

WAY OF DISCIPLESHIP: BIBLE CONFIDENCE AND KNOWING THE STORY



Session 3: Covenant and Worship

Understanding key themes: Covenant: How is the relationship God wants with us described?

Understanding key themes: how is worship at the centre of the Bible's story, and our lives?

Understanding key themes: What does the Temple show about God's presence and His continuing plan for a recreated world?

Tackling tricky questions: What does it mean that the Bible is human and divine?

Understanding key themes: Covenant: How is the relationship God wants with us described?



The relationship God wants with human beings is the same throughout the Bible story and is best described by the word covenant – a theme that is repeated throughout.

Both knowing the story and growing in discipleship is centred around the meaning of covenant. God seeks to restore His creation through a relationship of covenant.

Covenant is at the heart of God's faithfulness to creation.

"But I will establish my covenant with you: and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you." (Genesis 6:18)

The first mention of covenant is in the story of Noah. The Flood story is written as God's wanting to restore the world through saving Noah, not to destroy it.

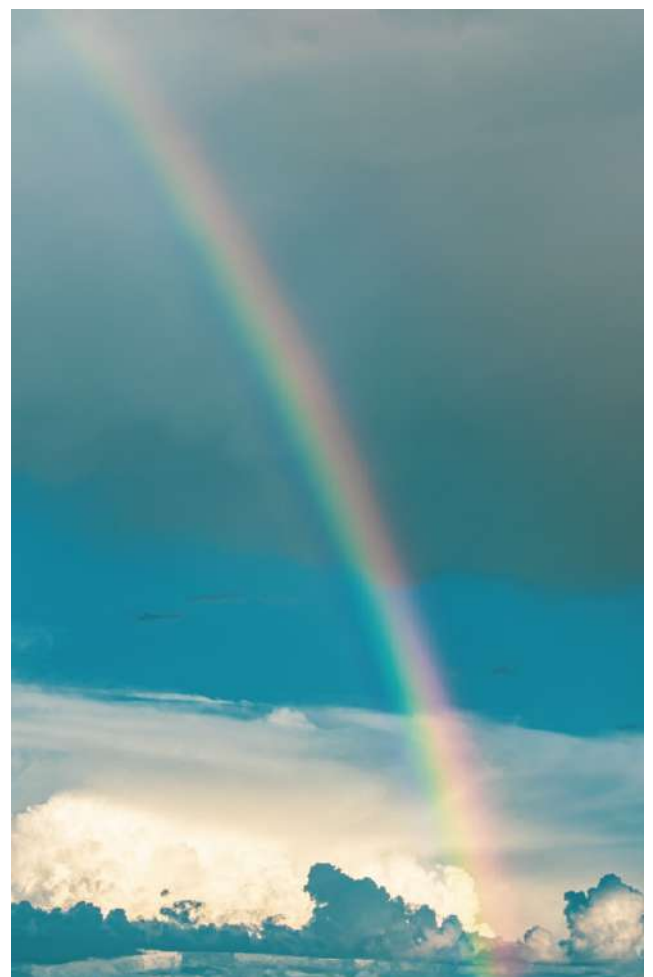
(It's worth noting that God is portrayed not so much as angry towards humans, but filled with pain at the way the world had become: "God regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled....The earth was corrupt in God's sight and full of violence." (Genesis 6: 6,11))

The story makes clear that God cannot contradict Himself by abandoning His faithfulness to His creation, but re-commissions Noah in the same way as Adam was and with the same words. "As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it." (Genesis 9:7)

God gives him again stewardship over creation, tells him he can eat meat (as long as it's well and truly dead – a good health tip!), and tells him to protect life. Noah takes this call seriously – he's the first one to start making wine! This is a continuation of the original plan, not a redirection.

But the covenant with Noah brings in an extra dimension to the human calling which is absolutely essential to our story here on planet earth. This story presents us a profound question which completely shapes how we view the world and its story: Why did God include the animals?

