has not done away with the Old Testament, but transformed it. It is still about God's people in God's place under God's rule, but now God's people are those who are 'in Christ', God's place is not a particular building or area, but the church, and living under God's rule is worked out by obeying the rules, but through the Holy Spirit.

And we can look forward to the time when God's great plan is perfectly fulfilled – when we will be eternally God's people in God's place (the renewed creation), living perfectly under his rule.

WORK

We've come to the end of this series. Can you think of one thing from it that has helped you in your Christian life, or one thing that will help you share your story with others?

CHRIST CHURCH, MORETON

We want to be a **W**elcoming Church

Because Jesus welcomed all who came to him

an **E**vangelising Church

*Because we believe that everyone has the right to hear
the Good News of Jesus*

a **L**oving Church

*Because Jesus commanded his followers to love one
another*

a **L**earning Church

*Because we are in the business of making disciples,
and disciples must always be learners*