When God makes His covenant with Noah, we read, "Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you– the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you– every living creature on earth...." (Genesis 9:8-11)



He gives the rainbow as a sign of protection (like a bow) as a sign of the covenant. Christians thus have the most profound reason for caring for this earth because not only do we believe it is a creation, but we believe God has bound himself to the animals, the fish, the birds in loving relationship.



God's covenant with us enables us to be a blessing to the world, joining in with God in its restoration.

"The Lord had said to Abram, "...I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."
(Genesis 12: 1-3)

"Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. God... announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: All nations will be blessed through you."
(Galatians 3: 7-8)

In what way are Christians still "children of Abraham"? Abraham's story is our story. Our calling is the same as his. God calls a people who will work with Him to undo the damage of the Fall. The meaning of God's calling and covenant with human beings becomes established through Abraham and the whole Bible is an outworking of the promises and calling made to Abraham.

Throughout the Old Testament God never tells His people that their purpose is to escape from the good earth He has made. He increasingly leads them to understand that His plan is to restore both their relationship with Him and their presence in the earth.

The story is about God making a people who will restore and recapture their original image. Abram is blessed by God in order to bless the world. In the first eleven chapters of Genesis there are five times when God describes how the world has been cursed by the fall. In the call of Abraham the word "bless" is deliberately repeated five times - in every way in which the world has fallen, God will work through Abraham to reverse the curse.

For Christians, Jesus does not change God's original covenant but fulfils it - enabling us to be a people who continue the call to bless and restore God's world, in the same way that Abram was called by God to do.

God intends to fix creation through a covenant people who will be a blessing, so that ultimately everything will be renewed (Revelation 21:5), "the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay..." (Romans 8: 21) and human beings can be "new creations". (2 Corinthians 5:17)



Covenant reveals the kind of relationship God wants with human beings.

Covenant begins with being chosen. In about 1800 BC God chooses Abram, a nomad who lived in the basin created by the Euphrates and the Tigris in modern day Iraq, (previously Babylon, Assyria) and was probably a moon worshipper.

After the opening of the Bible, which has had a universal focus, the rest of God's story is written through the lives of individuals and groups or tribes. It is through particular people (even today) that God chooses to work His purposes.

By continuing to call people, the Bible demonstrates God's continuing commitment to working in human-divine partnership - just as He does not abandon His creation, so He does not let go of the calling on people to image Him in the world.

As Peter writes millennia later, "...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)

(This "chosenness" is never portrayed as favouritism - in a sense everyone is a child of God - but as Peter writes, we are chosen for a purpose - to be a blessing.)

Covenant is relationship in which God binds Himself to us. Throughout the Bible it is God who initiates the restoring relationship. Having called Abram to be a blessing, God establishes a covenant with him.



The pattern of the Old Testament is that whenever God makes a promise, it is always sealed with a covenant, most frequently expressed with the words: "I will be your God and you will be my people."

A covenant is an agreement between two parties that brings the two into an experience of oneness. Marriage is our most familiar existing covenant. In the Old Testament covenant was the fabric of society.

Monarchs and subjects would make covenants. A king would confer upon his subjects the right to be in covenant with him. When a nation was conquered, the conqueror would give rights to the conquered to be included in the greater society.

There are two ways to have a covenant. In the first, two equal parties agree to become one. In the second, two unequal parties become one. In this, the one who is greater and stronger confers upon the weaker the right to come into an equal relationship.

In the Bible, the type of covenant is usually the stronger to the weaker. Because usually it is between God and people. God confers rights on human beings. But it is still a relationship of oneness.

Having called Abram in Genesis 12, in chapter 15 of Genesis God is ready to ratify His promise to him. At that time when a covenant was made it was always ratified in blood. It usually involved the exchange of property, and often included a change of name and the scarring of the person's flesh.

It was a serious affair – it meant that life was going to change. If two tribes entered into a covenant together they slaughtered their animals – a precious possession. The old life ends, a new begins. The life of the animal symbolised this death. They partook in a blood covenant by creating a corridor of blood.

At each end of the corridor stood the representatives of the tribes – the chief or groom. They exchanged places by walking along the corridor of blood.

For example, if a tribe of cattle keepers and sheep keepers changed places they would be signifying this: "We who once looked after cattle, now look after cattle and sheep," and vice versa. We possess everything of each other. We two have become one.



They changed their names and to indicate it was a lifelong covenant, two representatives would cut the heel of a hand and rub mud in it to keep the scar there forever. There was a new oneness between what had been a twoness.

Abram has received the promise – that he would become a great nation, a blessing, but in Genesis 15 he worries that has no heir who would make this promise possible and questions God.

In response God tells him to count the stars in the sky, and then bring Him a heifer, and a goat, and a ram. Abram splits them in half and lays out the pieces to create a corridor of blood.

"When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking brazier with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, 'To your descendants I give this land...'" (Genesis 15: 17,18)

Abram is now one with God in a way that's never been known before. The God of heaven has made a covenant with mortal man and has symbolised it with images that will continue through the Scriptures to reveal the presence of God. Everything that belongs to God is now available to Abram.

The land belongs to God but is now available to Abram. However, this is not an exchange of property - Abram gives nothing to God in return.



The further two parts of the covenant are given in Genesis 17 when Abram is ninety-nine years old, with no children. God graciously says, "I will confirm my covenant between me and you..." He gives Abram a new covenantal name, to remind him of his new identity. "No longer will you be called Abram (exalted father); your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a 'father of many nations'." (Genesis 17: 5)

To do this, in Hebrew God took from his name YHWH one of the pieces of his name and included it in Abram to become Abraham. He gives a sign of the covenant: "Every male shall be circumcised".

Crucially, in the days of Abraham, a man who walked along the street with a visible scar was to be feared - you didn't know who he was in covenant with. But God institutes a personal, private scar, signifying a private and personal relationship.

For Christians who are children of Abraham, how does understanding covenant shape us?

Exchange of identity: "This is my new covenant, sealed in my blood." (Luke 22:20) In the same way that a covenant was established through blood, to be in Christ means we have passed through a corridor of blood - His. And through the cross we exchange identities: He takes our rebellious identity - our sin - and we take His - His righteousness.

Inheritance: Just as in Abram's covenant God shared His 'property', so through Christ we receive the same identity and relationship that Christ has with His father. "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ..." (Romans 8: 16-17)

Change of names. "...to him who overcomes...I will write on him the name of my God and my new name." (Revelation 3:12) In the early church when you were baptised you got a new name - your Christian name.

Sign/scar/seal. "Circumcision is of the heart by the Spirit." (Romans 2:29) Paul's teaching is that the Holy Spirit has made a scar which is so intimate it is not on our bodies but within us - on the heart - the inner person. "Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance..." (Ephesians 1: 13-14)

Incredibly God continues to bear the scars of His covenant with us, taking them into His resurrection. In Luke 24, when the resurrected Jesus appears and shows his disciples his scars first of all he is saying,

"This is a covenant. Not only is it ratified in blood, but it's an everlasting covenant...These scars are precious tokens of the covenant I have with you."



Covenant shapes how we see God's character throughout the Bible.



Understanding covenant can help us to avoid having a split view of the God of the Bible. Some may read the New Testament God as loving and kind, but the Old Testament as angry and vengeful – as if there are two gods.

There are certainly difficult things in the Old Testament, and part of coming to terms with that is understanding it as an unfolding story.

But at the heart of it is the story of a covenant God who does not abandon His people despite their faithlessness. God makes a number of covenants throughout the Old Testament – with Noah, Abram, Moses (Genesis 19: 1-6) and David (2 Samuel 7: 12-13). To the Jews in Egypt He promises, “ I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.” (Exodus 6:7).

Through Ezekiel He assures His faithless people, “I will deal with you as you deserve, because you have despised my oath by breaking the covenant. Yet I will remember the covenant I made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you.” (Ezekiel 16: 59-60)

A people who are “dry bones” will be resurrected: “My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. Then the nations will know that I the Lord make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever.” (Ezekiel 37: 27-28)

The result of this renewed covenant with His people is that “...they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” because “It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors...because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them...This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel: 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.'” (Jeremiah 31: 31-34)

In the Old Testament we meet a God who tells his people not to take revenge or bear a grudge, that to rip people off in business is an abomination, that they should help the poor, not oppress the stranger, always offer peace to an enemy before going to war and love their neighbours as themselves.

One historian has said that God gives His people the idea of “equality before the law, both divine and human; of the sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person; of the individual conscience and so of personal redemption...of peace as an abstract ideal and love as the foundation of justice, and many other items which constitute the moral furniture of the human mind.”



Understanding key themes: how is worship at the centre of the Bible's story, and our lives?



In 'Being with God in Worship we saw that worship is the first practice of any disciple. Alongside covenant, worship is the most consistent theme throughout the Old Testament – our first calling – and it shapes the meaning of Christian discipleship.

The story of Israel reveals that human beings are made for a mutual relationship of love with God. The daily Jewish prayer, called the *Shema*, calls God's people to "...love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, and with all of your strength." (Deuteronomy 6: 4-5)

Worship is the expression of this love and seen in these ways:

Obedience. This is a love rooted in genuine feelings, but also expressed in actions. "What does the Lord your God ask of you, except to fear the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, to love him and serve him... and to keep His commands." (Deuteronomy 10: 12-13)

One of the most common words used for worship in the New Testament (*latreuo*) carries the meaning of serving.

Yet this is not a dry obedience, but a response to God's love. In the New Testament this is expressed in the simple line, "We love because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

Sacrifice. Leviticus describes the ceremonial practices through which God's people could worship Him. Central to these were five separate sacrifices or offerings which the people were instructed to give in their temple meetings.

Some were sacrifices to deal with sin, but some were expressions of giving thanks.

The sacrifices were an expression of worship because of the cost involved. After God tells him to buy a place to build an altar, and the owner offers to give it to him, King David replies, "No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing." (2 Samuel 24:24)

Sacrifice also expressed that God the Creator was of greater worth than the created thing being offered.

After Jesus' death and resurrection there is no need for a sacrifice to take away sins but the theme of worship that costs us something continues, with Paul encouraging Christians to, "offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship." (Romans 12:1)





The Message paraphrase expands on what this means in daily life. "So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering."

Praise and thanksgiving. After God had rescued Israel from Egypt the first recorded response is thanksgiving: "Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them: 'Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea.'" (Exodus 15: 20-21).

After Solomon dedicates the temple the people worship. (2 Chronicles 7)

At the heart of the Bible is the book of Psalms, meaning "book of songs or praises". Some of them are by David, but they are a collection taken from across Israel's history and probably put together in the third century BC.

Not every psalm is praise or thanksgiving – there are a variety of different kinds and are divided into five sections (like the Torah) – but they were the spiritual vocabulary of God's people, known and used by Jesus and the apostles and the most quoted book in the New Testament.

They encourage the people to "Sing the praises of the Lord, you his faithful people; praise his holy name" (30:4) and "Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy." (47:1).

David proclaims, "...at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the Lord" (27: 6) and "Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you." (80:4)



When the Magi come to the stable their natural response is to bow down and worship. (Matthew 2:11) When the disciples see the resurrected Christ, they worship Him. (Matthew 28: 17)

Paul encourages the Ephesians to, "Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Ephesians 5: 19-20)

Such devotion expressed through praise captures the meaning of the most common word for worship in the New Testament (*proskuneo*) which means to come forward and kiss the feet of someone.

Worship throughout the Bible

To worship God in these ways is the key calling of God's covenant people – the purpose of their lives – running throughout the story of the Bible. Towards the beginning of the story God tells Moses to approach Pharaoh with these words: "Then say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, 'Let my son go, so that he may worship me.'" (Exodus 4: 22-23)

In our era Peter makes it clear that Christians have inherited Israel's covenant calling to worship when he tells them, "... you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9)

At the end of the story the vision of God's people (and all of creation) will be that we hear, "...every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!'" (Revelation 5: 13)

We all worship something



The Bible describes how as human beings we can choose whether to worship God, but we cannot choose whether or not we worship. Being made in God's image means we are religious creatures by nature.

Every human being is a worshipper – the choice is between God or idols, between what and how we worship.

The story of Israel shows how when human beings turn from worshipping God, we put something else in His place. Throughout the Bible idolatry is the central symptom of our disobedience, putting something at the centre of life where God is meant to be.

Most famously, when the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us.'....he took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.'" (Exodus 32: 1-4)

One of the problems with idolatry is that it robs the people of their freedom. When they make the calf the materials for it are demanded from them, not given voluntarily, just as in the old life of slavery.

The first three Commandments (Exodus 20) call the Israelites to have no other gods. Moses later reminds them, "Be careful not to forget the covenant of the Lord your God that he made with you; do not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the Lord your God has forbidden." (Deuteronomy 4:23)

Yahweh alone is worthy of worship. But if allegiance is not to Him, there is no reason to keep His other commandments.

More seriously, for God, the issue is not that His people are breaking the law, but that they are breaking relationship with Him. God tells Moses, "... these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them." (Deuteronomy 31:16)

Throughout Scripture and history the human tendency to have idols is desperate. Paul wrote "They traded the glory of God who holds the whole world in his hands for cheap figurines you can buy at any roadside stand...."



And all this because they traded the true God for a fake god, and worshiped the god they made instead of the God who made them - the God we bless, the God who blesses us." (Romans 1: 23,25 The Message). Such disobedience is a travesty of who God made His people to be.

Augustine said that sin isn't breaking the law but is loving things in the wrong order. The order we give things in importance makes all the difference.

By loving something fourth that should be first, we court disaster. It is right to love our career and our family, but if we love our career ahead of our family, there is breakdown. Relationships with children can be sacrificed in the cause of extra hours at work.

Idolatry is making things that ultimately cannot fulfil us into what we worship, into what we place at the centre of our heart.

The essence of sin is not bad things. It is turning a good thing into an ultimate thing.

God's call on His people to love Him first is the call to live a life of worship in which we love things in the right order.

Understanding key themes: What does the Temple show about God's presence and His continuing plan for a recreated world?



The fact that there are so many details recorded shows its significance.

It contained altars for sacrifices and places for ceremonial washing. Its twelve loaves of bread symbolised both the tribes of Israel and the completeness of God's provision, the Ark (containing the Ten Commandments) symbolised God's presence and the lampstand His protection.

Exodus finishes with God's coming to the Tabernacle. His occasional presence is now His permanent presence with His people - the full restoration of His presence within creation as He originally intended.

"Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." (Exodus 40: 34-35)

This emphasis is why the Temple is not often referred to as 'Temple' in the Old Testament. Rather it is "the House of the Lord" or "the place which the Lord will choose to make his name dwell" (Deuteronomy 12:11) or a "temple for my Name." (1 Kings 5:5)

Someone's "name" represents the fulness of their being.

The way in which the Israelites experience God's presence through the Temple is in contrast to that of their pagan neighbours in two key ways.

Throughout the Bible the call to be a worshipping people is linked to the reality that God wants His people to experience His presence with them.

It is through various forms of a Temple (three physical and one spiritual) that God both creates a way in which He can dwell with humans, and a sign of how He is working through them to recreate the world.

The Temple is a way in which heaven (God's presence and space) and earth (human presence and space) can overlap.

God's presence

Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush (Exodus 3) is an astounding encounter with God's presence. Yet after the Exodus when the people return to Mount Sinai the whole mountain is on fire (Exodus 19). God wants to be present to His whole people.

After the escape from Egypt God seeks to find a way in which the holiness of His presence can be with His covenant people once again. "Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God." (Exodus 29: 45-46)

After giving Moses the law, nearly a third of the book of Exodus is taken up with detailed instructions for a moveable Tabernacle, a Tent of Meeting, and the setting up of a priesthood, so that the Israelites may have a place of being put right with God and coming to Him in worship.

Whereas it is God who gives instructions to Moses, and later David, for the Temple (400 years later), surrounding pagan nations would build a temple themselves and then invite their gods to come there.



There is a big contrast as well in which surrounding nations saw their gods as located within their statues. When the statues were destroyed, so were the gods, and the religious practices disappeared.

Yet, although the Ark was within the Holy of Holies, the focus of God's presence, when the Temple was destroyed and the Ark lost, the Israelites were able to remain faithful. Their sense of God's presence was highlighted by the Temple, but not dependent on it.

This is clear from Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem: "But will God really dwell on earth with humans? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!" (2 Chronicles 6:18)

Yet in the same way as God had filled the Tabernacle in the desert 400 years earlier, "When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. The priests could not enter the temple of the Lord because the glory of the Lord filled it.

When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the Lord above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, 'He is good; his love endures forever.'" (2 Chronicles 7: 1-3)

This connection between the Temple, worship and God's presence are repeated themes in the book of Psalms. "How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you." (Psalm 84:1-4)

The Temple as a recreation of the world

Both the way the Tabernacle is made, and the manner of God's instructions, are an expression of God's continued faithfulness to His plan to bring creation back to what it should be.

The tabernacle in the wilderness is an ordered creation in the middle of chaos, people centred around God, priests worshipping regularly in the same way that all of creation was made to worship God.



Enns writes it is a "piece of holy ground amid a world that has lost its way". There are echoes of creation in the way it is created. God tells them to erect the tabernacle on "the first day of the first month" to emphasise a new beginning (Exodus 40:2).

The word for "making" (asah) the tabernacle is the same word for God making the world.

Both tabernacle and temple are built and dedicated in a series of seven speeches, seven days (Tabernacle) and seven years (temple).

The temple is modelled on the original garden filled with images of flowers, pomegranates and trees. They use every kind of skill and material in building it, reflect every sense in its sounds, smells, sights, tastes and textures.

Its precise measurements and beautiful materials reflect order in a disordered world and affirm the goodness of God's creation. It was a kind of microcosm of the universe.

The wonder of *being* God's temple.



As the Bible story continues the promise that God's presence might fill all creation is increasingly realised as the physical Temple becomes replaced by a "living" one.

Solomon's temple survived for around 400 years but was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586BC. Haggai challenged the Israelites to start to rebuild the temple after the Exile, yet the second temple was always a poor replacement for the great temple of Solomon.

For the next 500 years it stood on Temple Mount in Jerusalem, as we call it today, until it was completely replaced by the temple of Herod the Great. Built primarily between 20--18BC some of the outer courtyard area was still under construction in Jesus' day. This was completely destroyed by the Romans in AD70.

Despite being rebuilt after the exile, the second temple remained corrupt, and the prophets pointed to a future "messenger of the covenant" who will come to God's temple. (Malachi 3:1)

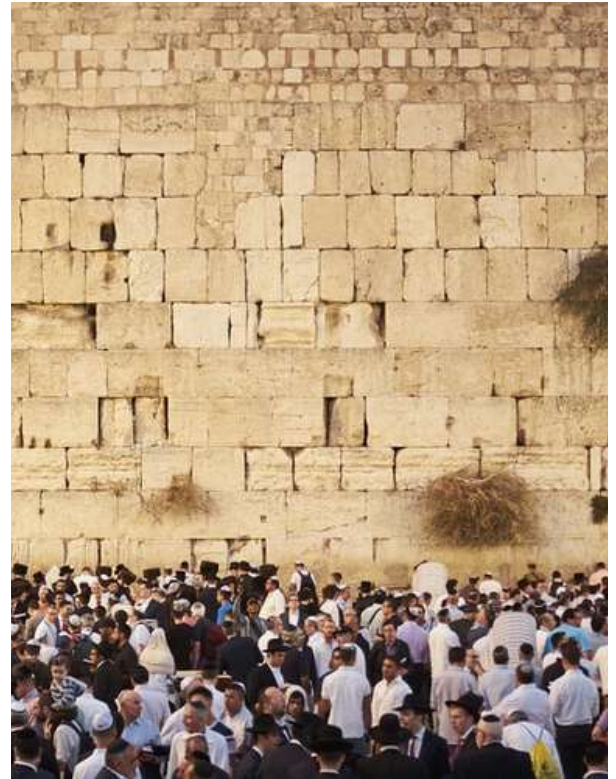
It is Jesus who renews God's temple and brings God's presence, but not in the way any of the people expect. He refers to His own body as God's temple: "Tear down this temple and in three days I will build it again."(John 2:19)

When Jesus dies on the cross the curtain screening the Most Holy place in the Temple was torn from top to bottom (emphasising this is God's work) – breaking down the barrier between God and humanity.

Understanding the story of God's presence and Temple helps us to grasp the wonder of the gift God's Holy Spirit for disciples.

Since AD 70 there has been no physical temple because the fulness of God's presence is now given through the coming of the Holy Spirit. This is a fulfilment of Christ's promise, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." (John 14:23)

In the Old Testament people come to meet with God at the temple. In the New Testament God comes to people and we become His temple. The letter to the Hebrews is a meditation on how much the meaning of Temple, and the reality of God's presence, has been fulfilled in Christ.



Paul is at pains to communicate the privilege of this inheritance. As individuals each disciple can now become a Temple, in which God dwells: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" (1 Corinthians 6:19)

As such, he calls us to treat our bodies with dignity and holiness.

As a Christian community we have become God's temple. "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" (1 Cor 3:16-17)

As Peter puts it, "... you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 2:5)

This calls us to a unity through which the presence of God can be displayed to the world.

Tackling tricky questions: What does it mean to believe that the Bible is human *and* divine?



“All scripture is inspired by God (God breathed).” (2 Timothy 3:16)

Christians believe that the Bible is divinely inspired. However, it is also a very human book. For example, as we have already seen, it draws from other sources, such as the creation myths of other cultures. It is obvious as well that being breathed by God cannot mean that the personalities, experiences, and characters of the individual authors are not included in the Bible.

Paul says that he cannot remember who he baptised. (1 Corinthians 1:16) Matthew has Jesus incorrectly referring to Zechariah as the son of Berekiah instead of the son of Jehoiadah. (Matthew 23:35) Paul admits he received no command from the Lord regarding unmarried women, but was willing to give his own judgement as a trustworthy person. (1 Corinthians 7:25)

Large parts of the Bible are not written as God speaking to us but rather humans speaking to God and in Psalm 89 the writer accuses God of breaking His promise. Most of what Job and his friends say to God throughout the book of Job is not true.

Rather than this being a problem which we have to try and find ways of getting around, the human-divine nature of the Bible is a precise reflection the way God works. It is consistent with the way in which God always works indirectly with human beings to achieve His purposes.

The way God relates to the world is not one-way but through mutual relationships. The writing of the Bible is a partnership in the same way that God giving human beings a 'cultural mandate' is a partnership.

This means that throughout the writing of Bible God acts towards humans, but He also allows them to act towards Him (just as we see most fully on the cross), even at the cost of absorbing our sin and mistakes as part of the text.

John Henry Newman describes this way of God breathing Scripture by comparing two Latin words for writer.

The word *author* describes someone who creates a work without any help or influence from anyone else – much as the Quran is a direct reciting of Allah’s words.

But the word *auctor* describes someone who is the first cause of a work, but who allows for other influences to contribute to the work that the writer produces.

God breathes His word by emptying Himself – just as throughout the Bible He accommodates Himself to us in order to reach us. This means that He is willing to speak to human beings from inside the world, taking our own experiences as His starting point.

So it is not a case of God taking away human beings’ ability to speak so that He can replace our words with His words.

Instead, as an *auctor*, God takes the words and actions of human beings and uses them to become the reliable “word of God”.

He takes the initiative as His Holy Spirit works in the hearts and minds of the human writers, but always leaving the personhood of the human authors in place, which affects the results of His breathing through them.

